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Rye Brook couple starts non-profit adoption agency

The realization of a 12-year dream

By Jeff Benzak

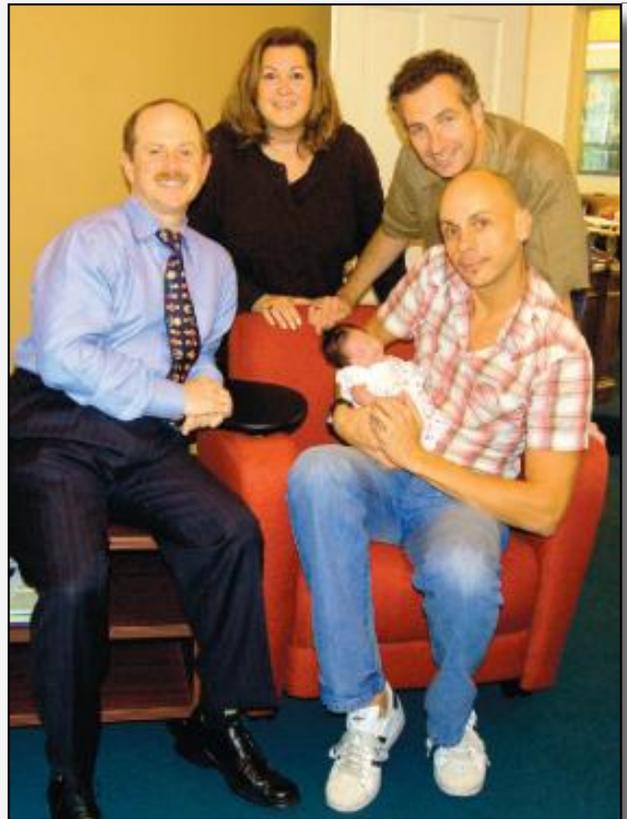
A Rye Brook couple with extensive experience in the adoption field recently opened a new adoption agency at 62 Bowman Ave. On Monday, the non-profit agency, Forever Families Through Adoption, delivered its first baby, a girl, to two loving parents from New York City.

"This is a busy, exciting day for us," said Joy Goldstein, director of FFTA, which began its own life as a nonprofit adoption agency in April. Goldstein said she hopes FFTA can facilitate 20 adoptions this year, with more in the future as the agency expands - perhaps as many as 80 or even 100 annually.

Goldstein and her husband, Michael, live on Holly Lane in Rye Brook. They are the parents of three adoptive children, and they have worked in the adoption field for more than 25 years. Last fall, Michael Goldstein was singled out by the U.S. Congress for his work in the adoption field.

For the Goldsteins, FFTA and Monday's first adoption was the culmination of a dream that began more than 12 years ago. They have taken on additional employees and have established a relationship with adoption lawyers in the Dominican Republic. One of their main goals it to spread the word about adoption.

"There are thousands of babies sitting in orphanages in America that could be adopted," Michael Goldstein said.



Michael Goldstein, left, and his wife, Joy, pose with adoptive parents and their new baby girl on Monday in Rye Brook. The Goldsteins have for years worked in the adoption field, and they recently opened up their own adoption agency called Forever Families Through Adoption.

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In order to get FFTA off the ground, the couple had to write a business plan and file various forms with the state government, which was a time-consuming process.

FFTA is different from the adoption services the Goldsteins had offered in the past, because FFTA is an all-encompassing agency. Previously, Michael, who is a lawyer, focused on the legal aspects of adoption, while Joy, a licensed social worker, counseled couples, children and parents through the process. Michael's legal practice remains separate from FFTA, but works closely with it.

Joy Goldstein said the agency will be more user-friendly, which is important, because the adoption process is often complicated and has many steps.

Adoptions normally begin when a couple who wants to adopt a child contacts an adoption agency. Then they undergo 10 hours of mandatory parental training and file an application. A profile of the adoptive parents is compiled, and a licensed social worker makes two home visits to determine if the parents can provide a safe, loving home for the child.

The financial history of the adoptive parents is examined, and fingerprints are taken. Then the agency tries to locate a birth mother through avenues like the Internet and newspaper ads, and oftentimes the adoptive parents and the birth mother meet.

Once the baby is born, an agency coordinates the preparation of legal paperwork to finalize the custody change. In FFTA's case, the adoptive parents are required to give updates on the child and the status of the family for at least five years.

Although there are adoption agencies throughout Westchester, the Goldsteins said theirs is unique for several reasons. First, the Goldsteins themselves are the parents of three adopted children. They said this gives them a deeper understanding of the emotions involved - both for the parents and the children. The Goldsteins are also licensed social workers with extensive backgrounds in adoption law.

Also, because of their expertise in the field, the Goldsteins said they will work to find permanent homes for babies and children who have either been neglected in the womb, at home or at foster-care facilities. They will also conduct education sessions in schools about adoptions and counseling sessions for birth and adoptive parents, they said.

"We're adoptive parents and we're social workers," Joy Goldstein said. "We are fond of placing 'hard-to-place' children in forever homes - babies with drug exposure, alcohol exposure or who are bi-racial."

These children, Goldstein said, often end up in foster care.

FFTA will place adopted children in homes with gay parents, male or female. Not all agencies do this, Goldstein said. Also, older parents can adopt children.

FFTA is designed as a national adoption agency. However, Goldstein said it will also help facilitate local adoptions. They said when United Hospital was open, the legal practice had some referrals from its maternity ward. They said they will remain available to anyone in the local community who would like to consult with them about adoptions.

"Our clients are the babies," Joy Goldstein said. "Our goal is to do what's best for them - and that's to find them forever families."

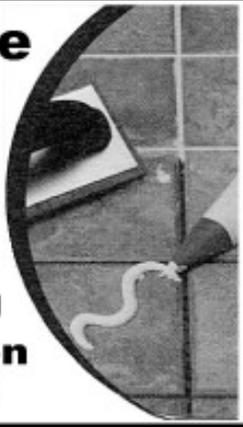
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