

# The Capital

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## Costume party at the 'Palace'

Children from Light House Shelter attend Halloween bash at Governor's Mansion

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Standing in eager anticipation outside the Governor's Mansion yesterday, 6-year-old Blanca Campos showed off her Tinkerbell wings as she clutched a plastic pumpkin with Mickey Mouse ears.

In a matter of minutes, she would be set free in the mansion to eat cotton candy, popcorn, cookies, and an assortment of treats rarely seen outside of Neverland.

"I'm Tinkerbell. Tinkerbell can fly. I have wings," she said with glee as she jumped up and down on School Street with her two brothers. "I am Tinkerbell Tinkerbell Tinkerbell."

Dozens of area youths swarmed the mansion grounds yesterday for a Halloween party. While many of the party goers were friends of Governor Martin O'Malley's children, the first family this year extended the invitation this year to Blanca and 10 other children at the Light House shelter.

"We live in the richest state in the country and sometimes with all of our wealth the thousands of homeless families and children go unnoticed. It is really to the credit of Katie (the first lady)



Marilyn Baker, development director at the Light House shelter, gives 3-year-old Jayden a mustache Yesterday before he headed to a Halloween party at the Governor's Mansion. Jayden was one of 11 Past and present Light House shelter residents who attended the party.

and Governor O'Malley that they saw these children, invited them into their home and included them in their holiday celebration," said Marilyn Baker, development director at Light House.

The party was closed to the media, but Ms. Baker, other chaperones, and the kids themselves described a "very posh" event where children were given almost complete reign of the house for two hours to eat, play games, and compete in costume contests.

"The kids were just running everywhere," said Ms. Baker, who dressed up as the Easter Bunny for the event. "It was kind of bedlam, but kind of happy bedlam."

Amidst the chaos, a 10-year-old Gary Thomas dressed like Will Smith, a la Men in Black, introduced himself to Mr. O'Malley. Ms. Baker said he just walked up and put out his hand.

"Gary said, 'Mr. O'Malley, thank you for having me,' " she said. "Like it was totally normal."

Gary, who also visited the mansion last year with the Boys and Girls Club, said it was exciting to meet the governor.

"It was like he was the president. Like he was Barack Obama," he said. "This is the best time of my life."

Gary's 11-year-old sister, Raishell Williams, went to the party dressed as a witch and won the party's scariest costume contest. She also met the governor and even got a picture with him.

"I'm going to tell all of my friends," she said, eager to download the picture from the governor's Web site and show people at her school. "They don't believe I was going to the Governor's Mansion."

The party also was fun for the children's parents, who got to see their kids play among some of the mansion's finery.

"I enjoyed it so much. It was so nice to see them there," said Valerie, Raishell and Gary's mother. She said she came to the Light House shelter last year and they helped her find a job and a place to live.

"It's been hard the last year, but it's getting better," she said.

It is unclear how much the party cost, who paid for it or how many actually attended. Calls to the governor's spokesmen were not returned last night.

The mansion is a far cry from the shelter the children have called home for at least part of the past year. Many of the kids got dressed in small apartments on the second floor of the Light House's main building on West Street and Ms. Baker put makeup on them inside her cramped office.

Ms. Baker explained her office also serves as the children's playroom because there is nowhere else for them to run around.

"To be able to go into a mansion, it lets them know there are some beautiful places in the world," said Ms. Baker. "Hopefully they will now work for that."