

<http://milpitas.patch.com/articles/legos-as-building-blocks-for-young-minds> [10 pictures posted online; 6 included here; couldn't access the other 4]

Newark Patch picked up the Milpitas Patch story: <http://newark.patch.com/articles/more-than-just-your-average-legos-the-great-spaceship-crash-teaches-engineering-skills> [May 3, 2011]

Lego FUNgineering Class and Camp for Kids in Milpitas

LEGOs are building blocks for young minds in this class offered at the Milpitas Community Center.

By My Nguyen April 25, 2011

3, 2, 1, blast off!

Colorful spaceships made of LEGOs are launched into the sky. Suddenly gravity takes a toll and they start heading back to earth. Some hit the ground completely intact, while others shatter into pieces.

"I need to make a better spaceship," 9-year-old Jacob Hannigan says as he puts the pieces of his spaceship together, making sure the pieces aren't loose, which he explains why the aircraft had a rough landing.

Hannigan is one of many students enrolled in the LEGO FUNgineering classes held by Renaissance Tots, an educational program whose mission is increase the development of children's creativity and imagination.

The objective of the LEGOs class for kids 5 to 9 years-old, held at the Milpitas Community Center, is to introduce basic engineering principles to young children, said founder David Wang.

"In addition to the engineering principles aspect of the LEGO FUNgineering classes, my personal objective is to make sure each child has at least one moment of true inspiration in each class," he said.

Hannigan said the class has inspired him to be an architect when he's older.

"It's fun and you learn how to build things, so when you grow up, it's easier," he said.

Each class session starts with an assignment. The kids then start working on their assignment. After they are done building, the students must pass different tests, or objectives.

"After we assign each project, we purposely hold back for a little while to let each child ponder how she or he will solve the assignment," Wang said. "We want to see the gears turn in their brains on their own for at least a little while.

For each project each child should "get it" at some point, and that "eureka" moment is what we truly want for each child — a sense of discovery and accomplishment."

Lawrence Seeberger, 8, said he loves going to class because he enjoys building things.

"I like building houses, cars, things like that," he said. "And with LEGOs, you get to build anything you want."

Wang started Renaissance Tots in 2003, which he modeled after similar businesses in San Francisco.

"My original aim was to offer music, art and dance classes to young children," he said.

Renaissance Tots also offers additional classes including Kindermusik classes, which focuses on the important role music plays in early childhood development as well as SAT prep classes. The newest class to be added to the mix is the Quiz Bowl Prep class, which will launch in Milpitas this summer and aims to bring out the fun in learning while improving performance on college prep tests.

"It truly makes my day when I see each child's face light-up when she/he comes up with an idea to solve each problem," Wang said. "We try to be very supportive of the kids' efforts."

The next LEGO FUNgineering class starts May 6 - June 3 at the Milpitas Community Center. Summer camp will also be held at the Milpitas Community Center from June 20 – 24.



Lawrence Seeberger starts on his spaceship. Credit My Nguyen



One of the students put his spaceship through the "blast off" test, where the spaceship is thrown into the air. Credit My Nguyen



Lawrence Seeberger puts final touches to his spaceship. Credit My Nguyen



David Wang and his assistant talks to the students to see where the progress is with their assignment. Credit My Nguyen



Gianna Ciardella is the only girl in the Lego class, but she said she loves playing with Legos. Credit My Nguyen



Son-Ly Nguyen builds a spaceship out of blue and red Legos, complete with a pilot. Credit My Nguyen