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Family starts new chapter with cross-country move, homeschooling

This summer, the Hendrickson family packed up their life in Seattle and moved to Rochester to start homeschooling their two children, both of whom have unique needs.

Written By: Jordan Shearer | 9:59 am, Oct. 9, 2020



James gets a closer look as his mom Kristin tries to create a bubble filled with dry ice on Thursday, October 8, 2020, outside their home in Rochester. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

Three clocks hang on the dining room wall in the home of Brandon and Kristin Hendrickson. The clock on the left only has the hour hand. The clock on the right only has the minute hand. The clock in the middle appears normal, with both hands intact and working together.

Like many things in the family's Northwest Rochester home, the three clocks are a learning opportunity - a way to help break concepts down and study them in a new way. That's something the family has been doing a lot of in recent months since they started their new endeavor.



Brandon sits down with June for a quick science lesson on light as James works on math on Thursday, October 8, 2020, at their home in Rochester. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

This summer, the family packed up their life in Seattle and moved to Rochester in search of a new way of doing things. As two professional educators, the couple had a goal of homeschooling their two children James, 11, and June, 7.

"We'd always seen ourselves as homeschoolers," Brandon said.

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Brandon works with June to illustrate waves, and what happens as they collide, with a rope on Thursday, October 8, 2020, at their home in Rochester. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

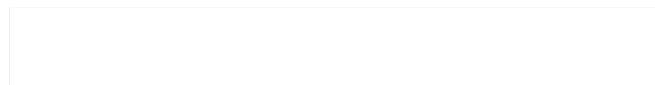
Things were difficult for the family in Seattle when it came to their children's education. Their son, James, is on the autism spectrum and has ADHD. Their daughter, June, also has ADHD. She's considered twice exceptional, which refers to gifted students who also have a disability. Neither of them did well in formal school environments.

That changed when the family started homeschooling.



1 / 4 James gets a closer look at the foam created with dry ice and soap on Thursday, October 8, 2020, outside their home in Rochester. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

"We were the family that got a lot of phone calls from the principal," Kristin said. "The stress levels are so much lower (now)."



Regardless of the pandemic, they decided to make the jump. Brandon and Kristin started looking at a number of locations in the Midwest that would be within driving distance of their hometowns, eventually deciding on Rochester. Kristin works as a teacher outside of the home. Brandon works remotely, providing classes online.

As far as their homeschooling goes, James and June have checklists of tasks they need to do every day. On a recent Saturday, June was at her tablet doing a geography quiz about the different states. They have math assignments, and reading. As teachers, however, Brandon and Kristin weren't worried about the curriculum aspect of the switch to homeschooling.



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as the blue paper tags they taped around the house. On the wall, on the ceiling, on the bookshelf. One tag has a hand drawn star on it with the caption "Polaris 5 p.m." Another tag has an orange circle on it with the caption 2 p.m., representing Mars.

Using a phone app, the family located the positions of the different stars and planets at different points throughout the day.

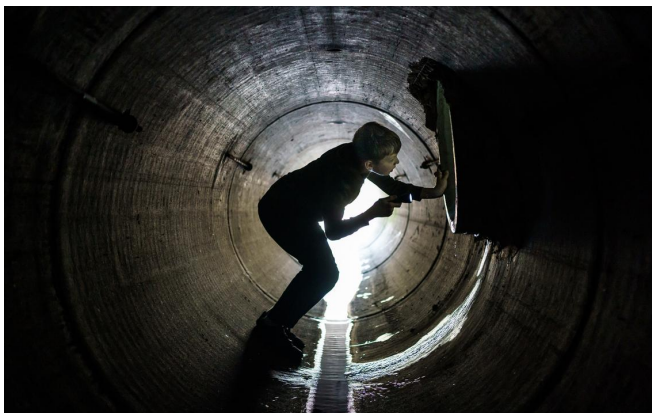
"We made the house into a planetarium," Brandon said, pointing to one of the tags. "That's where Mars was at 2 p.m. if you were standing right here."



James and June do an experiment with their mom Kristin using dry ice and soap on Thursday, October 8, 2020, outside their home in Rochester. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

The family constantly reaches for books to find lessons and information that don't fit on the walls. Every week, Brandon and Kristin pack two large bags of books from the library. Once they return home, they spread them around the house to catch their children's attention and interest. Once a month, on the 25th, they have "book Christmas" where James and June get to buy a book of their choice "no questions asked."

Brandon says they've essentially been able to accomplish three things by switching to homeschooling. They're teaching the core requirements but they're also opening up free time and allowing their children to follow their areas of interest.



James Hendrickson, 11, explores near the backyard of his home on Saturday, October 3, 2020, in Rochester. "For us play is a lot of the purpose of having them homeschooled. That they get to really enjoy, they get to really engage with something deeply, their imagination, exploration. There is a lot more learning that is going on in that. I trust the play that they do as a kid to be will be really good for them longterm," Brandon, James' dad said. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

Brandon and Kristin provide some technology, but they also try to make sure their children's curiosity is one of the things driving their education.

"We try to keep them bored ... like, kind of a low-grade bored, so that they're always finding new things," Brandon said.





James and June certainly take advantage of that. At times, they're exploring a tunnel near their home. Other times, they're up in a tree. James is mechanically inclined. Kristin says they eventually would love to find a fixer-upper just outside of town. It would be a home but it would also be one large, ongoing learning opportunity.

Whether or not they verbalize it in the same way, James and June recognize the same thing their parents do: that for them – for the needs of their specific family – it's best to do things a little differently.

"It only makes me make more noise and make more trouble inside if I can't get outside," June said.



1 / 2 June climbs a tree while playing with her brother James on Saturday, October 3, 2020, in Rochester. June typically spends 3 hours outside a day. (Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com)

In the calmer moments, the family takes the time to find learning opportunities.

Sometimes when they're watching TV, Brandon will press pause, and they'll talk about what's going to happen next. They talk about story structure and the fact that the protagonist will have to overcome some challenge.

The move to Rochester didn't solve everything for the family of four. They still have difficult moments. It's hard at times for Brandon to homeschool while still getting his own work done online. Plus, being only a few months in to their new journey, they still have things they want to try and do.

But, they've turned a new chapter and can already see the difference.

"We have more -- significantly more -- positive times than negative times," Brandon said. "And before, it was not that way."

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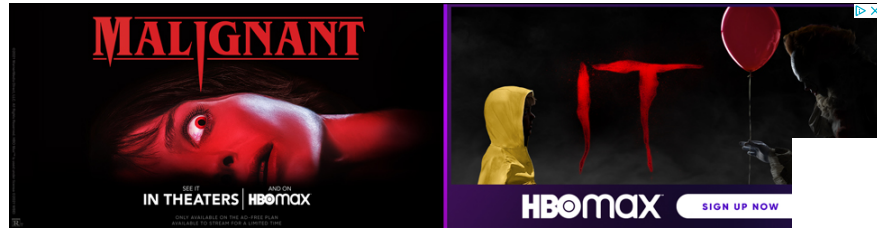
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