

Parent Pages

After-School Club Helps Build Fun And Learning

(NAPSA)—Many children benefited when one young mother had a bright idea.

Katherine Heiberger was inspired as she and her children, Brian and Kelly, played with her father's beloved collection of Lego bricks. As she sat on the floor with her children, Katherine came up with the idea to start a club for Brian's kindergarten class. The club would let her share the collection her father amassed during his lifetime, but also use the bricks in a way that was both educational and social.

Each time the club meets, parents and kids together explore a new theme, such as "things that fly" or "buildings." There's a "show-and-tell" element, during which members exhibit and explain their creations.

These sessions can bring parents and children together in play, something Heiberger feels is sometimes lacking in today's families.

"We all have time constraints, but parents should feel empowered to prioritize structured play time for children," she says. "The club is a great way for us to have regular play time with our kids, and the beauty of it is that they're having too much fun to realize they're learning something."

Heiberger and the other parents value the club because they know children learn through engaging their imaginations. Construction toys offer opportunities for open-ended creative play where boys and girls build anything they imagine, explore their world and gain skills for the future. "Not only do the kids build, they are encouraged to listen, read and follow



Some toys can be enjoyed for generations.

instructions, and they benefit from exposure to the ideas and play techniques of others, which helps them learn other valuable skills like sharing, taking turns and patience," she says.

While watching club parents and kids build together, Heiberger fondly remembers her father. In 1968, Dr. Charles Brenner, an electrical engineer, returned from a trip to Germany with a Lego set for Heiberger and her brother. As she grew up, Heiberger's father continued to collect bricks for them, ranging from early house sets to more elaborate pirate ships and spacecraft. The bricks became a connection for three generations of her family.

"I can't think of a better contribution to the future than that which involves children in healthy, creative play," she says.

For other parents who may want to start a club or simply share a creative activity with their child, here are a few exam-

ples of fun ways to get kids using their imaginations.

- **Number Triangles**—Ask children to explain what a triangle is. If they're clear on the concept, hand them a pile of Lego bricks and challenge them to build a triangle. Next, challenge them to make rectangles or circles.

- **Secret Sculptures**—Divide children into teams if possible. Provide each group with the same size and color of nine different Lego bricks. Take the same pieces for yourself and construct a small sculpture while keeping it hidden from the children. Show the children your sculpture for five or ten seconds before having them build a copy. If necessary, show your sculpture for another five seconds. End by comparing all the sculptures.

- **Mirroring**—Divide children into teams if possible. Create a flat pattern using four Lego bricks of the same color. Now, choose an edge to use as a line of symmetry and have the children build your pattern's mirror image in a different color. To make the game more challenging, perform the same activity with a three-dimensional model.

Heiberger's club was honored in a Good Housekeeping contest. To learn more about the club and other fun ways to build and play with children, visit www.lego.com/parents.

For details on a new contest to find the Builders of Tomorrow—children who are curious, creative, imaginative and, as a result, best equipped to grow into successful, well-rounded adults—visit www.ghseal.com.