

# Rock Island couple vouch for an up-side about Down syndrome children

By Leon Lagerstam, llagerstam@qconline.com | Posted: Friday, October 30, 2015 9:50 am

ROCK ISLAND -- They didn't adopt a baby girl with Down syndrome to win an award, they did it because it was the right thing to do.

Yet, Courtney and Aaron Ziegler, of Rock Island, will be awarded the Ruth Evelyn Katz Adoptive Family of the Year award from Bethany for Children and Families at its annual awards celebration to be held Thursday, Nov. 5, at Modern Woodmen Park, 209 S. Gaines St., Davenport. It will open with 6 p.m. heavy hors d'oeuvres and cash bar, followed by the 6:30 p.m. awards presentation.

It will cost \$25 per person. For reservations or information, visit [bethany-qc.org](http://bethany-qc.org).

The Zieglers will pack their 15-passenger fire-engineered van with "Zorro63" license plates with all seven of their kids and attend the ceremony. The license plate combines Mr. Ziegler's high-school nickname with the couple's June 3, 2005, wedding date.

The couple already had six children of their own before they adopted a Down syndrome child named Lucy, age 1. She joins five sisters, Grace, 7; Emma, 5; Maria, 4; Felicity, 3; Ruth, 2; and a brother, Samuel, 8.

It takes them five car seats and two boosters to safely transport them, Mrs. Ziegler said. "Car seats are my nemesis," she said.

When Mrs. Ziegler called her husband to tell him about Lucy's impending arrival, he only asked if they were sure it was another girl, and not a second boy instead.

Mrs. Ziegler will turn 35 on the day of the awards banquet, making it easy for her husband to plan



Courtney Ziegler and her husband, Aaron (not pictured), live in Rock Island with their seven children: Grace, 7, Samuel, 8, Felicity, 3, Emma, 5, Ruth, 2, Maria, 4 and Lucy, 1. The Zieglers have been named the Adoptive Family of the Year by Bethany for Children & Families and will be honored at an awards celebration on Thursday, Nov. 5, at Modern Woodmen Park in Davenport.

what they're going to do to celebrate.

The Zieglers were nominated for the award by Mr. Ziegler's mother, Paula Ziegler.

"There were no doubts in their minds," about adopting Lucy, Paula Ziegler wrote in her nominating papers. "They specifically chose a special needs adoptive child. "Lucy is is 1 year old now, and there have been ups and downs in Lucy's 12 months of life," she wrote. "Each milestone in Lucy's progress is a joy. The family all provide Lucy with an enormous amount of love, hugs and kisses."

"We all love Lucy," Grace Ziegler said. "It's cool to be in a nine-person family."

Grace looks forward to her clan's regularly scheduled family nights that usually include a walk and/or watching movies and eating popcorn.

"The entire family is committed to Lucy's care," Paula Ziegler wrote. "The little ones play with her and talk to her. The older ones protect her, hold her, help her sit and understand that her progress will be slower than normal. Lucy is deaf in one ear and hard of hearing in the other."

"She's a baby for a lot longer," Courtney Ziegler said. "It takes her longer to accomplish such things such as holding her head up and crawling."

But she has no heart complications, as Down syndrome babies are known to, she said.

Women told about Down syndrome complications generally get left with bleak outlooks, and 90 percent of them decide to terminate their pregnancies, a decision the Zieglers, as Catholics, don't share.

Mrs. Ziegler was contacted by a national Down syndrome society on a Friday, and were told they had to make their decision by Monday, when Lucy was scheduled for termination. Mrs. Ziegler made an immediate decision that "Lucy needed a family," before calling her husband.

"But we had talked about adopting since day 1," she said.

One of her brothers was a special-needs child, so she has been well accustomed to the situation since she was 5 years old, Mrs. Ziegler said.

She also always pictured having a large family.

Mrs. Ziegler once was a first-grade teacher in the Fulton and Champaign areas, before she and her husband returned to their native Rock Island.

She's now a stay-at-home mom and avoids prohibitive day-care costs. Her husband works for Modern Woodmen to support the family, and got home just minutes late for this interview.

She must follow a strict schedule to get all her kids up in the morning and get the school-aged kids to where they need to go.

Mrs. Ziegler goes grocery shopping when she has the least amount of kids with her. Their monthly grocery bill runs about \$700. She buys 10 gallons of milk at a time.

She also does at least two loads of laundry per day.

Ever since adopting Lucy, Mrs. Ziegler has felt adopted herself -- adopted by a Down syndrome community of parents and supporters.

"People need to know about this community of supporters," she said.

Mrs. Ziegler maintains a Facebook page titled "Little Miss Lucy -- the UPside of DOWN syndrome" to raise awareness about raising a Down syndrome child.