

FAMILY CONNECTIONS



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www.diakon.org

REUNITED WITH THEIR PAST: *Historic Journey Changed the Lives of An Lac Orphans*

They're men and women now, many with children of their own. In 1975, they were children themselves—babies, mostly—whose only “family” consisted of others abandoned like themselves at the An Lac Orphanage in South Vietnam.

As the country's government was about to fall to North Vietnamese forces, these little ones—219 of them—were airlifted out on the first leg of their journey to safety and their ultimate destination, the United States.

The head and heart of that rescue mission was a woman named Betty Tisdale. Moved to aid these youngest war victims by the work of Thomas Dooley, an American Navy doctor and author, Tisdale, a former aide to U. S. Senator Jacob K. Javits, had

developed a network of friends to support her effort.

When the plane full of tiny passengers eventually landed at Fort Benning, Ga., Tressler Adoption Services—one of the forerunners of today's Diakon Adoption & Foster Care—was asked to find families for all of the children. Working day and night, adoption staff members quickly met their goal.

“This story is so big,” says Elisa Esh, Diakon's current director of resource family recruitment. Esh recently sat down with several large boxes containing the documents, military communications, newspaper clippings, and other items representing Tressler's role in the personal history of those young lives. “They changed the lives of so many,” she says.

Esh had delved into the history of the effort because she had been



Elisa Esh and Betty Tisdale

asked to speak at a reunion of the now-grown Vietnamese children, organized by one of them, Dan Burkholder of Lancaster County.

Burkholder had seen an NBC “Dateline” segment on Betty Tisdale last year and set about locating her. He eventually visited her at her Seattle, Wash., home, inviting her to speak in central Pennsylvania about her experiences with the airlift.

With the date set, Burkholder reached out to other former orphans through public media and his own personal contacts, Diakon assisting in the effort as well as with aspects

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WAITING CHILDREN
HAVE BEEN PLACED
BY THE ADOPTION
SERVICES OF DIAKON
LUTHERAN SOCIAL
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SO FAR!

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WHAT MATTERS MOST IS FAMILY

BY: **LAUREN CONZAMAN, MSW, LSW**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

I have been a loyal patron of the same pharmacy for at least the last six years. During that time I have become very friendly with the staff, most of them knowing my husband, my children, and myself by name.

During my most recent trip to the store, I started “small talk” with the woman at the cash register as she inquired about my purchase of bubbles, sidewalk chalk, water guns, coloring books, and the other miscellaneous toys I was purchasing for our quickly approaching weekend camping trip.

We began talking about my children and I asked her if she was also a mother. She said she was, but that she had given her son up for adoption. She pulled out her wallet to show me his picture, and I noticed that this photograph of a smiling toddler was so worn that the edges were peeling. She told me she had named him Chris, and that he is now 9-years-old.

My heart sank as I realized the picture she has been carrying in her wallet for almost a decade is the only picture she has to remind her of the child that she dreams of daily. As her eyes welled, she explained that she and her husband had been on the verge of homelessness after being laid off by their long-time employers. It was then she learned she was pregnant. Rather than trying to rear a child in an unstable situation, she decided that adoption would be best for her son. She occasionally receives correspondence from the agency on how Chris is doing, but she thinks of him always and dreams of meeting him again one day.

Luckily, the store was not very busy so I could continue to allow this woman to tell me her story as she came from behind the counter. She mentioned that her family and friends to this day tell her that she should not have never made the adoption plan for her son. The woman said she doesn't regret the decision she and her husband made years ago, but that she misses her son more than anyone would ever know.

It was obvious she needed someone to talk to about her situation. She asked me if I knew anything about adoption. As I told her I work in the field and have experience with both adoption and foster care, she continued to talk about her adoption worker, Jennifer, at an agency she referred to as the “Topton home.” I stopped her and asked if she was referring to the Diakon Pregnancy Services program located on The Lutheran Home at Topton campus. She said yes, and asked if I knew anything about it. I told her that I am

CORRESPONDENCE PROCEDURES FOR DIAKON PREGNANCY SERVICES

Many families who have adopted through Diakon Pregnancy Services have agreed to exchange letters and/or photos with their child's birthparents. Generally, this voluntary agreement involves the exchange of correspondence on a yearly basis, around the time of the child's birthday.

