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Governor's Outstanding Adoptive Parent Awards presented

(MADISON) — In observance of National Adoption Month, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Secretary Eloise Anderson presented four special Wisconsin adoptive families with the 2014 Governor's Outstanding Adoptive Parent Award during a ceremony Tuesday at the State Capitol.

The honorees were chosen from nominations received from throughout Wisconsin based upon their demonstration of exceptional dedication and commitment to children and their devotion to providing secure and loving homes to children in need of a "forever home."

The theme for the 2014 ceremony was "*It's never too late – people need a family for life.*"

"DCF is pleased to recognize the Outstanding Adoptive Parent Award winners for the positive impact they are making in the lives of young people," said DCF Secretary Eloise Anderson. "They are great examples of parents who show commitment to providing permanent homes for children in the foster care system and welcoming them into their families with open arms and open hearts."

Four adoptive families who were nominated by their caseworkers received awards.

Nancy Covert and Patricia Hanvey of West Allis were touted as an example of successful foster-to-adopt parents. They adopted two small children they previously fostered, and are in the process of adopting an infant. Their strengths are in realizing different needs of each child and adapting parenting styles to ensure children's needs are met.

Mark and Nancy Huolihan of Milwaukee raised five biological sons of their own, who are now adults. They became involved with foster care and adoption in 2006. They adopted three small children, including one who was the biological daughter of a struggling teen parent. The family also adopted the child's mother, now a young adult, who wished to be a permanent part of the family. The Huolihans also are fostering two other boys, one a young teenager.

Roy and Jennie Lambrecht of DePere also raised a child who is now an adult. They have adopted six children through the Special Needs Adoption Program (SNAP). The first three were single adoptions, and the last three are siblings. Despite some challenges of caring for children with special needs, the Lambrechts show them great patience and love.

Lynda Robbins of Kenosha and her late husband began fostering children years ago. In 2009 they adopted two boys who are siblings. With the adoption of a third youth in 2013, Lynda is now a single mother raising three boys. The family worked through some adjustments and due

to Lynda's dedication, her sons are succeeding in school and are involved in community activities.

Although many Wisconsin families have made the commitment to adopt children, the event highlighted the need for more families to step forward to create these unique and special families through adoption.

In addition to the Outstanding Adoptive Parent Awards, the 2014 Champion of Adoption Award was presented to Cathy Swessel of Milwaukee, who provided adoption services in Milwaukee for 35 years, with Children's Service Society of Wisconsin, now known as Children's Hospital of Wisconsin Community Services. Swessel served as Director of Foster Care and Adoptive Services and was instrumental in establishing programs to eliminate the backlog of children in the foster care system awaiting adoption and establish dual licensure to integrate foster care and adoption services in Milwaukee County.

Other guest speakers at the ceremony included State Representative Joel Kleefisch, who has long advocated for the well-being of adopted children, and Varnique Smith-Wang, a high school senior from Madison who talked about her adoption from a youth's perspective.

Secretary Anderson also recognized Jockey International and its corporate initiative, *Jockey Being Family*. The initiative provides funding, employee volunteers, and in-kind donations in support of post-adoption services in Wisconsin and throughout the United States.

For more information about adoption, please visit www.dcf.wisconsin.gov visit and click on Foster Care and Adoption.

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