

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 E Boulevard Ave, Bismarck ND 58505-0250

EMBARGOED UNTIL

3 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 3, 2007 (Event is 1:30 – 4 p.m.)

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Individuals and families recognized at 2007 Adoption Celebration

BISMARCK, N.D. – Advocates, public officials, and families gathered to recognize six families and five individuals at the 2007 Adoption Celebration on November 3, at the Brynhild Haugland Room of the Capitol in Bismarck. The N.D. Department of Human Services and North Dakota Licensed Child Placing Agencies co-hosted the event to honor exemplary individuals and to raise awareness about adoption and the North Dakota foster children who are waiting to be adopted.

“This annual event is inspiring,” said Department of Human Services’ Executive Director Carol K. Olson. “Children deserve to be loved, cherished, and supported, and I am very pleased to represent Gov. John Hoeven at today’s celebration and to help recognize some incredible individuals for their extraordinary commitment to children.”

Last year, 115 children were adopted from the state’s public foster care system in North Dakota. At any given time, Olson said, about a dozen foster children are waiting to be adopted, and there is an ongoing need for foster families and adoptive families.

Honored event participants included the **Daniel and Tresa Paul** family of **Carson, N.D.** They received the *Multicultural Award* for their efforts to support the cultural heritage of their adopted children. The **Robert and Vicki Thu** family of **Jamestown, N.D.**, received the *2007 Special Needs Adoptive Family of the Year Award*. They fostered about 40 children in 11 years and subsequently adopted eight children. The Thu’s started a support group for foster/adopt families and devote themselves to their children and supporting adoption and foster care.

The **Jason and Dana Mitzel** family of **West Fargo, N.D.**, received the *Foster/Adopt Family of the Year 2007 Award*. The Mitzel’s have cared for 13 children since becoming licensed PATH foster parents seven years ago. They have demonstrated incredible commitment to a sibling group of five children by first fostering and then adopting three, and they eagerly await the finalization of their efforts to adopt the two remaining siblings in their care.

Mark and Valerie Kunze of **Bowman, N.D.**, and birth mother **Michelle Nelson** of **Fargo, N.D.**, shared the *Adoption Triad Award* for their efforts to maintain an ongoing, open relationship following the adoption of their children as infants.

Mike Adams of **Bismarck, N.D.** received the *Youth Excellence Award*, which is presented to young adults who are former foster children and who have overcome challenges and excelled personally and socially, and are contributing to their communities.

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To recognize their dedicated work on behalf of children and families, event organizers presented the *Adoption Advocate Award* to three individuals. **Keatha McLeod**, of **Horace, N.D.**, is a foster parent and helps train other foster parents and actively participates in local and state Foster/Adopt Parent Associations. **Bobby and Denise Eckerdt**, of **Grand Forks, N.D.**, are adoptive parents, and were honored for advocating strongly for a paternity registry for North Dakota to protect the rights of all parents involved in the adoption process.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy, an adoptive parent himself, attended the event and recognized **James and Danette Laske** of **Fargo, N.D.**, and **Greg and Jenn Knopp** of **Wildrose, N.D.** who were recipients of the *2007 Angels in Adoption Award*, which is presented annually by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Families and individuals interested in exploring adoption can contact a state-licensed child-placement agency in North Dakota. Agency information is available at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/adoption/agencies.html. Placement agencies provide a variety of services including family recruitment, preparation and assessment; child preparation and placement; and post-placement supportive services.

Adoption and foster care information is available on the department's Children and Family Services Division Web site at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/> or by calling 701-328-2316, or 1-800-245-3736, or e-mailing dhsdfs@nd.gov.

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