

# Proud foster parents

*Over three decades,  
56 children have lived  
in couple's home*

By TRISH AUDETTE  
Standard Staff

Jeannette and Robert De Vries have been in the business of bringing up babies for 30 years.

"We only had two children of our own, and felt God had given us a task to provide love and care for more," says Robert, 55, a milk and cream receiver with Parmalat Canada in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

In three decades as foster parents with Family and Children's Services Niagara, the De Vries have had only one six-month hiatus from foster child duty.

Altogether, 56 children have lived in their north St. Catharines home.

Jeannette, 56, says she has photographs of most of those children, framed and hanging in a basement den and in family albums, where each child's name is carefully recorded, along with the period of time they spent at the De Vries' home.

"The ones who've been adopted, you never hear from again," she says. "You kind of wonder, over 56 kids, where they are, what happened, if they're still alive...."

"The odd time, I've read the name of one or two of them in the paper, when they've got in trouble."

For the most part, the De Vries have taken in babies, up to two or three years old, just as Robert's mother, Wilma, did before them.

"We helped (her) out," Jeannette says.



Jeannette and Robert De Vries have been foster parents with Family and Children's Services Niagara for three decades.

STAFF PHOTO BY DENIS CAHILL

"We kind of got weaned into it," Robert adds.

Caring for foster children, they say, was a way to afford Jeannette staying home with their own growing children.

Members of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, they are still fostering children. For several years, they've acted as parents to three brothers, all of whom are entering adolescence.

These boys, the De Vries say, will be their last foster children.

"The older you get, the more breaks you need," Jeannette says, although there have been only a few "rough spots" along the way.

An absence of foster children won't mean the De Vries' home will be de-child proofed.

"Now the grandchildren are here," says Jeannette.

Asked what advice they would give to prospective foster parents, Robert says, "You're going to have to be able to love and let go."

The De Vries are among 63 people scheduled to be recognized tonight at Family and Children's Services Niagara's annual foster parent appreciation night.

The event takes place at the Quality Hotel Parkway Convention Centre on Ontario Street, starting at 6 p.m.