

# HOMeward BOUND



Allison Shelley/The Washington Times

Adoptee Isayah Edwards Jones, 3, was a little overwhelmed by the attention during his adoption ceremony at the 20th annual Adoption Day at the District's Moultrie Courthouse Friday. Story, A9.

## Families adopt 48 children

Annual court ceremony in District blends happy hearts, homes

By Tarron Lively  
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Dozens of children and their adoptive parents celebrated the official start of their new families yesterday during the District's 20th annual Adoption Day in Court ceremony.

Hundreds gathered at the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse to witness 48 children and their parents receive adoption decrees from the judges who worked with the adults, the children and the social workers during the adoption process.

So far, there have been 244 adoptions in the District this fiscal year, with 291 more pending approval. The D.C. Child and Family Services Agency said more than 300 other children are waiting to be adopted.

"All you have to do is open your home and your heart," said Barbara Harrison, anchorwoman on WRC-TV (Channel 4) who hosts the weekly segment "Wednesday's Child," spotlighting children up for adoption. She presided over the event and has attended since it began in 1986.

The city agency and the Superior Court cosponsored the event, which featured clowns twisting balloons into animal shapes and live music from a band whose members are Metropolitan Police Department officers.

Nia and Mia, twin 4-year-olds, were first in line yesterday, officially joining the Harden family of Prince George's County. The two girls arrived in matching purple velvet dresses, drawing



"awws" from the crowd. "These kids needed a home," said Brenda Harden, a University of Maryland professor and longtime child welfare social worker. "We weren't trying to find a certain kind of child, just a kid who was [in need] at the time."

That was 15 months ago, and the Hardens haven't looked back since.

"It's been fabulous, a life-transforming experience," Mrs. Harden said before the inquisitive Nia ambled over, eager to see who had her mother's at-

tentation. "Mommy, why do people keep coming over here and talking to us?" Nia asked.

"That's a good question, Nia," her mother answered, acknowledging that they were all ready to get back to their normal lives. "They're kind of tired of all of this," she said.

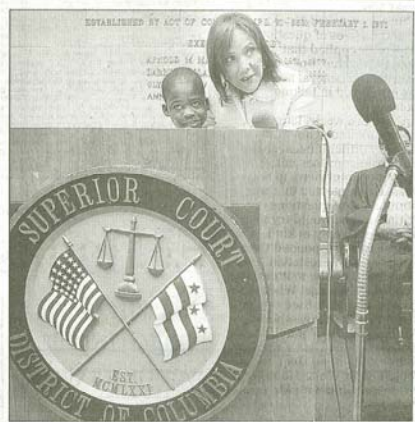
Others who attended the ceremony were Mayor-elect Adrian M. Fenty and Sen. Mary Landrieu, Louisiana Democrat, who spoke and implored others to consider adoption.

"Governments do many

things well," said Mrs. Landrieu, who has adopted children and sponsored the D.C. Family Court Act of 2001, "but governments don't raise children; people raise children."

The act, which President Bush signed into law in 2002, created a Family Court within D.C. Superior Court. The law allowed the courts to hire new magistrate judges to handle the Family Court caseload, which includes cases of neglect and abuse.

The stories of the children were as varied as the parents



Photographs by Allison Shelley/The Washington Times

Left: Yvette Smith, 20, the oldest of 48 adoptees Friday, hugged Judge Philip C. Seagal during her adoption ceremony. Above: Darrel Marco Ward Steele, 10, treated the crowd to an impromptu show of his ventriloquism skills with the encouragement of program emcee Barbara Harrison, anchorwoman for WRC-TV, at the 20th annual Adoption Day at the H. Carl Moultrie Courthouse in the District on Friday.

who adopted them.

One child's father was unable to attend because he had been deployed to Iraq last month. A 21-year-old completed her adoption yesterday after living with her adoptive parents for 10 years.

One couple in the District, Paul Flynn and Amy Shannon, adopted a 20-month-old girl from China who was abandoned by her parents because of strict rules in China that allowed only one child per couple.

"She was born in a mountainous area, very remote," Mr.

Flynn said. "Her parents left her in a blanket, where they knew she'd be found right away."

Sarah Marie-Yuan Flynn lived the first eight months of her life in an orphanage as Xu Yuan, which means "beautiful wish." The couple, who had applied to adopt a child in China, went there last year to meet Sarah for the first time.

"We're so lucky," Miss Shannon said as she and Sarah danced to the music. "Soon we'll celebrate our Gotcha Day, Dec. 5, the day we became a family of three."