If you are one of these families, you can mail your correspondence directly to Jennifer Roe at Diakon Pregnancy Services, Topton office. Before she forwards the correspondence, Jennifer attempts to contact the birthparents to make sure that they still want to receive the information. From time to time, birthparents call Jennifer directly to request correspondence from the adoptive families. In these circumstances, Jennifer then contacts the adoptive families to request the correspondence. For that reason, Diakon needs your most current phone number and address.

When you prepare letters and photos for birthparents, please do not include any identifying information in the letter. In addition, many of the birthparents only know the child by his or her birth name, so please remember to use that name in the correspondence if that is the case. Feel free to direct any questions to Jennifer Roe at (610) 682-1529.

WENDY'S WONDERFUL KIDS – HELP THEM FIND A HOME



Brian, Age: 15
PAE # C2209394

Brian is a healthy, energetic, 15-year-old boy. He spends his time playing basketball and backyard football when he is not at baseball practice. Brian will be playing baseball for his school this spring. Brian is a good student and is very active at his current church. He is searching for employment to help him build his savings account. He enjoys working on cars and building things. Brian is good at following directions, but needs to be reminded, and often gets distracted.

Brian is looking for a family who will accept him in their home and

can successfully guide him into his adult years. All families are welcome.

For more information on Brian, please contact: Jen Bircher, Wendy's recruiter with Diakon Adoption & Foster Care at (717) 795-0479 or bircherj@diakon.org.

Devin, Age: 14

Devin is an energetic and loving teenage, African American male. Devin is lovable and has a great personality. He enjoys being in the spotlight, and he considers himself a charmer. Devin is able to get along with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures.



Devin was recently featured on NBC4's Wednesday's Child television taping in Washington, D.C. During the taping, he was able to show families his special talent of gymnastics. Devin also enjoys basketball and music and is looking for a loving and committed family.

Could you open your heart and your home to Devin forever? Could you be the family he continues to wait for?

If you are interested in Devin, please contact Ebony Alderman, Wendy's Wonderful Kid's recruiter, Diakon Adoption Services, Maryland office, at 410-261-2857 or aldermane@diakon.org.

WHAT MATTERS MOST IS FAMILY CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

employed by the organization and work with that very program. She smiled and started asking question after question about her son.

“What does he look like? Does he do well in school? Is he playing sports? Does he attend church? Do you get to see him? Do you think he remembers me? When do adoptive parents tell children they were adopted?”

I asked her her full name, and when she told me I mentioned that we had actually spoken on the phone several times. On the same day every year, the day that her child was born, the day she made the most selfless decision of her life—to make an adoption plan—she calls Diakon Pregnancy Services to get an update on her son.

I really started thinking about how birth parents may consent to the adoption of a child, but that their lives are never the same. They never stop thinking about that child and always wonder “what if” they had not made the adoption plan.

I wanted to share this emotional experience with you. When you receive a call from our staff asking if you would be willing to send an updated picture or a letter on how your child is doing, please think of this woman and the eight-year-old picture she carries in her wallet.

TIPS AND TRICKS TO PARENTING

- **Remember, you cannot change anyone (nor should you try).** Instead, change how you respond to a given behavior your child is presenting. If your child consistently repeats a behavior that needs to be modified (i.e. consistent temper tantrums, resistance to going to bed, ignoring requests, etc.) you, as the parent, need to change your response. Try something different. If an angry, strict tone of voice is ineffective, try humor. If a meek request to a child doesn't work, try lowering the timber of your voice and animate your face with a serious expression.
- **Acknowledge the serious and life-altering repercussions that poor, ineffective parenting can have on your children.** Parenting is the single most influential factor that determines a child's future. Allowing children to repeat negative behaviors can create negative habits throughout their lifetime. The childhood obesity epidemic is a very obvious example. Parents allow their children to eat extra sweets, fatty food, and watch/play too much TV or video game without thinking about any future emotional or physical challenges that their children will experience as an obese adult. Whether we are talking about indulging our children with food, privileges, or material possessions, the issue remains—parents need to acknowledge that their child is learning to develop negative habits that will require great effort to “unlearn” as an adult.
- **Do not take it personally.** When children misbehave or have problems, the tendency for parents to blame themselves is natural. This can lead to defensiveness and denial, which will not resolve the problem. For children who have emotional or behavior problems, it is important not to reinforce their behaviors. You have the power to change your child's behaviors. If the problem persists there are places you can turn to for professional help.

