

# Three Local Families Adopt Children Into Their Homes in Time for Thanksgiving

## Little Girls Start New Chapter of Life Through November 'Adoption Day'

By Ryan Schlehober

Thanksgiving meant a little more this year for the Brant family of Cedarville, the Penner family of St. Ignace, and Betty Sherwood and Rickie Buskirk of Gould City, who have adopted children into their families. The local adoptions were finalized at the Mackinac County courthouse in November, coinciding with adoptions taking place across the state to mark Michigan "Adoption Day."

In Mackinac County, a three-year old girl permanently joined the family of her aunt and uncle, two little sisters were adopted to their longtime foster parents, the only parents they've ever known, and a baby girl from China was welcomed to a home in St. Ignace.

### The Children

Three-year-old Noelle had lived in four homes before she was a year old. Medical problems kept her biological mother and father, who live separately in Wisconsin, from caring for her, so she became "a child of the system," according to her grandmother, Shirley Borski, and was provided foster care by Wisconsin.

Marissa was placed in a foster home at the age of two months, and her sister, Morgan, followed her when she was only three weeks old. Their biological parents terminated all parental rights of the two girls two years ago and have moved out of the state. They took a third sister

with them.

A year ago, Elisabeth was one of thousands of Chinese girls who had either been abandoned or left for adoption. Abandonment of girls is common in China, since families are permitted only one child and couples are eager to conceive a son to carry on the family name.

Little is known about Elisabeth's biological parents.

Through the China Center of Adoption Affairs, the country's central authority overseeing all adoptions in China, adoption requirements are different, more expensive, and more demanding than in the United States, which made Elisabeth's chances of finding a permanent family all the more challenging.

### The Families

Terry Brant transferred in 2003 from his Coast Guard station at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to the cutter *Biscayne Bay* in St. Ignace. He and his wife, Pamela, moved to Cedarville with their daughters, Leah, 15, and Felicia, 13. They hope to remain in the Upper Peninsula following Mr. Brant's retirement.

Betty Sherwood of Gould City has been a foster parent for six years and has cared for 28 children, ranging from birth to 17 years of age. Foster children have been a good substitute for the children she could never birth herself.

She and Rickie Buskirk, a long-time trucker, also from Gould City, have been together 14 years and he has babysat her foster children when he could. His own daughter and three sons are now grown and beginning their own families.

Tom Penner has been the pastor at Straits Evangelical Free Church for six years. He and his wife, Lisa, tried for eight years to conceive a



Just one of the family: The Brant family of Cedarville happily welcomed a new addition to their family, three-year-old Noelle, who officially became a Brant Thursday, November 10. Pictured (in back, from left) grandmother Shirley Borski of Wisconsin, new mother Pamela, Noelle, new father Terry, and (in front) Noelle's two new sisters, Felicia and Leah.

child but knew, he said, that their faith in God would lead them to their destiny.

### Overcoming the Obstacles

The Brants found out in May 2003, a month before they were to move to Michigan, that they had a niece in Wisconsin's foster care system. Immediately, said Mrs. Brant, they knew they had to rescue her.

"She was blood," said Mrs. Brant. "I couldn't just ignore it. We discussed it and we agreed right away that we wanted to take her in."

Mrs. Brant's parents, Ray and Shirley Borski, had moved to Wisconsin in 2000 to take custody of her son's daughter, Noelle, when she was four months old. When the Brants moved to Cedarville three years later, as planned with the

Borskis, they took temporary custody of Noelle through what the state agencies recognize as "kinship care."

Acquiring legal, permanent custody would take almost another three years, and the Brants had to meet state requirements for both Wisconsin and Michigan while helping Noelle adjust to her fourth home and adjusting to caring for a toddler all over again in their late 40s.

"She had four homes and so she was withdrawn and lethargic at first," explained Mrs. Brant. "The background checks and home studies were long and extensive, plus, we're both 46 years old, three years from retirement. We knew it was the right thing to do, but we knew it wasn't going to be easy."



The Penner family: (at left) Tom, two-year-old Elisabeth, and Lisa. The Penners adopted Elisabeth from China last year and are in the process of adopting another child.



Sisters Marissa and Morgan became the daughters of Betty Sherwood of Gould City Tuesday, November 22. Pictured are (from left) are Rickie Busrick, two-year-old Morgan, three-year-old Marissa, and Ms. Sherwood.

