

Couple raising 7 sees it as a ‘calling’

By Bryan McKenzie
Daily Progress staff writer

Sometimes the Rogers family gets down right interesting looks, like when they pull and push a couple of crammed carts through Sam’s Club’s crowded aisles or when they bail out of the car like a small army.

“You get a lot of raised eyebrows because people just aren’t accustomed to families with seven children,” laughs Jude Rogers, sitting next to her husband Charlie in the office of People Places of Charlottesville.

“Most of our time and most of our money go into the family, into the kids, but I don’t feel like I’m missing anything,” she says. “We’ve got everything we need.”

Jude and Charlie Rogers are unique people. Not everyone is cut out to raise seven children. Fewer still are prepared to raise kids by birth, by previous marriages, by adoption and by foster parenting all at the same time.

The Rogers children range in age from eight to 17. They are stepchildren, biological children, foster children and adopted. The fostered and adopted, of which there are four, have been arranged through People Places of Charlottesville, a private adoption and fostering agency. “It’s kind of a calling,” Rogers says. “It’s something that’s laid on your heart to do. It’s not for everyone. In some ways you have to look at it as a job. You want it to be all about love but it’s also a job driven by love. You realize that when you’re sick and have the flu and just want to hide in the bedroom and lock the door but you have kids to take care of. It’s your job.”

The large family and the mix are something the Rogers considered before adding new members. “We didn’t just add to the family. We made sure certain structures were in place so that the kids knew what was expected of them and what the rules were before we brought someone new into the family,” Charlie Rogers explains. “The dynamics are naturally going to change but you have a basic structure in place to provide guidance.”

The Rogers theory is promoted by People Places of Charlottesville. The organization has trained the Rogers to be adoptive and foster parents. It supports the family with counseling, further training and even respite care.

The agency began in Staunton as a “therapeutic” fostering agency in which parents were trained to help their foster kids and adoptees adjust to new lives. It provides an 8-week training course for prospective foster parents and a special foster-to-adopt program.

“All of the kids we serve are from the Department of Social Services so they have been victims of abuse or neglect,” explained Stephanie Snider, the agency’s adoption consultant and administrative coordinator.

“We expect that they’re going to have emotional and behavior difficulties and some issues in school. The object is to give the foster parents the support and training they need to make the matches work. We want the parents to know what to expect and give them the information and tools they need to address a situation when it comes up,” Snider said. The Rogers know very well what to expect from foster and adoptive children. They’ve been there. A family adopted Jude in 1972, bringing her from South Korea. She was four years old and spoke no English. Charlie lived in foster homes while growing up near Portsmouth.

“It wasn’t easy. I was in a new country, in a new language and I had a hard time,” Jude recalls. “Everything was different and just expressing basic needs was difficult. Later, I thought if I could help in any way just one child — just one life — it would not only help that child but help me to come to terms with my own experience.”

Charlie Rogers understands.

“I grew up in one of the worst projects in Virginia without a father. In that situation you either just go along with what you see around you, which is not good, or you go totally different. I went totally different,” he says. “I knew I wanted to a father to kids and, if I could, I wanted to give back to that [foster] community.”

Their experiences may be one reason why the Rogers’ kids are simply their kids. There are no adopted, biological, fostered or “from a previous marriage” children. They have the same rules. They have the same expectations.

“I see them as all the same and I treat them as all the same,” Charlie Rogers says. “I don’t see biological children and foster children. I just see them as my children.”

“Being a parent is a gift,” Jude Rogers says. “It’s something we love to do. We’re lucky we’re able to share our lives with them.”

Contact Bryan McKenzie at (434) 978-7271 or bmckenzie@dailyprogress.com.

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