

BUILDING COMMUNITIES

BY BURIK

Mark Berton



Robinson resident is not alone in his love for Lego.

Jason Burik was bitten by the Lego bug as a child, making kits and replicas of his parents' house. Today, the Robinson Township resident and Montour School District administrator has turned his love of Legos into a successful side business that combines his passion for bricks and artistic expression.

"I went to college in Maryland while the Baltimore Ravens were constructing their stadium. I decided to make a Lego block replica of it. You can imagine the look I got from my roommates when I informed them I would be taking over the kitchen table so I could build a Lego model!" Burik said. "However, they were quite impressed once it was done. When I found out the Pirates were going to build PNC Park, I sent them pictures of my Ravens stadium. They had me come in to do a presentation, they liked it and asked me to build PNC Park out of Legos. That was my first commission."

Today, Burik gets requests for Lego replicas from companies and individuals all over the world, ranging from a condo project in Malaysia to Panorama Towers in Las Vegas. Some require more than 40,000 bricks to complete. All of Jason's work can be viewed on his website: www.burikmodeldesign.com.

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"For Lego as a hobby, it's really hard to have a generalization of what it is that attracts people and why. Some people build intricate spaceships. Others build complete and accurate buildings. They may have nothing in common, but they all have the same pieces. It's figuring out why you liked it as a kid and why you're coming back to it."

But given his level of Lego mastery, Burik discovered that he was not alone in this interlocking, multicolored world of plastic — he had the Steel City Lego Users Group, or LUG, supporting him and hundreds of others in their pursuit and passion of all things Lego. Burik said, "Josh Hall has done an amazing job getting the Steel City LUG up and running."

Formed in September 2012, the Steel City LUG is just one of more than 200 in North America, and hundreds more worldwide. One of the largest Lego communities, BrickLink, has about 250 million users across the globe buying, selling and trading in a market of over 130 million Lego pieces at any given time.

Hall, an IT manager for a large financial company, started the Steel City LUG after consulting with the Philadelphia-area LUG — Penn-LUG.

"They said people from Pittsburgh come over all the time and ask about their LUG, but no one else was doing it in the Pittsburgh area," he said. "So it formed that way. We have users

registered on the website and people who participate in varying degrees — from posting items on online forums to staffing events to sorting out parts for building. There are no rules on your level of ability."

The rise of the LUGs came about in the 1990s, when Lego released kits that resonated with kids of the Millennial generation, based around Star Wars. Kids liked the toys because of the movie tie-ins. It also released Mindstorms, a line of programmable Lego robots. By 2004, Lego had a new CEO who essentially opened the floodgates to fan participation, which helped grow Lego into the multimedia mega sensation it is today.

One of the more appealing aspects of Lego culture among LUGs is "My Own Creation," or MOCs. Branching off from the Lego architecture kits, MOC builders use different software



LEGO OR LEGOS?
 Lego bricks are synonymous with childhood. Whether you grew up rich, poor, in the city or in the country, you've come across Legos... or is that Lego? The answer to that question is one that's been a source of controversy for Lego brick builders the world over for years. If you ask the Lego company, they prefer "Lego bricks." In fact, at one time, if you tried to go to www.legos.com, you got a schooling on the proper use of the Lego trademark and brand name. If you go there today, you simply get redirected to www.lego.com. In the United States, "Legos" just sounds right, just as potatoes sounds right. But in Europe, Lego is akin to the plural of "moose," where you can have one Lego, or many Legos.



