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Joy abounds as new families come together

In Omaha's 14th year of celebrating National Adoption Day, a festive mood fills the courthouse with performers on stilts and face painting.

BY AMANDA BRANDT
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As a Douglas County public defender, Yvonne Aguero has spent a lot of time in courtrooms.

She was in a courtroom again on Saturday for an entirely different experience.

She and her husband, Jose Aguero, legally adopted a 6-year-old girl, Analieze, and gave her their last name.

More than 50 new families were formed in Omaha as part of National Adoption Day. This celebration, the 14th in Omaha, was also held in eight other communities throughout Nebraska.

Maritza Aguero, the couple's 11-year-old daughter, was excited to become a big sister. "Now I have someone instead of just me," the sixth-grader said.

The carnival-like atmosphere in the City-County Building lobby couldn't squelch the tears as many families' dreams were finally realized.

The road to adopting Analieze was long. She is the niece of Yvonne Aguero, 30.

On Analieze's fourth birthday, Yvonne's sister asked if the child could spend the night. She never came back to pick up the girl, and two years of legal battles followed.

The timing was inconvenient.

Jose Aguero, a 31-year-old Marine Corps veteran who served two years in Iraq, had proposed to Yvonne.

He went from having no children to taking care of both Analieze and Maritza. Jose said he couldn't be happier and called Saturday "the icing on the cake."

Before the brief legal ceremony,

Analieze surveyed the tense courtroom to ensure everyone was quiet. She gave Maritza a thumbs-up and clutched Yvonne.

When presiding Juvenile Court Judge Elizabeth Crnkovich walked in, Analieze cracked a big smile and shyly raised her hand with the others to be sworn in.

When the proceedings were finished, Crnkovich gave Analieze a teddy bear and asked what she wanted to do next. "Get started!" Analieze said.

Another Saturday adoption held special significance for the Aguero family.

Yvonne's mother, Adela Berunen, adopted Analieze's biological 4-year-old brother, Santos-Cruz Berunen. She had previously adopted another one of the siblings, 3-year-old Daniel.

A festive atmosphere awaited the new families.

Toddlers stared in awe at a woman on stilts, and other children played games. "Star Wars" stormtroopers made an

appearance, and nearly everyone was dancing to the beat of the Omaha Street Percussion group. Face paint turned regular kids into monsters and princesses, and a photographer was on hand to take "first" family portraits.

"I love adoption Saturday," Crnkovich said. "It's the best day of the year. ... It is one of the brighter spots."

Despite caring for Analieze for more than two years, a few things will change now that the adoption is final.

Analieze is deaf in her left ear, and it has been up to the state and her birth mother to seek treatment. Now the Agueros can explore long-term care that can help their daughter. They can also now get her a passport so she can meet Jose's family in Mexico.

Analieze, her face covered in face paint and chocolate doughnut, said she was happy. When she grows up, she wants to be a lawyer.

"Just like my mom," she said.

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Clockwise from left, Juvenile Court Judge Elizabeth Crnkovich, Yvonne Aguero, Jose Aguero, Maritza Aguero, 11, and Analieze Aguero, 6. Analieze legally joined the Aguero family Saturday at the City-County Building as part of National Adoption Day.