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Arlington family of 12 has a lot to celebrate on Father's Day

By Andy Rathbun, Herald Writer

Father's Day honors fatherhood, and so today, the Kennedys have something to celebrate tenfold.

Patrick Kennedy, a father of 10, can be shy, but when it comes to his family, he is quick with a joke. Those come naturally, the result of hearing the same set-ups again and again.

Are all those kids his?

"That's what my wife tells me," he says.

Is he Roman Catholic?

Yes, but "The pope's not holding a gun to our head," he says.

When is he going to stop?

"When we get an ugly one," he says, adding that he hopes his youngest takes no offense.

The Arlington father, his wife, Kathleen Kennedy, and their 10 children offer a sharp contrast with the reality show broods that fill the tabloids. Yes, the Kennedys have 10 children ranging in age from 2 months old to 25 years, but no, they aren't interested in crafting a media empire.

For decades, Patrick Kennedy has supported his large family through his small business, Kennedy's Refinishing. He works 30 seconds from his front door on antiques in a wood shop, where he also makes the occasional crucifix as a hobby.

With his job so close, he can spend hours with his family each day.

His two eldest live in Everett, where they work for Boeing. The other eight live with their parents in a five-bedroom home.

The family shares a clear bond.

As Patrick tours his 11/3-acre property, three of his youngest tag along. The boys scatter as he discusses a koi pond the family built together. He starts to walk again, and his sons regroup, like ducklings, to follow.

Setting aside the noise in the talkative household, the Kennedys live a quiet life. They don't watch TV, and on Sundays, as members of the North American Martyrs parish, the entire family attends Latin Mass at St. Alphonsus Church in Seattle.

That family began after Patrick, now 50, met Kathleen, 46, at a Lynnwood roller rink in 1979. Both came from large families -- Patrick was the youngest of five, and Kathleen was one of 13. They quickly fell in love, married in 1982 and had their first child a year later. They wanted a large family, but didn't plan on having a huge one, the couple said, sitting in their living room.

"You came from a family of 13," Patrick said, turning to his wife, "but that was just weird."

Despite a wide range of ages, the family shares many common interests. They go to the occasional movie together, taking up a row of seats to watch "Up," and listen to much of the same music.

Granted, personal preferences can give rise to the odd dispute.

"The biggest argument," Bernadette Kennedy, 19, said, "is if country music is better than jazz."

"A tactful debate," Michael Kennedy, 17, added.

Kathleen home-schools the children, each named after a saint, while her husband acts as principal. It's easy work, he said. He believes in spankings, something his eldest children recall, but he can't remember the last time he disciplined someone.

"I think I'm getting lax," he said.

The family is several steps removed from the parents of multiple-birth litters that have grabbed headlines in recent months.

Unlike Nadya Suleman, aka Octomom, they aren't interested in being on TV. And unlike the stars of "Jon & Kate Plus Eight," the family appears free of slow-boiling tensions.

Granted, at least in one small way, they fit the role of reality TV stars.

"We're not living in the real world," Patrick said, smiling at the mention of his family. "I love it."

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