



East Bay's Lego master returning with new exhibit

By Jason Sweeney
The Oakland Tribune

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SAN LEANDRO — Children will soon once again walk around the Lego landscapes and skylines created by Johannes van Galen and his friends from the Bay Area Lego Users Group.

Beginning Friday and running through July 25, van Galen will showcase his large Lego exhibit at the Bay Area Family Church, 2305 Washington Ave., where he staged exhibits the past two summers.

Initially, van Galen was unsure if he would return this year because of the amount of work previous shows have involved, but he is back by popular demand, he said.

Parents had asked if the show would be returning, and one even sent him a letter, he explained.

"My children were absolutely enthralled with what you have built, and we could have spent all day there," the parent wrote, adding, "It was probably the high point of our summer."

This year's display will take over an upstairs room at the church. Lego ships will sail Lego seas, Lego trains will chug through Lego mountains and across Lego cities as Lego helicopters fly overhead.

Van Galen, 38, started collecting and building with Lego blocks as a boy growing up in the Netherlands. In 1994, he moved to the United States to study automotive engineering in the East Bay.

Today, the Hayward resident is a general contractor who shares his passion for Legos with his young children and fellow user group members.

Two years ago, he decided to display his creations for the public at a free show. The event

was so popular that he expanded it last year, with the addition of several displays from other group members. He also added a \$1 entry fee for ages 5 and up. That show attracted about 300 people a day.

This year, the price has gone up to \$3 for children ages 3 to 15, and \$5 for ages 16 and up.

The 800-square-foot exhibit will feature a Lego city, a medieval display, a Star Wars display, robotics and more, plus a Lego play area.

"There's going to be some changes, new buildings, some new stuff," van Galen said.

Setting up the display takes two weeks and a lot of preparation and organizing, he said.

"It's fun. Otherwise I wouldn't do it, right?"

Just don't expect his Legos back in San Leandro next summer. Van Galen's display already is booked for a National Model Railroad Association show in Sacramento.

Will it return to San Leandro again?

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"Who knows?" he said. "You never know. We'll see."

Jason Sweeney covers San Leandro. Contact him at 510-293-2469.

if you go

- **what: Exhibit of creations by members of the Bay Area Lego Users Group**
- **Where: Bay Area Family Church, 2305 Washington Ave., San Leandro**
- **When: Friday through July 25. 10 a.m. -4 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays; 1-4 p.m. Sundays (closed Mondays, Tuesdays)**
- **Admission: Free for children under 3; \$3 for ages 3 to 15; \$5 for ages 16 and older. Cash only.**
- **NOte: No strollers in the exhibit hall.**

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