

KANSAS FOSTER FAMILY OF THE YEAR

TERRY AND NANCY MILLER



The youngest of the five Miller children graduated from high school in 2005, leaving Terry and Nancy with an empty nest at home and Nancy with an idea in her head.

"Before we had children of our own, I babysat for two foster boys," she said. "That was my first exposure to fostering, and I've wanted to do it ever since."

They had the house all to themselves for about three years. Then, Nancy figured it was time to get to it; she just needed to tell Terry. He had learned a long time ago that when Nancy decides to do something, it's best to go along peacefully.

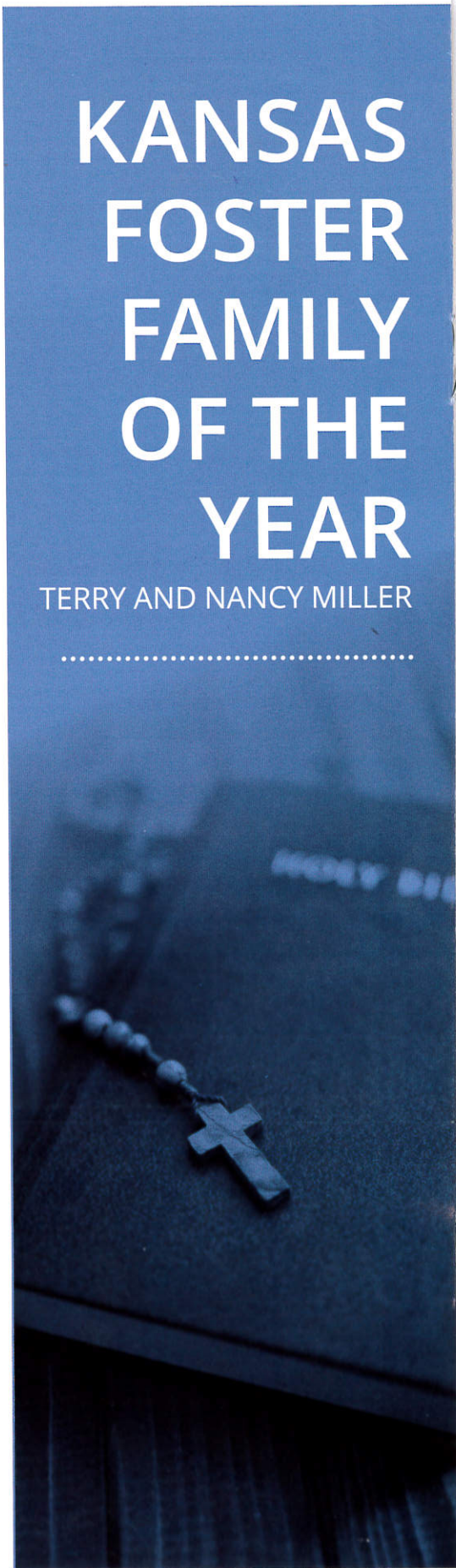
"We trust each other and go from there," he said. "Besides, this is in Nancy's heart."

They began by helping a local foster family with respite care. Eventually,

they licensed through Saint Francis Community Services and began providing regular foster care, mostly to teenaged boys and girls. Earlier this year, they were named the Saint Francis 2014 "Foster Family of the Year."

"I was born to do this," said Nancy. "And Terry agrees that this is valuable work and enjoys the boys. One of the boys recently asked Terry to help him with a woodworking project, so they're going to do that this summer. Together, we hope to provide the emotional, physical, and spiritual support that will help them become successful young men."

Currently, they foster four boys, ages 18, 16, 15, and 13. The eldest recently graduated from high school and is in the process of "aging out" of foster care. He's considering enlisting





in the Army, but has also talked about remaining in Bern, the tiny northeast Kansas town where he's lived with the Millers for 15 months. He works at the Bern Meat Plant, the family business purchased by Nancy's father in the 1960s, now owned and operated by Nancy and Terry.

"We've provided a car for him while he's been here," said Nancy. "He wants to buy it, and I told him he can work for us until it's paid for. He should be able to do that."

The arrangement is indicative of the way the Millers foster. They understand that the goal of foster care is to provide a temporary refuge, a secure place where kids can heal until they can safely return home. While they're with the Millers though, Terry and Nancy try to teach self-sufficiency, personal responsibility, and life skills that their foster children can use long after they've left Bern.

"They've helped foster children get driver's licenses, open bank accounts, and get jobs," said their Saint Francis worker Brynne Haverkamp. "They also spend a lot of one-on-one time with their teen placements, teaching

them independent living skills and anything else they need to know about how to be successful adults."

That concern extends beyond the initial placement, too. They still keep in touch with a former foster daughter through Facebook and even attended her wedding. And one of the first boys they fostered still visits them. Nancy maintains a good relationship with the boy's birth mother and often travels to Topeka to pick him up for the weekend.

"The willingness to take a stranger into your house and live with you can take some getting used to," said Terry. "You have to adapt. But, you're providing shelter, a safe place, and like Nancy says, a place to heal."

"You have to come around to deciding what's more important – people or things," said Nancy.

"It's fulfilling to make a difference in the life of a child who's had a bumpy start," she added. "Many of these kids are coming to us out of a 'war zone.' We who are blessed with everything we need should do whatever we can for them. I like to see them return home; that's the goal."

