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## Adult Lego lovers just like kids again at conference

**By Elizabeth Fitzsimons**  
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CARLSBAD – They call it "coming out of the dark ages." It's a life moment, a time of reckoning, when they realize their love of Legos.

It happened to Dan Jassim when he went to the store for motor oil and saw a Lego helicopter set.

Ten years and several thousand Lego bricks later, he was at Legoland yesterday, part of a conference of adult Lego lovers and surrounded by 7-year-old boys gaping at his 15,000-piece space battleship.

Jassim, 29, of Lawndale, was one of about 130 people attending the second annual BricksWest convention, where Adult Fans of Lego, or AFOL, come from up and down the West Coast to show their work, trade building secrets and learn from the masters.

One lecture centered on building with SNOT. For those still in the dark ages, that means Studs Not on Top. (Studs are the little round nubs on the top of each brick.)

In fact, Lego fans have their own language of acronyms. BURPs are Big Ugly Rock Pieces, ungainly pieces of plastic used by advanced builders. FOTW stands for Find of the Week, which is when a Lego user finds a great deal on Legos and posts the discovery on a bulletin board online. LUG is a Lego User Group, clubs of like-minded Lego fans; several regional groups were represented at Legoland this weekend.

Jassim, who coordinates classes offered by the Culver City Parks and Recreation Department, said that when he's constructing a major piece he can be consumed by it, locking himself in his bedroom.

"I've always been a tinkerer and a daydreamer. This was a way of making daydreams and cartoons into something tangible," Jassim said. "Lego is a toy that renews. It's an art medium almost."

Steven Gullatt came from Lake Elsinore and carried a video camera. He marveled at the tiny Lego towns, complete with a movie theater and a Starbucks.

"I'm not a Lego maniac. I'm Lego mildly insane," said Gullatt, 48.

Gullatt, who works as a computer network administrator, has about 10,000 Lego pieces at home and mostly builds from kits. Like Jassim, Gullatt came out of the dark ages by accident about 10 years ago, happening upon Legos on a trip to Target.

"This is an addiction," Gullatt said. "It's limited only by your imagination and your time and money."

Mark Staffa, 27, a programmer from Las Vegas, built a model of the Las Vegas Strip for the convention and brought a prized possession – a Cinderella that he created for his ex-wife and won in the divorce settlement. It took him five months to build.

"I started at the neck and built the head and worked my way down," Staffa said. "It's probably the piece I'm most proud of."

One room in his two-bedroom apartment is devoted to Legos. He said he was up until 2 a.m. Friday, racing to finish his Las Vegas Strip.

"You lose all track of time," Staffa said.

A relative went into debt because of his Lego hobby, and is trying to recoup his losses by selling Legos on the Internet, Staffa added.

Dan Parker, 40, a Seattle resident and the creator of a giant Statue of Liberty on display yesterday at Legoland, left his engineering job to start a Lego-related business called TrainBuilder Productions LLC.

"If I can't build with Lego, I go stir-crazy," Parker said. "If I go on vacation, I take it with me."

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