Robert Allan Hafetz, author of the book, *Not Remembered, Never Forgotten*, was born in January 1951 and was adopted into a New Jersey family in June of that year. Bob's adopted family loved him and reared him as their own but never told Bob about his birth family.

After the death of his adoptive parents, Bob began searching for his birth family and now devotes his life to sharing his journey with the adoption community.

Hafetz's book, *Not Remembered, Never Forgotten*, is a wonderful resource for anyone who has adopted or is looking into adoption. The book talks about the losses experienced by all parties involved in the adoption process: the birth family, adoptive parents, and adopted child. Hafetz also explains the importance of talking to your children about their adoption and history, and encouraging them to explore their feelings about adoption and their birth family.

DIAKON ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE RECEIVES BLUE RIBBON FOR KIDS AWARD

In April, Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Diakon Adoption & Foster Care office in Topton, Pa., received the Blue Ribbon for Children Award. At that time, Berks County Children and Youth Services held its third annual appreciation reception for nominees, at which awards were presented by state Sen. Michael O'Pake. The Diakon

program was nominated for its efforts in preventing child abuse and improving the lives of children in Berks County.

The Blue Ribbon Campaign began in 1989 when a Norfolk, Va., woman tied a blue ribbon on the antenna of her car after her 3-year-old grandson died of injuries inflicted by her daughter's boyfriend.



Diakon Adoption & Foster Care staff accepting Blue Ribbon for Kids Award.

Now the campaign is honored nationwide during the month of April.

AN EXTRAORDINARY DONATION

The birthday present list for the average soon-to-be-eight-year-old boy is usually quite long: a skateboard, the latest video game, a basketball, a shiny new bike. So what about the party invitation that asks guests not to bring gifts, but instead to donate the money they intended to spend to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, so that other children can have a home?

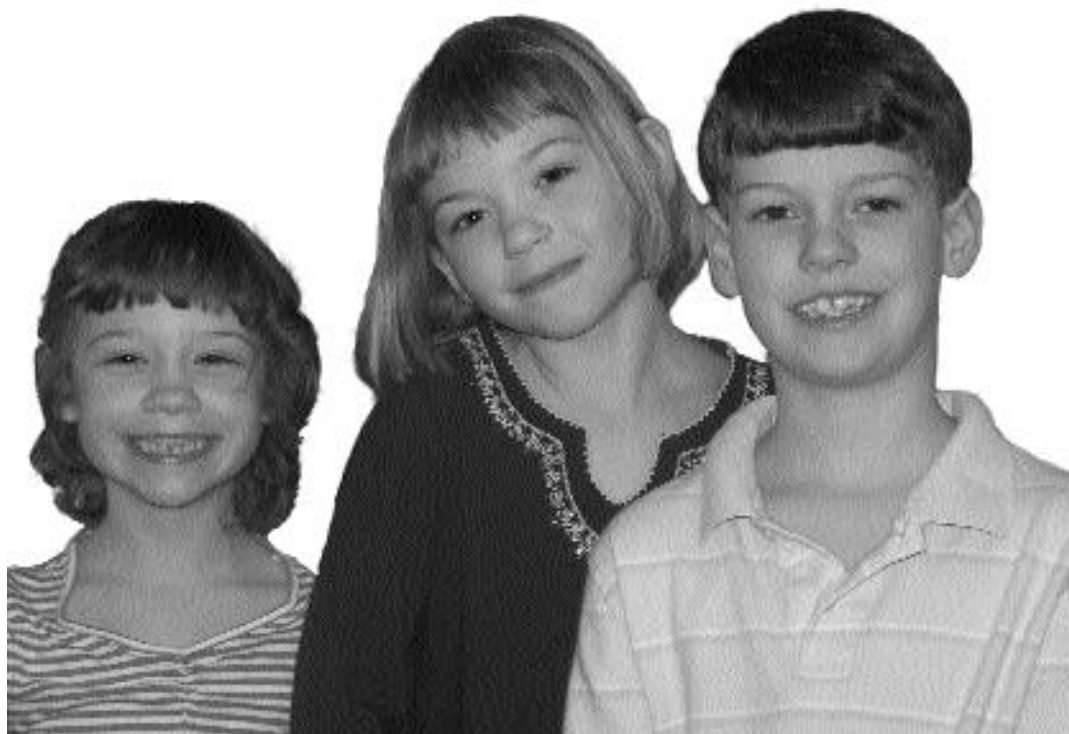
“I wanted to do this to thank Diakon for my sisters,” says Jeremiah “J.J.” Dey, who turned 8 in March, as he presented \$350 to Diakon Adoption & Foster Care employees in Topton, Pa. Not long ago an only child, J.J. is now a member of a family of five.

