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Wanted: Master Lego Model Builder By Daniel Terdiman

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If you've waited your whole life for your dream job, the time has come.

That's because LegoLand California is about to embark on a nationwide search for its newest master model builder.

Perhaps not since David O. Selznick scoured the country in 1937 looking for the perfect Scarlett O'Hara for *Gone With the Wind* has such a plum position been available to the public.

According to the official requirements, the "role of the master builder exists to offer design, build, repair and service functions to all models and animated features within LegoLand California and selected external locations."

Who are they kidding?

"You get to play with toys for a living," summed up LegoLand spokeswoman Stacey Slingerland. "It's the greatest job in the entire world."

Starting Oct. 30, LegoLand, located in Carlsbad, California, will kick off its search at the Art Institute of California -- San Diego. Applicants will be given 2,000 Legos and 45 minutes to impress a panel of judges. Those chosen for the second round will be notified within 24 hours and asked to come to San Diego in late January.

The whistle-stop tour then will hit Art Institutes in Washington, D.C.; Boston; Charlotte, North Carolina; Las Vegas; Phoenix; Los Angeles; and Orange County, California, over the next two and a half months.

Patrick DeMaria, a LegoLand master model builder, said the park currently has a total of six people doing his job, but needs a seventh.

So his team is on the hunt for a Lego nut with the 3-D modeling experience and inventiveness to turn a pile of bricks into a dead ringer for Carmen Miranda.

"The most important skills we're looking for are basically creativity," said DeMaria. "You can't teach imagination. You have to be a kid at heart. You can't take your work

too seriously if you're working with (Legos) all day."

And if you want the job, you'd better be able to turn a bunch of Legos into a perfect sphere.

"When they get to the second round, we do heavily use the sphere," said DeMaria. "It's such a great technique for seeing whether someone can take square bricks and make a circle out of it. If you can do that, you're well on your way to doing what we're trying to accomplish."

Dan Dement, a spokesperson for the Art Institute of California -- San Diego, said his school had developed a relationship with LegoLand a few years ago when some instructors trained LegoLand builders on designing objects in 3D Studio Max, a design program.

But now, many of the school's students are excited about the opportunity to try out for such a high-profile gig.

"A lot of students are eyeing that job," Dement said. "Our students are studying media arts and animation, video-game art and design. Some (of them want to see) if they can build with Legos what they've been building with 3D Studio Max."

DeMaria agreed that the Art Institutes are a good place to start the master builder search, given the innate artistic skills he and his team are hoping to find in a successful candidate.

"What better place to search for artists than at an art college?" he said.

Another good source will be the formidable Lego community. That community, which hosts many online user groups, already is abuzz with talk about the nationwide hunt.

Russell Clark, co-founder of BayLUG, said he's been playing with Legos for 18 years and thinks his experience building things, like a replica of San Francisco's famous Coit Tower, has prepared him for the master builder auditions.

He allows that he may not be the most skilled Lego builder in the world, but he's letting himself dream.

"I'd just be tickled pink," he said of how he would feel if he won the competition. "I'd probably be in heaven. My mom would be very proud of me. She told me I should just apply to see how far I could get."

In a posting on LUGNet, lifelong Lego enthusiast Aaron Sneary talked of his excitement at the chance to try out for master builder.

"Some kids dreamed of being an astronaut, or doctors, or professional athletes," he

wrote. "Some kids reached out and worked for those dreams. I've been building and playing and watching and learning in hopes of getting an opportunity. Finally, that opportunity is here."

Sneary said it has been his dream to be a Lego master builder since he was a kid.

"As a child, I wrote (Lego) a letter and asked them what are the requirements for the job," the 24-year-old said.

Now, Sneary is gearing up for his shot at showing off his stuff. Like Clark, he admits that he may not be the very best Lego builder, but thinks he has some intangibles others lack.

"Some people out there are better builders than I am," he said, "although most of them build in a very adult style. I've always tried to keep a bit more of the childlike fun and whimsy in the things I build."

And Sneary may be right. DeMaria and his fellow judges surely will see some amazing talent. But in the end, the Lego search is likely to come down to passion for Legos.

"To most of the people here, it's more than a job," said DeMaria of the community of master builders. "They have a love of building with bricks, and they have a love of Legos. They're pushing their own limits and seeing how creative they can be."



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