

BY ROBYN ADAMS

REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY

Light blue rim glasses sitting on the tip of her little nose, Leslie was unaware of the goings on at Probate Court.

The tyke with curly light brown hair and sparkly pink shoes was just hanging out with the folks she has known as mommy and daddy.

On Friday, Probate Judge Thomas Brunnock finalized Joe and Karen Coton's adoption of Leslie.

"She got in our hearts right away," said Joe Coton, an engi-neer for Verizon Wireless, as he teared up.

"She is the love of our life," Karen Coton said.

November is National Adop-tion Month — a time when state child custody agencies around the nation promote finding per-manent families for children in foster care.

Leslie was placed with the Cotons, of Waterbury, at 1 month old, according to the state Department of Children and Families. She was removed from her biological mother due to physical neglect.

"We just love her," Karen Coton said.

In Connecticut and the na-tion, thousands of children are placed in foster care due to neglect or abuse. Currently, there are 4,800 children in fos-ter care, said Lisa Flower, a spokeswoman for DCF. The state has 32 childrenages infancy to 18, waiting to be adopted.

The Rev. David Torres and his wife, Brenda, also went be-fore Judge Brunnock to official-ly adopt their smiley 3-year-old girls, Serenity and Felisha.

The girls, who are not sisters, have been with the Torres fam-ily since the summer of 2006.

They join the couple's biologi-cal daughters, Priscila, 15, and Amarilis, 16, both students at Crosby High School.

The Torres had no plans to give up the girls. "We fell in love with them," Brenda Torres said. Flower said the adoption process can take a bit of time for children in foster care be-cause the court system is in-volved. While Connecticut has seen improvements in both the number and speed of adoptions in recent years, there are al-ways additional children in fos-ter care who need a permanent family.

During state fiscal years 1997 to 2005, an average of 615 per-manent homes were found an-nually for children in foster care— more than four times the number in 1996. In fiscal year 2006, 498 adoptions were final-ized, while 530 were finalized in fiscal year 2007 and 634 were fi-nalized in fiscal year 2008.

Before both families were whisked away in separate white stretch limousines Friday for lunch and a stop at a toy store, they posed for pictures with Judge Brunnock.

Cameras were plentiful for the Coton photo opportunity; aunts, uncles and neighbors witnessed the adoption.

Grandmother Barbara Butler and her daughter, Debbie But-ler, drove from Tampa Bay, Fla., to transport a carload of presents for an adoption party that will be held for Leslie in a few weeks.

And aunt Karen Coton, also of Tampa, boarded an airplane to share in the happy occasion, even though she doesn't like to fly alone.

With tears in her eyes, the aunt said she would not have missed the special moment.

"I just love that little girl," she said.

More people opt to adopt



IRENA PASTORELLO REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

Karen Coton of Waterbury holds her daughter Lezlie, 3, as her husband, Joseph Coton, gets a congratulatory hug from neighbor Dolly Ganesh after the couple received adoption papers for the girl at Waterbury Probate Court on Friday.