Cindy and Stefan Dey of Berks County attended an adoption information night in September 2003, interested in the legal-risk foster-to-adopt program. In February 2006, sisters Summer, 8, and Danielle, 6, were in need of a permanent family.

“We contacted Cindy and Stefan and they showed great interest in the girls,” says Jessica O’Neil, recruitment and family development specialist. “Almost immediately they knew they wanted the girls to be a part of their family.”

In June of that year, pre-placement visits began. The visits went so well that the girls were placed in the home on June 23, 2006. The adoption became final this May.

“It seemed a perfect match from the start,” O’Neil says. “The girls



J.J. Dey with sisters, Summer and Danielle

had been through a lot of loss, and Cindy and Stefan were excellent at making them feel safe, secure, and loved. The girls have been thriving in their home.”

So J.J. went from being an only child to having two energetic sisters with whom he would have to share his parents’ attention. But he has adjusted so well to the change, and is so happy to have siblings, that he was motivated to donate to Diakon.

Dey says all three children have adjusted well. “Our house is a lot

louder, messier at times, and definitely more active,” she says. “It is wonderful to see the three of them play together, and confide in one another. I love to watch the simple things, like the three of them walking down the driveway together to wait for the school bus, or how they interact at meal time. They have definitely bonded as siblings and demonstrate a strong love for one another.

“And they bicker as all siblings do, too,” she adds. “It has been wonderful to watch all three of them thrive.”

DEEP ROOTS

Diakon's new director of corporate advancement, Tim Bilger, truly believes in this organization's ministries. Without Diakon, Bilger's family would not be the same.

In 1975, Tressler Adoption Services—now Diakon Adoption & Foster Care following the 2000 affiliation between Tressler Lutheran Services and Lutheran Services Northeast that created Diakon—was asked to find homes for more than 200 children abandoned at the An Lac orphanage in South Vietnam. Adoption staff members worked day and night to find families.

"They changed the lives of so many," says Elisa Esh, Diakon's current director of resource family recruitment, of the Vietnamese children. Some of those directly affected were Bilger and his family.

"When I was 10, my parents adopted a 5-year-old boy, Vu Tien Sang, now Sang Bilger, from this group of orphans," says Bilger.

"The day we went to pick him up, I actually carried him right off the plane. I was so proud." Bilger, who grew up in Selinsgrove, Pa., notes that several years later his parents adopted another child, a 3-year-old

girl from the United States, rounding out their family of six.

Bilger says two Vietnamese families settled in the area where his family lived. "Our church sort of adopted them and my family got very involved with helping," Bilger recalls. "I gave up a lot of my toys. We felt a special connection because of my brother."

The new neighbors were good for him and his community, he believes. "It taught me a great appreciation of different cultures at an early age," he says. "And for my brother, it allowed him to hold on to a piece of his own culture as well."

REUNITED WITH THEIR PAST CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of the reunion. "I had no idea how many [An Lac orphans] would come, but we had a nice turnout," he says. "About 30 were there. I also wanted to reach out to people who had adopted internationally or who were interested in doing that."

Those who gathered that Sunday evening in early February at the Akron Mennonite Church in Akron, Pa., greeted one another warmly, gave Betty Tisdale a standing ovation, and posed for a group photograph. They pored over news stories about their extraordinary arrival in the U.S., barely recognizing themselves in old photographs. Some spoke of viewing their past in a new light.

"I guess I repressed a lot when I was young," says Daphne Ambrose, who, at six, was one of the older An Lac orphans. "As I got older, I began

to appreciate what was done for me. What they did to get us here ... I know now it was amazing."

While some who attended the reunion traveled just a few miles, others crossed Pennsylvania or drove from

nearby states. No matter the distance, their trips couldn't begin to compare with the journey they made as infants.

Certainly, Betty Tisdale will never forget the effort that made that venture

possible. In her 80s now, she continues to support orphanages in war-torn countries. "What we did then ... I know some people thought I was crazy," she says. "Maybe I was, but I believe we have to do what we can."



