


**COMMUNICATE**  
 Do You Have Some Concerns About The State? Do You Disagree With Any New Laws? *Contact Your Representative!*

Honorable Max W. Cleland (D)  
 United States Senate  
 Washington, D.C. 20510-1001  
 E-mail: senator\_Max\_Cleland@cleland.senate.gov  
 Web: www.senate.gov/~cleland  
*Or The Governor!*  
**Roy Barnes**  
 203 State Capitol  
 Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
 (404) 656-1776  
 Web: www.state.ga.us/governor/

Our deepest sympathy goes out to the friends and family of Senator Paul Coverdell since his demise July 19, 2000. He was a great supporter of Foster Care in Georgia and a great man. Senator Coverdell will be greatly missed.




# INFONET

## *Building A Family One Child At A Time* Georgia's Adoptive Parents of the Year

*Excerpt from article By Fauve Yandel • Atlanta Journal-Constitution • Thursday, June 8, 2000  
 Photo By Johnny Crawford, Staff Photographer*

Eight children Debbie Sanders never birthed call her "Mama." Since 1993, 39 foster children have been placed in Debbie and Mark Sanders' home through the Clayton County Department of Family and Children Services. The couple adopted six. The oldest two, Julie and Tammy, turned 18 before their adoptions could become final, but the couple considers them their children nonetheless. "I've gone through more mental labor than anybody who has gone through

physical labor," Debbie Sanders said. "We fought hard for these kids."

For their efforts, the couple recently was named Georgia's Adoptive Parents of the Year by the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia. They were Clayton County's Adoptive Parents of the Year in 1999. While the Sanderses feel honored to be recognized, they are quick to talk about their desire to involve more families in the foster care and adoption process.

"The need for families to open up their homes to these children is so immense," Debbie Sanders said. "So many of these children are brought into the foster care program after unimaginable abuse and neglect. We just want to give children a safe place and a happy place." Clayton County DFACS says the need for more families like the Sanderses is overwhelming. There are 400 children who need placement in foster care, but only 112 homes are available.

Those not placed stay in group homes and shelters, said Chuck Fischer, deputy director of Clayton DFACS. Each year, the need for foster parents increases, while the pool of available homes remains relatively unchanged.

"Even though we have about 112 homes, not all of them are available all the time," Fischer said. "The maximum number of foster children per home is six, and while many of those homes are at capacity, we have to temporarily place these children in group homes and emergency shelters."

Between 15 and 20 children are available for adoption each month, officials said. The greatest need is for parents willing to adopt older children and sibling groups. If parents go through DFACS to adopt, there's little to no out-of-pocket expense for them, as opposed to private adoption agencies which can cost \$10,000 and up, Fischer said.

LaVett Birdsong, social services case manager and foster parent liaison for Clayton County DFACS, nominated the Sanderses for the Adoptive Parents of the Year award. Birdsong, who has known the couple for six years, knows how generous they are.

"They just have a heart for children," Birdsong said. "The kids that have been placed in their home know they can always call Mark and Debbie if they ever have a need -- even the kids who have left the foster care program and have gone back to their own homes."

There was a time when the couple thought their hopes of having a big family would remain just a dream. Just before they began dating in 1989, Mark Sanders was diagnosed with cancer that left him unable to have children. A friend suggested the couple investigate foster parenting.

"We were hesitant to try the foster program, although looking back now, I can't remember why," Debbie Sanders said.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for my kids," said Mark Sanders, an employee of the city of Forest Park. "I love each and every one of them so much, and having them in our lives has been pure joy for Debbie and me."

The Sanderses are renovating their new home in Pike County, where they moved last August. They also are looking forward to working with the Pike County DFACS, and hope to adopt two more children some day.