

The Lego Brickshow of Johannes Van Galne at the Bay Area Family Church

Rebecca Parr
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Johannes van Galen of Hayward, Calif. poses with some of his LEGO block creations, Tuesday, June 23, 2015, at Bay Area Family Church in San Leandro, Calif. Van Galen's works will be on public display at the church for the next six weekends. (D. Ross Cameron/Bay Area News Group)

SAN LEANDRO -- In a room at the back of a church, Medieval knights battle, helicopters fly overhead, trains whiz by and Old West gunslingers shoot it out, all part of Johannes van Galen's miniature universe of cities, kingdoms and settings real and imagined.



The father of three is sharing his fantasy worlds made of Legos, displaying his creations through Aug. 2 at Bay Area Family Church, where he is a member.

"The church likes it; I like it. It's fun," he said of the detail-rich panoramas that take up much of the space in a second-floor room used for church lunches the rest of year.

His favorite scene is also his newest addition: a Medieval castle scene that covers a 5-by-20-foot area.

"I've seen Game of Thrones," the Hayward resident said, smiling.

Inside the castle walls, the queen bids the king farewell as townspeople tend animals, push carts and go about village life. Outside, more than 500 warriors battle, with some soldiers and even skeletons lying on the ground. After three years of planning, van Galen started building the castle last year, using drawings from a book as a guide.

Van Galen played with Legos as a boy growing up in Holland, but put his colorful plastic bricks away when he was about 16. When his son turned 6, the father returned to

his childhood hobby -- in a big way.

He retrieved his childhood Lego collection that had been stashed at his sister's home in Holland. He has been adding to it over the past 10 years, building some models from kits and giving his imagination free rein to create whimsical scenarios.



The meticulously crafted vignettes throughout the exhibit show van Galen's eye for detail. On the side of a steep ravine, rescuers rappel down a cliff to rescue a driver from an overturned car. A helicopter hovers overhead, waiting to lift the injured motorist.



A fair scenario includes a replica of California Hall, a nod to the Alameda County Fair. Lego people line up at a food stand, with others twirling on midway rides, including a fast-moving spinning one.

"I call that the throw-up ride," van Galen said.

The 43-year-old also has sneaked in some surprises. In one setting, a family takes in a scenic outdoor view near their camper, but a second glance reveals a bear sneaking behind them, about to steal food.

A train goes by; on one of the cars, Indiana Jones fights off snakes.

In a scene out of the Old West, a gunslinger's hat comes off during a shootout, with a bullet going astray and hitting a bystander.

A zoo contains bears, ostriches, camels, elephants -- and Bambi.

"You make it a little fun," van Galen said.

Van Galen started displaying his creations in 2006, first at a daughter's birthday party,

later going public with exhibits at the church. He stopped doing annual shows there as the exhibit size grew; this will his first since 2012, although he has done smaller exhibits for the Bricks by the Bay show

in Santa Clara.

Past shows have drawn thousands to the church, sometimes with people lined up waiting to get in, said the Rev. Kevin Thompson, church pastor.

"Our neighbors refer to us as the Lego church," he said, laughing. "The main purpose is to give parents and grandparents a place to take their kids in the summer. They are just happy to get their kids away from TVs and computers," the minister said.

Van Galen has worked about two months on the exhibit, spending three to four hours every day for the past month assembling the Legos in sections before moving them to the church.

He is not sure how many Legos pieces he has accumulated or how much his collection is worth.

"It's a lot of investment, but it's a hobby that's worth it," he said.

When not on display, the Legos are carefully stored in 100-plus labeled boxes.

Why the fascination, some may even say obsession, with Legos?

"You can take it apart and create something new if you like," he said. "If you drop it, you can put it back together."

He is not alone in his passion. Van Galen is a member of Bay Area Lego Users Group, which has about 200 families, with about 30 to 40 people meeting monthly. Some group members also will display Lego creations at the show, including replicas of paintings and World War II battleships. But most of the vignettes and models are the work of van Galen.

Lego Brickshow 2015 When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, noon-5 p.m. Sundays, through Aug. 2

Where: Second floor, Bay Area Family Church, 2305 Washington Ave., San Leandro

Admission: \$4 for ages 3 and older, free for those younger than 3. Tickets available through <http://playbuildingbricks.com> or cash only at the door