



Karissa and Ryan Williams have a newborn baby girl, Creighlee Jayde, born at 11:37 p.m. Monday. The newborn’s siblings are, from left, Carson, Blake and Brooklynn.

# First baby of 2012

## Karissa & Ryan Williams welcome Creighlee Jayde

by Joe Sovà

Perhaps it was the Mexican food she ate Monday afternoon that led to Karissa Williams giving birth to the first baby of 2012 in Hot Springs County.

Karissa and her husband Ryan – both Thermopolis natives – were seen leaving a local ethnic restaurant. Just a couple of hours later, Karissa went into labor and was admitted to Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital. Eight hours later, she had given birth to her fourth child – a little girl. Karissa and Ryan named Creighlee Jayde Williams. Although the baby was born about a month early, she was a healthy 6 pounds, 8 ounces and 19 inches long.

Creighlee was welcomed to the family by her two brothers, Blake, 9, and Carson, 7, and sister Brooklynn, 5. Coincidentally, Brooklynn was also a bit premature, also born a month early.

Dean and Diane Mercil of Laramie and formerly of Thermopolis are the maternal grandparents. Mike and Terri Williams of Thermopolis are the paternal grandparents. Creighlee’s paternal great-grandparents are LeRoy and Lois Williams of Thermopolis, and Art and Kay Gossens of Michigan. Emma Berd of North Dakota is the newborn’s maternal great-grandmother.

Ryan talked about choosing the name Creighlee

of their new daughter.

“We had two B (first) names,” he said, and he and Karissa wanted a second name beginning with C. “We liked the name Creigh for a boy.” Soon after learning their fourth child was a girl, the parents added “lee” to Creigh and settled on the name of Creighlee.

When Creighlee was born Monday at HSCMS, it was right down the hall from where both Karissa and Ryan work at Gottsche Rehabilitation Center.

Both Karissa and Ryan have been active in sports since they were young. Karissa and Ryan played on the Gottsche co-ed softball team last summer and both were on a co-ed volleyball team last fall. Team member Kevin Simpson came up with a catchy name for the team – You Can’t de Fetus – and the season was dedicated to Karissa and her yet-to-be-born child. Karissa was able to play the first half of the season, then got some rest and introduced Creighlee to the world at 11:37 p.m. Jan. 1.

Karissa, Ryan and Creighlee were showered with gifts from 52 local merchants, thanks to the effort of members of the HSCMH Auxiliary.

“I’m glad we could do it. The auxiliary did a good job,” auxiliary president Linda Franklin said. “Thanks to the merchants. We have a pretty generous community.”

# Basse elected as commission chair; board appointments made

by Cindy Glasson

Tuesday’s meeting of the Hot Springs County Commissioners saw reorganization for 2012 as well as the appointment of several residents to various boards and committees.

Brad Basse was elected by the other commissioners to serve as chairman for 2012 with Mike Baker elected as vice-chairman. John Lumley stepped down as commission chair after serving in that capacity for the past two years.

The commissioners also voted to have their meeting dates remain the same, the first and third Tuesday of each month.

In addition, they approved the holiday schedule for the county offices. In 2012, county offices will be closed Presidents’ Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thursday and Friday for Thanksgiving in November, and on Christmas Eve. Offices will be open this year for New Year’s Eve.

**Board appointments**

The commissioners made appointments to various county boards and committees during the meeting.

New appointees are: Weston Jones, Fair Board; Margaret Stansill and Beth Drake, Hospital Board; Diane Winter and Terry Tonn, Sr., Land Use Planning Board; Kathy Wallingford and Barb Vietti, Library Board; Dan Moriarity, Lodging Tax Board; Kelly Andreen, Museum Board; and Arthur Hunter and Bob Blacketer, Predatory Animal Control Board.

There were six applicants for the two openings on the Hospital Board; however, there were no applicants for the Natural Resources Planning Committee or the Weed and Pest Board.

There are still six openings on the Natural Resources Planning Committee and one opening remaining on the Weed and Pest Board.

**Snow plow delivery**

A snow plow on order from Lariat International Trucks in Casper is now 80 days past its contracted delivery date.

According to the contract, the commissioners are within their rights to assess liquidated damages against the company in the amount of approximately \$4,000.

Since the State of Wyoming is providing grant monies for the purchase of the equipment, they were consulted on whether or not to set in motion the liquidated damages clause. At this time, the State is leaving that decision up to the county commissioners.

Baker suggested a decision be delayed until the snow plow is actually delivered and it is determined it is operational. A discussion with the airport manager will also help determine what, if any, damages have actually occurred.

# A Christmas in foster care — decorated with lots of love

by J.D. Stetson

The holidays are a stressful time for most families contending with the hustle and bustle of the season, but families who take it upon themselves to bring another person into their home, a foster child, have a different kind of experience.

Foster parents such as Barb and Todd Rice have celebrated the holidays pretty much the same way for the past 25 years. They have the traditional meals, go to church, open presents on Christmas morning and keep everything really low key.

Part of the reason they keep to their traditions is the fact that nine children have lived in their home who were originally placed there as part of the foster care system.

