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NorthRidge hosts 2012 Heart Gallery grand opening

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Visitors to NorthRidge Church on Saturday will be asked to open their hearts as the 2012 Michigan Heart Gallery makes its debut.

The Heart Gallery is a photographic display of portraits of children, usually over the age of 9, who are in Michigan's foster care system and waiting for adoptive families. The portraits are taken by professional photographers who volunteer their time, and are often done in settings picked by the children and that are reflective of their personalities.

The Heart Gallery, maintained by the Michigan Adoptive Resource Exchange in Ann Arbor, travels throughout the state each year to banks, libraries, theaters, churches and other public places. Saturday's event at NorthRidge's activity center will be both the debut

of this year's Heart Gallery and the first time the event has been launched from a Plymouth-area venue.

"I think what it does best is really just raise awareness about adoption," said Heidi Raubenolt, program manager at MARE, which is part of the Judson Center, a nonprofit human services agency.

This year's gallery features portraits of about 70 foster as well as some basic information about them. Portraits of three families that have adopted foster children in the past will

also be included, Raubenolt said.

Statewide, there are more than 300 children awaiting adoption through the state's foster system.

Maura Corrigan, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, will be the guest speaker, and photographer Linda Solomon will also speak.

Solomon was in charge of a recent project in which six foster children were given cameras and photography training, then asked to photograph things that captured their hearts. Their photos will be on display, and Solomon will speak about the project.

A youth in foster care is also scheduled to speak, and children portrayed in the Heart Gallery are invited to the event, Raubenolt said, although it's not always possible for them to attend. Lunch will also be



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Raubenolt said NorthRidge, which is based in Plymouth Township and has services there and at two satellite locations, is becoming more involved in helping children in the foster care system.

“We thought it was a great fit” for the Heart Gallery debut, she said.

The free grand opening of the 2012 Michigan Heart Gallery is 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at NorthRidge Church, 49555 North Territorial, west of Ridge, Plymouth Township. Register online for the event at www.mare.org.

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