Ms. Sherwood and Mr. Buskirk were really the only parental figures Marissa and Morgan ever knew. Their biological parents continued to visit them, infrequently at first, then not at all. When the girls' biological parents finally moved, Ms. Sherwood could not bear the thought of them being adopted by another family, especially since she had reared them practically since birth. She began the process of adoption.

She and Mr. Buskirk had to go through a standard two year process of filling out documents and waiting while a state agency investigated their private lives and their family histories to make sure they would be fit to adopt Marissa and Morgan.

God's plan for the Penners became more apparent during the winter of 2003, when Mrs. Penner came across an advertisement for international adoption. After several months of discussion, the couple decided to adopt a Chinese baby.

"We had good reports from our

Pennsylvania adoption agency about adopting Chinese babies," said Mr. Penner. "They did all the work with the Chinese agency."

Legal documents and state-certified background and history checks would have to be created, sent to their adoption agent in Pennsylvania, which then sent them on to the Chinese adoption agency, where Chinese officials began their own arduous verification process.

"International adoption is a lot more paperwork and a lot of trips to Lansing," said Mrs. Penner. "Waiting and not knowing were the harder things to handle."

The process took 16 months.

China does not allow adopting parents to take custody of a child until the child is at least six months old. Once they are notified that a child is available, they must spend at least five days with the child in China to get to know the child and the culture.

\*Please turn to page 10

## Mackinaw City Tourism Bureau Adds Members

By Paul Gingras

To improve its ability to serve the tourist industry in Mackinaw City, the Mackinaw Area Visitors Bureau is adding at least four new members to its board of directors. The Bureau wants to increase communication with other organizations, such as the Village Council, and is redesigning its official slogan and logo to make the area more marketable.

"More people at the table means more wisdom," said Executive Director Marilyn McFarland of the board expansion.

The board will link itself to the Village Council by adding Steve Schnell, zoning administrator for Mackinaw City. He will be joined by Greg Hokans, director of development and marketing at Mackinac State Historic Parks, and Dean Steiner, service manager for the Mackinac Bridge Authority.

The Bureau also will add a member from one of the Mackinac Island ferry lines, Ms. McFarland said.

"We sent out letters to each boat line asking them to nominate a representative," Ms. McFarland said. "We will decide which member that will be in December," she added.

According to Ms. McFarland, these efforts will help bring together various organizations within Mackinaw City, factions which have not always communicated well in the past.

To do so, the bylaws of the Visitors Bureau had to be changed. Under the old rules, the board was limited to seven hotel owners, one restaurant owner, and one gift shop owner, but Ms. McFarland said that this did not adequately reflect the tourism industry in Mackinaw City as a whole.

Ms. McFarland hopes the new village, bridge, state park, and boat line representatives will add insight to ongoing Bureau projects and help generate new ideas.

One of the most important Bureau initiatives, she said, is working on a new "brand" for Mackinaw City, a project Bureau members have been developing since last May. The image of Mackinaw City, promoted in the visitors guide and on the Mackinaw City Web site, is a series of three tiles representing the Mackinac Bridge, the Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, and Fort Michilimackinac. The Village Council and the Mackinaw City Chamber of Commerce have simi-

\*Please turn to page 10



## Students Enjoy Day of Skating at Little Bear

Chris Dumas (left), Cody Therrian, and Trevor Metz of St. Ignace Middle School are among about 150 students who participated in the annual D.A.R.E. skating event, hosted by State Police Trooper Fred Strich Tuesday, November 22, at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace. The event included students from St. Ignace Area Schools, Engadine Consolidated Schools, Les Cheneaux Community Schools, Mackinac Island Public School, and Gros Cap School, who participate in the drug resistance education program.

## Historic Mackinaw City Landmarks Theme of Handstitched Quilt Display

A hand-stitched quilt depicting historic Mackinaw City landmarks has been hung on display at Mackinaw Village Hall. It will eventually be used at Mackinaw Historic Village, a project of the Mackinaw Area Historical Society and the Village of Mackinaw City. The 20 blocks comprising the quilt are viewed here by Mayor Robert Heilman (left), project chairperson Dorothy Krueger, and Kurt Grebe, president of the historical society. A list of those who crafted the quilt is posted beside the display.

