

Stay-at-home father starts group for dads and kids

By Charity Prater

More and more dads are staying home with their young children while their wives head back into the workforce.

Eric Houghton is one of those dads. After moving to Portland from Boston last November, he decided that he wanted to stay home with his two-year-old son Nicolas while his wife worked.

"We both were working before we had Nicolas and making about the same amount of money," says Houghton. "We knew that one of us was going to stay home with him, and it just happened that I didn't particularly like my job."

Houghton (who, with his family, recently moved to North Portland from the Hollywood neighborhood) says their decision has worked out well and admits he even feels guilty that he has gotten what he considers the better end of the deal.

"I worked at a job where, in order to rise in the ranks, I would have to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, giving me less and less time to spend with Nicolas," says Houghton.

Other dads Houghton met were in similar situations, with young kids and wanting to find things to do during the day.

Eric Miller is a local stay-at-home dad who wanted to be a part of the group that Houghton was developing.

"He is doing it for all the right reasons," Miller says, "to build community, to provide a support network for other stay-at-home dads, to not just have playgroups together but to discuss parenting and other father-related issues that are unique to very involved fathers."

Miller chose to stay at home with his four-year-old son Liam and two-year-old son Kai when he and his wife Juliet moved to Portland three years ago. They moved here so Juliet could pursue her teaching career in a tenure-track position.

"I also wanted to take on the challenge of



Eric Houghton and his son Nicolas return from an outing on light rail.
– Photo by Erika Foia



Eric Houghton recently started a group for stay-at-home dads like himself. He and his son Nicolas enjoy outings, field trips, and educational events with other stay-at-home dads and their kids.

– Photo by Margie Apfelbaum

spending time with Liam and Kai, to play an active role in their development,” says Miller. “Being a public-health physical therapist, I am much more flexible in my ability to take time off and quickly be able to find a job, if the need arises. I feel very lucky to be in a situation where we, as a family, can do what we’re doing.”

In 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau reported an estimated 189,000 stay-at-home dads, and that number is growing.

“Being alone at home with young children is an isolating experience for both men and women,” says Houghton, “but men have a more difficult time finding resources to cope with the isolation.”

Houghton decided to start a Stay at Home Dad’s Group here in Portland to connect fathers and their kids with other dads in the community. He got the idea from Minnesota Dads At Home, which has more than 140 members. In the groups, members suggest outings to the zoo, museums, parks, parties or any other child-oriented events, and decide what events they want to attend.

“The group lets me know that there are other stay-at-home dads out there, so I’m not alone,” says Miller. “Fathers’ conversations are fundamentally different from when a mother is involved. This is hard to define or describe succinctly, but it makes me feel that my parenting style, which has some dramatic differences from my wife’s, is not only okay, but is good for my kids.”

Portland Dads At Home has more than 40 participants and is seeking additional members. To join, visit www.portlanddad.com and ask to be put on the email list.