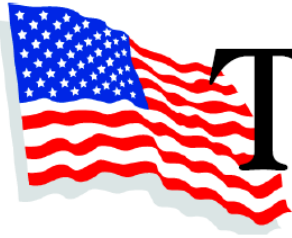


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CIRCLE OF LOVE — The Klobucher family of Iron River have adopted five special-needs children over the years to add to their family. The newest member of the family is 6-month-old Max. The circle consists of (proceeding counter-clockwise from bottom right) baby Max, Leah, Keenan, Ashley, Tyler, Olivia, Isaac, Vanessa and Jason. (Submitted Photo)

A loving home: Local family adopts 5 special-needs children

By SARA NEMEC
Staff Writer

IRON RIVER — When Robyn and Dave Klobucher first saw Keenan, he was slumped in a wheelchair in a state group home for the disabled. Doctors said he would never walk and subdued the 7-year-old with different medications, making him seem like a zombie. But the Klobuchers knew they could help Keenan, who suffers from Down syndrome. He would walk one day.

Now 9 and a part of the Klobucher family, Keenan walks normally and loves to swim in the family pool.

“He’d stay in there all day if we’d let him,” Robyn said.

But Keenan isn’t the only special-needs child the Klobuchers have taken into their home. Robyn and Dave have adopted a total

of five children, four of whom have Down syndrome. They also have three biological kids as well.

Down syndrome is a genetic disorder that causes lifelong cognitive disabilities, developmental delays and other problems, according to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. More than 400,000 people suffer from the condition in the United States, according to the National Down Syndrome Society.

Keenan was the youngest in the family until two weeks ago when Robyn and Dave brought home 6-month-old Max from New York. Max is thought to suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome, a condition that results from alcohol exposure during pregnancy. Problems that may be caused by fetal alcohol syndrome include physical deformities,

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FAMILY: Adopted children have helped to inspire biological ones

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cognitive disabilities, learning disorders, vision difficulties and behavioral problems, according to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research.

"We're just loving him," Robyn said of the small brown-eyed boy. "We think he's perfect."

The Klobuchers started extending their family in 1993 when they adopted Vanessa, who also has Down syndrome. At the time, Robyn was working for an organization that helped families meet the developmental and health-related needs of infants and toddlers who have delays or disabilities. Through her work, Robyn discovered she had an affinity for children with Down syndrome and soon after the family adopted the then-infant Vanessa.

Robyn and Dave said their children were very accepting of their new sister. Their oldest son Jason said, "We can't just leave her there without a family." So she became a part of theirs.

After Vanessa, Isaac was adopted in 1998 with Olivia coming eight months later. In October 2009, Keenan joined the family.

Though having eight children, five of whom have special needs, may seem like a handful, Robyn and Dave said their lives are pretty normal. Quiet even.

"We just love the kids and the joy that they bring to our lives, but we're pretty simple people," Robyn said.

All the special-needs Klobucher children attend school in the Maple School District, attending regular education classes with their peers. Even if some of the subject matter is advanced for them, they still thrive off of the structured setting



NEW ADDITION — Robyn Klobucher gives adopted son 6-month-old Max a bottle. The Klobuchers adopted Max two weeks ago from a family in New York. Max is thought to suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome. (Sara Nemeč/Staff Photo)

and social interaction, Robyn said. Now that it's summer, the kids enjoy picnics, swimming in the pool and family camping trips.

And the Klobuchers' adopted children have helped inspire their biological ones. Jason, 27, is a physical therapist. Ashley, 23, has a degree in speech therapy from the University of Minnesota-Duluth and is currently studying special education. She said her adopted brothers and sisters helped point the way to her future career. Tyler, 20, is a pre-med student at St. Scholastica in Duluth,

inspired to practice medicine for the love of science and to better help his family.

"It hasn't been any different than my normal," Tyler said about life with his special-needs siblings. "But most people identify with the disability and then the person. I don't do that."

In not looking past a person's disability, one can make unfair assumptions about what an individual is capable of, Tyler said. Instead, they should get to know the person to best see what they can accomplish.

And one shouldn't under-

estimate any of the Klobuchers. Olivia, 12, is non-verbal and is both autistic and has Down syndrome. But she has a successful business all the same. She raises and takes care of chickens and sells their eggs locally.

Isaac, 13, is an athlete, playing both baseball and basketball with his peers.

Vanessa, 17, was crowned Snow Queen by her classmates at Northwestern High School.

"I liked the crown," she said, adding that she was very excited to be chosen.

Vanessa will begin her senior year of high school this fall and will graduate in the spring with her peers. With her graduation looming, the Klobucher family is thinking about her future. After high school, Robyn and Dave hope to find a mentor for Vanessa to help her learn skills to do every day tasks independently.

At 21, they hope to move her into a new home they're planning to build on their property to help her achieve more independence and self-reliance. They said they plan to do the same with Isaac as well when he comes of age and hope to rent space in the home to other disabled people.

"It makes me feel better about the kids getting older," Robyn said, noting that cognitively disabled people are more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect. "I would hate to put them in a situation where they would feel unsafe. We value them just as much as our kids who aren't disabled."

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