Barb and Todd have mainly taken in children in need of permanent placement with the possibility of adoption. They have been older children, teenagers or children who have already been to other foster homes.

They recognize the challenge most kids have within the system, and that’s also their reward, because they are up to the challenge of being a part of a stranger’s life and working with the child to go on to future opportunities.

The most difficult part is the beginning, Barb said. You are both strangers to each other, but at some point you stop being strangers and become a family.

**A sense of normalcy**

Most children who go into the foster care system contend with feelings of loss. The feelings are equivalent to losing a family member at a young age. When it comes to the holidays, celebrating isn’t at the forefront of their minds.

That’s why creating a routine and a sense of consistency is key to creating a stable environment for the children who enter the Rice home.

The holidays are a time where most people go off routine, but the Rices still maintain a sense of balance in order to instill a sense of normalcy to their charges without overwhelming them with too much change.

“You have to set some of that aside and understand what that person is going through,” Barb said. “It’s also hard for the foster family because these are also strangers to you, so you have these people you don’t know coming into your home at the worst possible moment of their life, and you’re trying to create a new relationship.”

Another aspect is the child’s biological parents and their importance in the role of the child’s welfare while in foster care.

The Rices have always seen the importance and need for the children to maintain relationships with their biological parents. Part of the reason is because the holidays aren’t just stressful for fosters, but also to their biological families.

The Rices are able to help ease that stress by working with the children to make Christmas cards or send pictures to them to maintain the thread of a relationship.

“That relationship, even if it wasn’t a good one, and even if it had its own issues and struggles, is really important, too,” Barb said.

The importance of the relationship is the chance the biological parents will play a role in the success of the child. The Rices have the perspective never to look down or mistreat the biological parents because they know most of the parents also are concerned about the best interests of the child.

**Christmas time**

Toni and Myron Casdorff also recognize the need to help maintain relationships with the biological parents of their fosters. They currently have friendships with the families of some of their charges who were reunified.

The Casdorffs’ home is as chaotic as you would expect a home would be this time of year with two toddlers and a 5-year-old boy to help Toni keep track of them while her other children play outside.

The family has had 10 long-term fosters, eight of them who stayed for more than six months, plus 15 children who stayed short term or just weekends. Both the toddlers are new fosters in the home.

The first year the family took in fosters, they had three fosters and three children of their own during Christmas. They bought bicycles for all of them, which filled their entire living room on Christmas morning.

Two of the fosters, ages 7 and 8 at the time, were excited because they never had anything that special given to them for Christmas.

“It’s tempting to go out and buy all kinds of things for these kids, especially the ones who have nothing,” Toni said. “It would not be good for the child, and it would really make the parents feel bad. You need to always be sensitive to how the parents feel.”

While Christmas can be an emotional time for both the fosters and the family, Toni thinks there’s also a part of the routine celebrations such as holidays and birthdays in which the children receive a sense of normalcy coupled with excitement for the joyous experience.

Like the Rices, the Casdorffs also try to keep to their normal holiday traditions in order to bring normalcy to their charges. Some of those traditions include reading a story every night in December or delivering “12 Days of Christmas” gifts to a friend.

**Department of Family Services**

For more information about foster homes, or if you are interested in becoming a foster parent, contact Wyoming Department of Family Services foster care coordinator Kristie Collins at 307-548-6503 or visit [www.dfsweb.state.wy.us](http://www.dfsweb.state.wy.us).



Above left, Toni Casdorff sits next to her 5-year-old son Daniel as he plays his drum. Both were busy before Christmas taking care of two toddlers who were recently placed in the home as foster children. Above right, Todd and Barb Rice are pictured with their sons, Brandon, 7, and Jon Gibson, 17. Both Barb and Todd have been foster parents for 25 years, offering a home to children in need of permanent placement. — J.D. Stetson photo

“Christmas is always a little more exciting when there’s extra kids here because you see it through their eyes,” Toni said. “They are always sad to be away from their parents, so it’s fun to see them get into the excitement of Christmas.”

**A family**

In Rice’s home, a moment of joy always occurs Christmas morning. The parents get up early and prepare for the day while the kids still sleep. They eat breakfast, have hot cocoa and prepare to open the presents under the tree.

“That’s just pure happiness and the kids are just kids,” Todd said.

The Rices strive not to give the label of “foster child” to any of their children. They allow the child to decide if they want to call themselves foster children, but the Rices simply consider them family.

“Those are our children,” Barb said. “We feel as deeply about them and their

extended families because they are a part of our family.”

In Todd’s job working with children at the Wyoming Boys School, he’s heard the stigma and preconceptions the boys who are going into foster care think about the system. They’re always surprised to hear Todd say he is a foster parent and that most foster families aren’t doing it because they are mean and only care about a paycheck.

“They’re people just like me and my wife,” Todd said. “The reason they are opening up their doors is because they care about kids and that is why they do it.”

Barb encourages others to share in the experience of being a foster parent. She considers the challenge of meeting and helping the children to be the true gift of the experience.

“If people find the willingness to be challenged they will come out the other side,” Barb said.