Adult adoptees view Diakon's display

PENNSYLVANIA HEART GALLERY

There are thousands of foster children across Pennsylvania who are waiting to be adopted, waiting for families with enough room in their hearts and homes to love a very special child in need. The Pennsylvania Heart Gallery features more than 50 of those children in an exhibit of professional portraits that highlight each child in a way that captures their personality and spirit.

Developed by the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, which operates under the Department of Public Welfare, the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery is intended to raise awareness of these children who are without permanent homes—and the thousands like them—and encourage Pennsylvanians to adopt.

With your help, these children can find a loving, permanent home. Whether you're interested in adopting, fostering, or helping to

raise awareness, Pennsylvania's children need your help.

To learn more about one of the children featured in the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery or for more information about becoming an adoptive or foster family, please call 1-877-DIAKON-7, option 4, and then option 1.

To view and learn about all the children available for good foster and adoptive homes, please visit www.Diakon.org and/or link to www.AdoptPakids.org.

Upcoming gallery locations -

- Sept. 7–16 – York Fair (one week). The York Fair is located in the City of York at the York Fairgrounds. The Pennsylvania Heart Gallery will be on display in Memorial Hall.
- Oct. 1–6 – Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program Center (one week).
- Nov. 13–20 – Norristown Human Services Center Building (one week).



MARYLAND

FINALIZATIONS

APRIL 12, 2007

Bill, Jalita, and Jacob
Steve of Baltimore, Md.

APRIL 24, 2007

Anthony
Gordon & Keisha of
Baltimore, Md.

PLACEMENTS

JANUARY 1, 2007

Alexandra, age 8,
Phoenix, age 7, and
Juan, age 5, from
Oregon, joined Tonia &
Lautaro of Westminster,
Md.

FEBRUARY 10, 2007

Matthew, age 9, and
Tristen, age 4, joined
James & Deborah of
Darlington, Md.

MAY 4, 2007

Lequan, age 11, from
New Jersey, joined
Robin of Baltimore,
Md.



Jacob was adopted by Wayne Hopkins and Steve Renninger in Februar



Isabelle, adopted through Diakon Adoption Services, Maryland office.



Sam and Amy Flick adopted Lucas through Diakon Permanency Services in May



Stefan, Cindy, and JJ Dey adopted Summer, 8, and Danielle, 6, from Berks County, Pa.



Madeline, adopted through Diakon Adoption Services, Maryland office.

GIRL SCOUTS DONATE BACKPACKS AND SUPPLIES

Junior Girl Scout Troop 1206 of the Penn Woods Council recently donated 10 backpacks for girls entering foster care.

Brittany Sheidy, Emmeline Knowlan, and troop leader Kelly Knowlan presented the backpacks to Kathy Roach, director of Diakon Permanency Services, Tipton office, and Lea Moyer, child prep/profile specialist.

The young ladies completed the project in order to earn their Bronze Award. They began their project by writing to local businesses and requesting donations. Sears in the Schuylkill Mall in Frackville, Pa., donated the backpacks. Brittany and Emmeline raised the money for the contents by selling candy and cookies, and by recycling cans.

The well-stocked backpacks are filled with school supplies, a disposable camera and photo album, hygiene supplies including fancy hair bands, and a stuffed animal.



Pennsylvania

FINALIZATIONS

JANUARY 3, 2007

Ava
Kerry & Diane

JANUARY 3, 2007

Diaujana
Johnathan & Vicki

JANUARY 18, 2007

Jamie
William & Shelli

FEBRUARY 8, 2007

Jacob
William & Steven

FEBRUARY 14, 2007

Mikequan and Tatiana
Iris

FEBRUARY 21, 2007

Elijah
Michael & Susan

FEBRUARY 28, 2007

Jesse
Neil & Melanie

MARCH 1, 2007

Oshanea
Kurtis & Tina

MARCH 7, 2007

Jasmine
Joseph & Darlene

MARCH 7, 2007

Giovanni
Andrew & Janalee

MARCH 16, 2007

Robert
Dennis & Michelle

APRIL 5

Davion and Spencer
Aaron & Lolita

MAY 2, 2007

Dontae
Wilford & Kristine

MAY 2, 2007

Summer and Danielle
Stefan & Cindy

MAY 9, 2007

Malinda and Tho'mas
Patrick & Randy

MAY 14, 2007

Desiree, Tanara, and Trew
James & Chastity

MAY 21, 2007

Lucas
Samuel & Amy

DECEMBER 4, 2006

Anna, age 2, joined
Allen & Pamela of
York, Pa.

