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EDUCATION

My Tucson: Learning a snap at LEGO club

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November 03, 2008, 3:45 p.m.

JULIA V. GOUSSEVA
Tucson Citizen

A few weeks ago, my 8-year-old son sat on the floor building cars out of colorful LEGOs, plastic snap-together blocks.

"I wonder which car will go faster," he said and pushed two cars down a ramp. "Will it be the bigger one? The one with larger wheels? The heavier one?"

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He experimented with different designs, checking the speed of his cars every time he made a change. Then he put a sign on his door, "LEGO club."
 "If only there was a real LEGO club in Tucson," he said. "Wouldn't it be fun to build models with other kids? Together?"
 I did an Internet search. "There is a LEGO Club! Meetings are on Sundays at Ward VI District Office. It's open to all ages and skill levels."

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City Councilwoman Nina J. Trasoff says she is delighted that her ward hosts the club.

"These youngsters spend many Sundays working together . . . and while it is fun, it's not just games! They're mastering computer skills, math, physics and more as they program the fanciful vehicles they construct," Trasoff says. "It's amazing to watch them run their creation through its paces, collaborating with other young people and their advisers to figure out how to make the vehicle run the course flawlessly."

That Sunday, my son and I went to a meeting of The LORD of the LEGO Group, a junior division of the Tucson LEGO Club.

"First, build anything you want," Mikhail Chernobelskiy, associate director of the local club, told a dozen kids seated around a table filled with LEGO pieces.

"When your project is complete, you will take turns describing it to us. Then parents and kids will vote on the best creation and the best presentation. Whoever gets the most votes will get a prize."

While my son constructed his model, I peeked into the room where advanced LEGO Masters teams were preparing for the annual First LEGO League competition to build and program a robot, and present a solution for a given challenge.

This year, the challenge involves working on a climate problem, anything from global warming to shortage of the desert's water to snow removal difficulties in New Hampshire.

The regional competition will take place here in December; the state competition will follow in Phoenix. Both events are free and open to the public.

The local LEGO Club - created in 2002 and supported by the Midtown Neighborhood Association, Howard Ward and Ward VI - is the only known community LEGO club in Arizona.

"The LEGO Club is one small part of a larger fabric of community opportunities available to help kids explore and achieve their creative potential," says Ward, owner of TerraSystems Southwest Inc., a Geographic Information System consulting firm.

"With the present-day concern about failing education systems and a looming lack of global competitiveness, thousands of small volunteer programs like the LEGO Club can help fill in the gaps in kids' education, give structure and adult guidance to developing personalities and, most of all, provide kids with some fun!"

I watched the kids work with their robots, then went back to see my son and his friends finish their creations.

"They play so well together," another mother said.

Playing well is exactly what LEGO Co. intended. The word lego comes from two Dutch words, leg and godt; it means "play well."

Later, the company creators discovered that the word lego, translated from Latin, means "I study" or "I read." And what can be better than studying that happens unintentionally, while playing?

Julia V. Gousseva, a native Russian, has lived in Tucson since 1993.

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“Playing well is exactly what LEGO Co. intended. The word lego comes from two Dutch words, leg and godt; it means 'play well.'”

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Children put it all together at a LEGO Club meeting at City Council Ward 6 office, 3202 E. First St.

MORE INFO

To learn more about the Tucson LEGO Club, go to www.tlclub.org.

MORE BY JULIA V. GOUSSEVA

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