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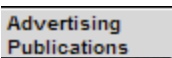
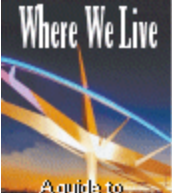
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LEGO lovers find a plastic paradise

BY CAROLYN NORTON : The Herald-Sun
cnorton@heraldsun.com
Feb 26, 2005 : 7:07 pm ET

CHAPEL HILL -- Eight-year-old Garret Pearce has a lot of LEGOs at home.

No, that's an understatement. Garrett says he has about two million.

"That's my estimate," the Chapel Hill boy said. "I have two big boxes. I like trying to put them together in different colors."

Needless to say, Garrett was in heaven Saturday afternoon at LEGO-palooza at Morehead Planetarium and Science Center. The event featured hundreds of models built by LEGO building block aficionados from across the country, plus tables with pieces strewn across them for visitors to use in their own creations.

"It's really, really neat," said organizer Joe Meno, a leader of the N.C. LEGO Users Group. "It's neat seeing the different types of creativity happen."

On a table displaying models made by children, a green fish and yellow chick sat side by side. Next to them was a polar bear, perched on a plane with propellers and wheels. More traditional LEGO constructions, such as planes and ships, lay next to a grasshopper. One child made a plane-like object mysteriously named "Strike."

Garrett made a brontosaurus, while his sister, 6-year-old Hunter, made a windmill.

"I like dinosaurs," Garrett said. "One of my favorites is the brontosaurus. I like that it has such a long neck and tail."

Zachary McElhaney, 7, wasn't sure what he was making, although the blue, green and yellow object had wings.

"I don't have a name for it," said Zachary, who attended LEGO-palooza with his



The Herald-Sun/Kevin Seifert
An astronaut made from LEGO blocks is shown on display on Saturday, Feb. 26, during the LEGO-palooza event held at Morehead Planetarium's Banquet Hall.



The Herald-Sun/Kevin Seifert
Twin's Elise and Max Moses, both 3 and from Efland, do a doubletake as a LEGO monorail motorized vehicle makes its way around the track during LEGO-palooza.



The Herald-Sun/Kevin Seifert
John Inness, 9, of Cary looks at a Naboo N-1 Starfighter Star Wars Lego kit.

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grandfather. "It's sort of a spaceship."

Builders recruited by the users' group displayed their more intricate models around the room. A moving train looped several space stations, one with windows showing people inside. Another table showcased various white planes. One man showed a group of kids and parents his kinetic model, a series of working pulleys, ramps and gears. Miniature basketballs and soccer balls slid down ramps through various obstacles.

Children could even enter their models into a "Best in Show" competition.

Although directions for making various models lay on the tables, few children used them. Nicholas Andres built "a war thing with lasers."

"You'll see, this is a laser that shoots out power that drains the enemy's power," the 9-year-old said, pointing to a green gun barrel on the end of his spacecraft. "It can go up to 100 miles per hour."

LEGO-palooza was an extension of Morehead's LEGO laboratory, an event offered each weekend at the planetarium.

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