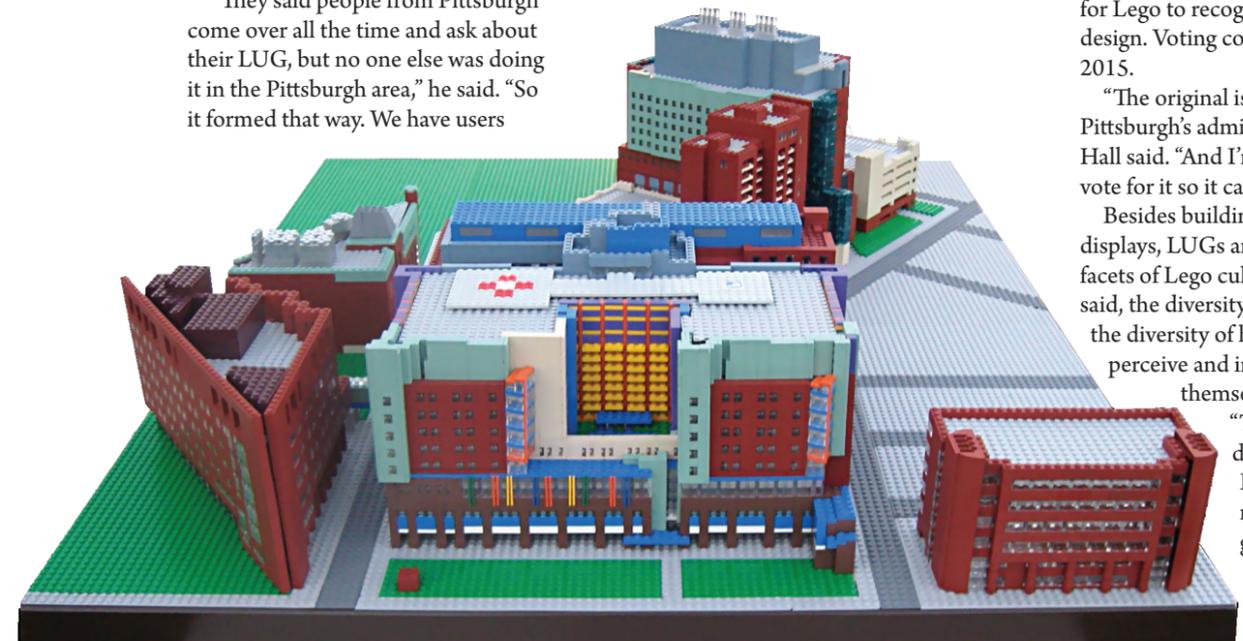
and methodology to create specific scenes, localized buildings, landmarks or anything else that's not offered in standard kits to scale. Once complete, their build may go on display in a public place, be part of a fundraiser for a charity or cause, or become an entrant for a future official Lego kit.

Hall currently has his model of the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning up on the Lego forums for the world to vote on. So far, he's garnered nearly 900 of the 10,000 votes needed for Lego to recognize and consider his design. Voting continues until May of 2015.

"The original is in the University of Pittsburgh's admissions office right now," Hall said. "And I'm hoping people will vote for it so it can become a set."

Besides building impressive public displays, LUGs are outlets for many facets of Lego culture. In fact, Hall said, the diversity of the LUG mirrors the diversity of how individuals perceive and interact with the bricks themselves.

"There are a lot of different areas. For Lego as a hobby, it's really hard to have a generalization of what it is that attracts people



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PROSPECTING FOR GOLD

With billions of Lego bricks in circulation, approximately 86 bricks for every person on Earth and 5.2 million produced every hour, it's hard for Lego enthusiasts to determine what exactly constitutes the "Holy Grail" of Lego products. However, there are one or two items that never fail to pique Lego collectors' interests worldwide – Mr. Gold, however, tops the list.

These Lego minifigures have achieved collectable status, representing characters from movies, people from everyday walks of life, and superheroes from the comics. But Mr. Gold stands out because only 5,000 were made as part of a May 2013 series, which like baseball cards, came in a sealed pack so collectors never knew which minifigure they would be getting. Mr. Gold is gold in color from head to toe and comes with a top hat and white gloved hands. Five of the Mr. Gold figures reside in the Pittsburgh area and belong to Steel City Lego Users Group members. Other valuable Lego minifigures include characters from the Ice Planet series and several Star Wars related characters.



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For Burik, creating 4-foot-tall scale buildings that take as long as four months to complete is not only a challenge, but a reward. It's also a teaching tool.

"There's such a high educational value to it, there's lots of math involved. It teaches about architecture," he said. "I love the fact that all three of my boys are into building Legos and even though she may not admit it, I think my wife actually enjoys building them as well!"

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For his Cathedral of Learning build, Hall not only used lots of pieces – just around 1,200 of them – he utilized a 3D model created by Google Maps and then scaled it back to 10 inches to fit the height requirement of the competition. Total cost – between \$200 and \$250. The documentation on the build spans 500 pages, but that doesn't dissuade people from building their own version.

"One guy gave it to his fiancée as a graduation present, and I was flattered that he thought it was worthy to give it to her," Hall said.

With the release of the Lego movie this year, and plans to continue their successful game console video games for years to come, there's no doubt that the popularity of Lego will continue to build. And like any popular trend, communities will always spring up to support it. For those who have been lifelong aficionados of all things Lego since childhood, the rise of the LUGs is better late than never.

VOTE!

If you would like to see the Cathedral of Learning become an official Lego kit, go vote for it online at: <https://ideas.lego.com/projects/43478>.



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