

For judge, adoptions are sweet

By Linda Thomson, Deseret News

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Jayden Romero is held by Judge Sharon McCully while she signs adoption papers for Jayden as his adoptive parents, Rose and Buddy Romero, and Jayden's new brother and sister, Rosemary and Jason, look on in McCully's Salt Lake courtroom Friday. (Tom Smart, Deseret Morning News)

After more than 22 years on the bench, 3rd District Juvenile Judge Sharon McCully has seen practically everything: abused youngsters, neglected children, unwanted babies, drug-addicted infants, troubled parents, the works.

So that made Friday particularly sweet. McCully spent the afternoon on nothing but adoptions, creating some new families to celebrate National Adoption Month.

One exceptionally chipper participant was Jayden Christopher Esquivel Romero, 3. He was officially adopted by Buddy and Rose Romero, who have been taking care of him since he was 11 months old.

Jayden perched on McCully's lap while the adults signed the final papers, then gave the judge a bouquet of flowers and

got a big kiss in return. He also quickly chose a leopard, which he insisted on calling a tiger, from a row of stuffed animals the court provided children who were being adopted that day.

Outside the courtroom, Salt Lake residents Buddy and Rose Romero were alternately overjoyed and relieved that the lengthy process was finally done.

"It's great that it's official, but in my feelings, he's always been my son," said Buddy Romero, 45, a jeweler. "It's really a beginning. It's like having a child (biologically). He belongs to us with no reservations. Now we can teach him and not fear he'll be taken."

Rose Romero, 32, a former day-care provider and now a full-time homemaker, also was delighted. "It's a completion," she said. "We don't have to worry he's going someplace tomorrow. This is the Romero family."

The boy is the son of Rose's brother, who voluntarily relinquished his parental rights, and a young woman whose parental rights were terminated by the court. That couple had been given opportunities to show they could care properly for Jayden, but it turned out that having him adopted by the Romeros was in Jayden's best interests.

The Romeros had temporary custody of Jayden and went through the full adoption process: undergoing criminal background checks, providing financial records, getting physical checkups to prove they're healthy, and being observed and interviewed by social workers.

Parenthood isn't a new experience for them — the couple has three biological children: Aly, 14; Jason, 12; and Rosemary, 6.

Rosemary had little to say about her new brother, just nodding when asked if she was happy he was coming home to stay forever. Jason said adopting Jayden was "great," although he conceded his little brother is "sometimes a little bit rowdy."

Aly announced the adoption was really cool — "I've loved him from the start" — and the two happen to share an Aug. 12 birthday.

Jayden appears healthy and happy, but other adoptions before McCully on Friday involved youngsters who have been exposed to drugs in the womb or while very young, children whose parents have such severe mental health or substance abuse problems they can't take care of the children, and older children who might end up experiencing attachment difficulties.

One family adopted four children, ages 15, 13, 11 and 10.

McCully later said she loves the "adoption day" observance but says it involves a happiness that is tinged with sadness because there are many birth parents she has worked with whom she wanted to succeed but who simply could not take good care of their children.

"When it comes down to it, the most important thing is for the child to have a permanent and secure family," the judge said.

She also noted that adoption isn't a cure-all for a number of children who have continuing physical and mental problems that will need ongoing treatment and a lot of patience from the new parents.

"They're taking on a life with kids who come with troubles," McCully said. "There are amazing people out there who are willing to do that."

For the Romeros, however, this day seemed to be both a happy ending and a new beginning for something special.

In fact, since they began efforts to adopt Jayden, the couple has discussed possibly adopting more children in the future. "This has opened up so much emotion and so much love and understanding that there are so many children that need protection," Rose Romero said.

For now, though, they are thrilled to take Jayden home as their own son.

"We weren't expecting him," Buddy Romero said, "but now we won't let him go."

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