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Santa Ynez Valley Star

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FOR A WEEKEND, SOLVANG BECOMES LEGOLAND

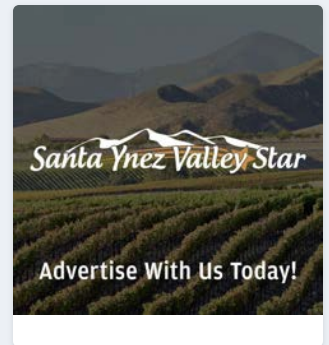
Posted by Michael Chaldy | Apr 15, 2025 | Community |

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INAUGURAL BRICKS & BUILDS EVENT CELEBRATES CREATIVITY AND CONNECTIONS INVOLVING FAMED DANISH PRODUCT

The City of Solvang was awash in multi-colored plastic bricks on the weekend of April 5-6 as Solvang Park, the Solvang Veterans Hall, and a few other locations



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hosted the inaugural Bricks & Builds event, celebrating all things Lego.



Solvang, known for its deep Danish roots, was an appropriate site for the event, as the Lego company was started in the workshop of Ole Kirk Christiansen, a carpenter from Billund, Denmark, who began making wooden toys in 1932. Two years later, his company came to be called “Lego”, derived from the Danish phrase “leg godt,” which means “play well”. In 1947, Lego expanded to begin producing plastic toys, and soon created the interlocking blocks we all know so well. The company is still based in Billund.

The Lego craze has resulted not only in countless playset and products, but conventions and expos all over the country where Lego builders and fans gather to build and meet up with others who share the passion.



John Cooper of San Diego explains his building process to the crowd while showing his Lego work based on Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling,” during the Bricks and Builds event in Solvang on April 6. Cooper’s build won the public vote in the town-wide competition. Photo by Mike Chaldu/SYVS

However, such events have been few and far between in California, something that Bricks & Builds organizer Allyson Gail wanted to rectify.

"I really wanted to get something going here, because we haven't had any Lego event in California after the Bricks LA event stopped a couple years ago," said Gail, who was on the reality show "Lego Masters" and actually helped organize a similar Lego event in Solvang in 2022. "I just wanted to give somewhere for the Lego builders to go to. We have people from the Bay Area down to San Diego, and from Long Beach, Orange County and LA."

Gail pointed out the different things going on with the event.

"We have all the builds displayed here, we have vendors in the other room selling Lego stuff," she said. "We have our town-wide building competition, where we have builders at different locations putting together a build based on a Hans Christian Andersen story, to give it a connection to Solvang."

One of those builders, John Cooper of San Diego, was set up at Solvang Park, near a public "brick pit" where kids and their parents could build things out of random Lego pieces, various vendors, and a live band playing at the gazebo.

"I guess I'm just a hardcore fan of these," said Cooper, who was assigned "The Ugly Duckling" for his Andersen work. "I used to do monthly competitions at Legoland [in Carlsbad] with both my daughters."

One of Cooper's daughters, Juliana, accompanied him at the table, and said she's dabbled in Legos herself.

"My dad and I will do some mass-market kits," she said. "And we enjoy doing the architectural models that they have."



Tim Heinderich from Los Angeles makes progress on his Lego work based on the Hans Christian Andersen story "The Emperor's New Clothes" on April 5 next to peasant's FEAST restaurant in Solvang.

The time was well spent for John Cooper as he took his completed work to the Veterans Hall on Sunday and won the popular vote over the other town-wide contestants.

Visitors to the Veterans Hall on Saturday and Sunday got to take a look at a number of finished Lego projects, as well as talks with a number of Lego Master Builders, and those who run the Lego community website, Bricklink, a website that has products for sale, but also a designer program where you can design a build online and even enter a contest where one's design can be picked as a set to be marketed and sold.

"Bricklink is a very fan-centric portion of the Lego community," said Alex Kastelic, who is the Bricklink Designer Program Lead at Lego. "We are the community space for the most passionate Lego fans, and we pretty much cover the whole world."

