

County seeks foster parents

By ANNIE ZELM

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HURON

Thomas and Irene Kazmierczak thought they had some idea of what to expect when they became foster parents, but they learned a lot along the way.

Lesson No. 1: How to find and assemble a Toys "R" Us crib in less than an hour for an unexpected arrival.

No. 2? The dynamics of modern diapers.

There were a few things they never could have prepared for, such as the whirlwind of emotions that come with growing attached to a child, only to say goodbye a short time later.

Or the sheer joy they feel when that same child, now a grown man, calls to say he still considers them his family.

"You've just got to keep in mind the seeds you're planting," Irene said. "You give them the opportunity to do things they've never done before."

Foster families play a crucial role in the lives of children who might not otherwise have stability or a safe place to call home, said Angel Young, Erie County's deputy director of social services.

The county has 21 families providing foster care, but it needs more foster and adoptive parents. About 50 children are in temporary custody as they await a more permanent home.

Social workers try to place children with relatives or



Register photo/ANGELA WILHELM

Blake Wysocki, 14, left, chases Monika Giardina, 15, with a water balloon Saturday at Osborn Park in Huron during the Erie County Department of Job and Family Services' luau for those interested in adoption or foster parenting.

foster parents who live as close to the area as possible, but sometimes that's not an option, Young said.

If no one is available within the county, the children have to move somewhere else — often leaving behind their school, friends and other activities.

That can add to the trauma they've already experienced.

"The kids have to start all

over," Young said. "When a child leaves the community, it costs taxpayers a lot more money as well. Every one of us has a responsibility, and we are affected in one way or another."

Young and her co-workers at the Erie County Department of Job and Family Services hosted a luau Saturday at Osborn Park to celebrate foster families and encourage

others to consider fostering.

People in all stages of life can be foster parents, as long as they are 21 or older. They don't have to be married or own a home.

Some decide to foster with the hope of adopting, while others provide care for short periods of time to give someone else a break.

And although foster parents can feel overwhelmed

at times, it's important to remember they're never alone, foster care specialist Tina Krueger said.

Foster parents receive financial assistance to help meet the needs of the children in their home, and the county offers its own network of support.

Erie County recently started a monthly forum for foster parents to help them

Want to help a child?

The Erie County Department of Job and Family Services will host classes for potential foster or adoptive parents from 5-8 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, starting this Tuesday at the agency office on 221 W. Parish St., Sandusky.

Another session begins Oct. 8.

For information, call 419-626-6781, ext. 6500.

with the unique challenges of caring for children of all ages.

This Tuesday, it also kicks off a series of classes for people interested in foster parenting or adoption.

The classes cover topics including child development, introducing foster children to biological children and the resources available to parents.

It's an emotional journey, said the Kazmierczaks — who have fostered three sets of siblings in the past 18 months — but the rewards continue to surprise them.

One example: Watching the spark of excitement in the eyes of a boy seeing fireworks for the first time.

Or realizing how much a young girl loves eating popcorn and watching a movie as a family.

"It's the little things, the things you take for granted," Irene said.