FEBRUARY 12, 2007

Zoe, age 6, and Payge,
age 3, joined Bret &
Lynne of Newbould,
Pa.

FEBRUARY 16, 2007

Thomalika, age 7,
joined William &
Myra of Reading, Pa.

FEBRUARY 16, 2007

Marsadies, age 7,
joined Cynthia of
Sinking Spring, Pa.

FEBRUARY 17, 2007

Thomas, age 6
months, joined Steven
& Beth of Macungie,
Pa.

MARCH 3, 2007

Brandon, age 10,
joined Mark & Donald
of Steelton, Pa.

PLACEMENTS

MARCH 22, 2007

Austin, age 8, joined
Todd & Arlene of Jim
Thorpe, Pa.

MARCH 22, 2007

Rickia, age 6, joined
Paul & Yolanda of
Harrisburg, Pa.

MARCH 29, 2007

Mylasia, age 8, joined
Anthony & Dana of
Harrisburg, Pa.

MARCH 31, 2007

Amanda, age 10, from
Ohio, joined John &
Marian of Riegelsville,
Pa.

APRIL 6, 2007

Orrin, age 2 months,
joined Steven & Alicia
of Mohrsville, Pa.

APRIL 27, 2007

Korey, age 5 months,
joined Trevor &
Candra of Harrisburg,
Pa.

MAY 10, 2007

Tommya, age 2,
joined Steven &
Kathy of Reading, Pa.

MAY 11, 2007

Leland, age 1, joined
Todd & Penny of
Zionsville, Pa.

MAY 11, 2007

Jaylette, age 4, joined
Bradley & Michelle
of Hanover, Pa.

MAY 22, 2007

TeShawn, age 2,
joined Trevor &
Candra of
Harrisburg, Pa.



RACE TO ADOPT

In July, during the Mitch Smith Memorial Speed Week race, Williams Grove Speedway observed adoption night to raise awareness of the need for the more than 1,300

Pennsylvania children searching for a family to call their own. Sprint cars displayed photographs of more than 60 children searching for families as well as Diakon Adoption & Foster Care contact information.

To share information about the adoption process, an adoption fair was held for all race fans to promote the need for families to adopt children.

Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, which partnered with Berks, Dauphin and York county Children and Youth agencies, Bethanna, Children’s Home of York and Concern, was thrilled with the event’s success.

According to Elisa Esh, director, resource family recruitment for Diakon Adoption & Foster Care, “Our event highlighted the need for



(Left to right) Jon Douglas, Project Star; Stephanie McCarl, Jennifer Bircher, Greg Hodnett (driver), Elisa Esh, and Angie Vicchiotti from Diakon Adoption & Foster Care.

families for older children with special needs. Our adoption fair was crowded all night and we suspect many matches were made between families ready to adopt and children available for adoption. Diakon and

private provider informational tables were busy all evening and we had some very serious inquiries as to the adoption process.”

Adoption fair attendees also perused the Pennsylvania Heart Gallery—a professional photography exhibit featuring the faces of Pennsylvania children waiting for a family.

The 63 children from several counties in Pennsylvania who appeared on the wings of the sprint cars and numerous adoptive families, attended a hospitality event prior to the race. Upon arriving, each of the children was given a gift by volunteers, Deborah Rahmer, Lisa Stone, and sponsors and friends of the #22 team. Gifts included bikes, Gameboys, DVD players and gift cards for stores of their choice.

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Drivers displayed photos of waiting children in PA.



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Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries

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Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries offers a range of specialized programs for children, individuals, families, and senior adults.

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Ramona Hoyle, Director, Maryland office
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Craig Gehosky, Director,
Mechanicsburg and York offices
Elisa Esh, Director, resource family recruitment
Jennifer Leonard, Editor

Visit our website at www.diakon.org

RACE TO ADOPT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

“The outpouring of generosity from the racing community is amazing,” says Esh. “These kids are searching for something so basic that most of us take for granted—a family.

It was heartwarming to see them enjoy this evening and all that it had to offer to them. Our hope is that the best gift some of these children received at this event is a forever family.”



Drivers displayed photos of waiting children in Pennsylvania.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

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