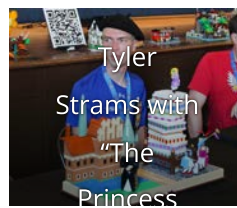
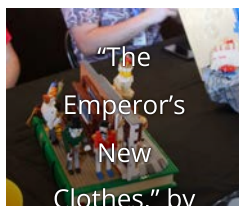
Like many adult Lego enthusiasts, Kastelic can go back to his childhood as his start at building with the plastic blocks. Also like many, there was a period where his building waned, but the interest came back.

"I got interested in other things as I got older, but then I got back into right before COVID," he said. "It was in 2019 and it was the 20th anniversary of the Star Wars sets, which were the last ones I had as a kid. When they brought them back, it was nostalgia for me; I started doing those and never looked back. And now I'm working for the company."

Many attendees expressed their gratitude that the Bricks & Builds event has happened in Solvang, among them Jesse Gros of Venice Beach, who won the Lego building contest at Solvang's Danish Days last September.

"I love it; it's my favorite new Lego event," said Gros, who won the category for space/steampunk creations. "We haven't had any events in California for a while, and it's good not to have to travel so far."

At the end of the event on Sunday, the winners for the various categories:



Town-wide Lego Build: John Cooper (The Ugly Duckling). Also entered (with each basing his work on a Hans Christian Anderson story): Riley Blissmer (The Snow Queen), Tim Heinderich (The Emperor's New Clothes),

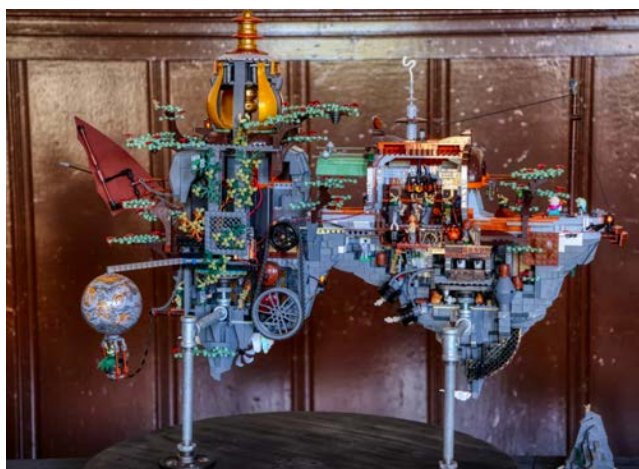
Conard Scoley (The Little Mermaid), and Tyler Strampp (Princess and the Pea).

Best Solvang-themed build: Lia Von Damm (Solvang stamp and others)



Solvang Postage Stamp by Lia von Damm. Photo courtesy of SolvangUSA.com

Best Space/Steampunk build: Jesse Gros (The "Aetherhive" from Magic: The Gathering)



The Aetherhive by Jesse Gros. Photo courtesy of SolvangUSA.com

Art/Pop Culture build: Nino Guba (Ghostbusters RTV)

Best Lego City/Train build: Bruce Heller (Brentwood
Sunshine Preschool)



Brentwood Sunshine Preschool
by Bruce Heller. Photo courtesy
of SolvangUSA.com

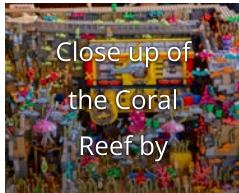
Best Castle/Fantasy build: "Shy" (Original castle/battle
scene)



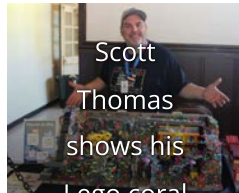
Castle Battle by "Shy." Photo courtesy of Solvang USA

Public vote winner for inside the Veterans Hall expo:

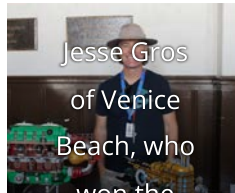
Scott Thomas (coral reef)



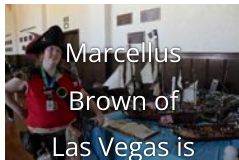
Close up of
the Coral
Reef by



Scott
Thomas
shows his
large coral



Jesse Gros
of Venice
Beach, who
won the



Marcellus
Brown of
Las Vegas is



Builders of
all ages got
to create



John
Cooper of
San Diego

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