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Home
Eastside
So. County
Business
Boeing News
Prep Sports
Sports
Opinion
Obituaries
Milestones
Living
Entertain.
Women's
Journal
Site Map
Search
Archive

World News
MoneyWire

Mytown
Classifieds

Traffic
Weather
Lotto
Crossword
Dilbert
Horoscope
Movies
Komo TV
TV Listings

Home
Delivery
Advertising
Jobs with Us
About Us
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Weighing colleges and careers, all at 12 years old

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by [Jon Savelle](#)

Journal Reporter

Like many young high school graduates, Andrew Hsu is thinking about college and an occupation.

The difference is, Andrew is 12 years old. And he's well into a multifaceted career as a scientist, filmmaker, author and director of a humanitarian foundation.

``When I grow up, I hope to be a medical researcher and doctor," he said during an interview at his Issaquah home.

Despite his age, Andrew already is within reach of those goals. Earlier this month he became the youngest person ever to win the grand prize in the Washington State Science and Engineering Fair, and will be the youngest contestant ever to enter the national Intel Science and Engineering Fair in Cleveland next month.

Slightly built, serious and poised, Andrew is articulate and quick to comprehend. In fact, he's always caught on fast.

His parents, David and Joyce Hsu, noticed by the time Andrew was 2 that he had an unusual appetite for learning.

At that age he built a Lego robot as big as he was. Later, school teachers had to provide him a room of his own just to accommodate the astonishing speed with which he mastered his curriculum.

Now Andrew spends part of each day studying at home, where he has breezed through the entire program offered by the University of Nebraska Independent Study High School.

He spends the remainder of his school day studying with Dr. Peter Byers of the University of Washington pathology department.

``When I don't go to the lab, I study during that time," Andrew said.

After school comes his swim team -- where Andrew has a network of friends his age and where he holds several records -- and then it's on to his other interests.

One of those is filmmaking, for which he uses a video camera, editing software



and the occasional helping hand from a parent.

The results look almost professional. Andrew made one film as an introduction to his state science fair project; it is complete with theme music, graphics, voice-over sequences showing him working in Byers' lab, and an interview with Byers himself.

The movie itself is a kind of short tutorial in genetics research, with the daunting title of "Identification, Characterization and DNA Sequencing of the Homo Sapiens and Mus Musculus COL20A1 Gene (Type XX Collagen) with Bioinformatics and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR)."

The movie shows Andrew working with laboratory tools he used to discover the human collagen gene.

That discovery earned him the state prize and will be his entry in the Intel fair as well.

"The next step is to identify a disease that's related to mutations in that collagen gene," he said.

Andrew's other movies are also documentaries. One is about the life of artist Pablo Picasso, and the other is about William Shakespeare.

"I'm also writing two books right now," he said. "One is 'Introduction to Genetics,' and the other is a book about children, analyzing the conditions of children" around the world.

The latter book is an outgrowth of his filmmaking interest, as is his establishment of the World Children's Organization.

A joint effort of Andrew and his 11-year-old brother, Patrick, the organization focuses on children's rights, education opportunities, clean air and water, and "an environment free of all forms of childhood exploitation."

Andrew is particularly concerned about conditions in Cambodia, India, Ethiopia, Nepal and Vietnam, which he has been studying through library and Internet research.

"In Ethiopia, only one quarter of the population has access to clean water and the illiteracy rate is 65 percent," he said.

Andrew's entrepreneurial and humanitarian spirit runs in the family -- Joyce Hsu established the Foundation of Language Education as a means to build schools in Third World countries. But with three children at home -- the youngest is Benjamin, 2 -- she had to set that idea aside and come up with another: "virtual schools," using videotaped English language lessons and books.

David Hsu is a computer science engineer. His company develops software for fast Internet engines.

Both parents know that Andrew's abilities will open the door to any university he chooses. Already he has received invitations to apply for scholarships. But how a 12-year-old would attend a faraway school is a problem the family hasn't solved.

"I really don't want to think about it," David Hsu said. "It's not a fact yet, so I'll try to postpone it."

"Academically, he's ready for college and I think he should go. Personally, I think the University of Washington is a very good environment. It has very good

facilities, there are a lot of scientists and he'll never run out of support.

`` But he likes Harvard too, so they're all good."

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GIFTED CHILDREN HOME SCHOOLING GENIUS KNOWLEDGE CONTESTS COMPETITION STUDY TEACHING PHOTO by Maxwell Balmain/Journal: David Hsu films his 12-year-old son Andrew as he describes his science project that won the grand prize in the Washington State Science and Engineering Fair. The footage will be included in an English DVD for overseas kids. David and Joyce Hsu, Andrew's mother, run a language education foundation.

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