

# The new LEGO® Ambassador Network

By HispaBrick Magazine®  
Picture by Keith David Severson

*In June we had the opportunity to speak with Keith David Severson, Senior Manager of the CEE Team, on the new ambassador program that has just been announced and will be launched this coming September. If you've been watching the evolution of the ambassador program, surely you've noticed that in recent years it had become blurred within the community. No wonder that LEGO® would see the dilemma of closing or renewing it. It is a relief to see that in the end, the relevance that this program has had throughout its existence has been more important than the grayer recent times. So it seems that LEGO wants to revive the program and has invested much time and effort in developing a new program with new roles and responsibilities. Clearly the fact that the AFOL Community is growing large and visible has forced the CEE Team to take measures to adapt to this new environment.*

**HBM:** There have been changes in the organization of the community support team lately. Can you tell us what the main changes have been and why they were made?

**KDS:** Yes we did go through a change in our organization at the beginning of the year. We created a clearer split between Kim Thomsen's and Jan Beyer's roles. Jan now is the community manager for eastern Europe, Russia, Asia and Pacific regions. Kim's role covers North, South, Central, and Western Europe. Also Kim is responsible for all of our online communities. These changes were made to help strengthen clear roles and responsibilities within our team. Also, in the past 10 years Jan has demonstrated a strong ability to grow communities in regions where there may not be some. This skill is especially needed in our Asian markets.

*At this point we deviate a little from the topic to discuss the presence of team members in the growing number of events and AFOL meetings worldwide. Keith tells us that they have worked hard to try to reconcile the private life of each member with their presence at events, and they are trying to make a distribution of their travels to go to major events and new events that are under expansion. He also said that the presence of other members of TLG at these events depends not only on them, but the different departments are the ones who show interest in attending certain events. "We are always encouraging members of other departments to come and experience what these events are".*

**HBM:** The main contact point between the CEE Team and AFOLs is the Ambassador Program which will be fundamentally transformed this year. What are the main reasons that have led to these changes? What are the most important changes that will be made and what is their objective?



From left to right: Jan, Kim, Kevin and Keith from the CEE Team

**KDS:** Before I answer this question it is important to highlight what the community support team has been doing in 2014. We have dedicated a full year to rebuilding many of our operations and creating a much more lean and optimized business. The reason for this is that over the past 10 years we have built a community business which has been highly successful. However due to the amazing growth in the AFOL community our business is not capable of growing at the same level. Thus everything we have been focused on this year has been to refine and rebuild our business which has a sustainable and scalable growth which can meet the needs of the AFOL community of tomorrow.

The Ambassador program is transforming to the LEGO Ambassador Network (LAN), and yes, it is a fundamental shift for the Community support team and will have ripple effect throughout our entire business. The LAN is going to be our focus area for all communication with the AFOL community. What I mean is that currently we email and have contact with 2,3, or even 4 people within a single LUG. With over 250 LUG and continuing to rapidly grow, these multiple points of contact are unsustainable. So with the LAN each LUG ambassador will be the single point of contact to this LUG for everything. There is some opportunity to have the LUG ambassador delegate responsibility (i.e. LUGBULK order) to another LUG member. We do not want to create too much of a burden on just one person.

*Keith tells us about cases where the contact for LUGBULK has suddenly stopped responding to communications. They don't want this to happen again, so delegating some activities to other members of the LUG will be allowed, but the Ambassador should always have a copy of all the mails, to resume responsibility in this activity if necessary.*

The next very essential and most exciting point to the LAN is the importance we (The LEGO® Group) will put on it. We will migrate to a new forums platform and within this platform there will be workgroups. Workgroups will be a space for LUG Ambassadors to focus their conversation and create a consolidated and powerful message for TLG to consider. For example if 50 LUG ambassadors bring 50 different ideas to TLG then we are unable to understand what is the most important issue or idea to review. But if 50 LUG ambassadors bring a single and powerful message then it will be clearly valuable for TLG to understand. We also envision that in some cases the ideas coming from Ambassador will be so well done that we will send some of those ambassadors to a TLG location to meet with leaders and talk about their idea in person.

A couple other essential points to the LAN is it is the only way a LUG can receive support from TLG in the future. A LUG must register with us (starting on September 1st) and they will be required to have a LUG Ambassador.

Another change which is important to mention is the Name change. The title "LEGO Ambassador" no longer exists. The new title is "LUG Ambassador". The change emphasises that an ambassador does not in any way represent TLG but very specifically represents their LUG.

**HBM:** One of the main problems, from the point of view of the ambassadors, is that there is little activity from both sides, both ambassadors and LEGO. Are there new initiatives to activate this participation?

**KDS:** The community support team took the decision that if we move forward with the LAN we must put a full and long lasting effort into the program. This means that the community support is adjusting our work habits and spends less time talking with all the different contact points out in the ecosystem and primarily focuses on ambassadors and topics within the LAN.

Also for the LUG ambassador, each ambassador will need to be active. Moving forward we will only distribute communication (i.e. LUGBULK, event support, and other documents) through the LAN. A LUG needs to have their Ambassador distribute this, otherwise the LUG will lose out of opportunities with TLG. Also it will be the ambassador who will be the primary person submitting event support application and other documentation to the community support team, we will not accept it from other people. So in summary the LUG ambassador will play an essential role in managing the LUG relationship with TLG.

**HBM:** Another problem is the sensation that sometimes the questions that are asked on the forum are not officially answered by LEGO for a long time. What changes are being made to improve this?

**KDS:** We are not going to answer every question on the forum, especially ones which have been answered already. An example is product pricing differences, or specific quality issues, these have been answered and we will not spend time re-writing the answer. Instead, as the LEGO Ambassador Network implies, other ambassador can step up and answer questions. There is an expectation that ambassadors use this network to get answers and share ideas among other ambassadors without the explicit need of TLG. We are also looking into have a FAQ built into the forum which should have the commonly asked questions.

*Keith tells us that he is very excited about the new platform, as he expects that in future developments, many of the negotiations between the CEE Team and LUGs that now are done by email, will be carried out through this platform and that this would simplify these processes.*

**HBM:** How do you think the ambassador program is seen from within the company?

**KDS:** The current Ambassador Program has a lot a lot of importance in the company, that is why we needed to do a full reset and create something that creates value to both the AFOL community and TLG.

**HBM:** What has the reaction inside the company to the changes in the program been?

**KDS:** Curiosity and excitement! TLG want to continue to have a strong relationship with the AFOL community and with the LAN we can significantly strengthen the relationship and create value adding discussions both within the company and out in the community

**HBM:** What has the reaction of the current ambassadors been?

**KDS:** There have been plenty of questions in regards to the difference to a physical and online LUG, or what support programs are guaranteed as a registered LUG. From some of these questions we will be working on creating an additional FAQ and other documents which can help with the clarity.

**HBM:** One of the main novelties in this new program is that the ambassador is the sole contact person between the LUG he or she represents and the CEE Team. What has been the main reason for this decision?

**KDS:** Simplicity and scalability! The community team does not grow at the same rate as the LUG's. This means that we need to find new processes to be able to talk to all the LUG's and provide a high quality Service.

**HBM:** This change means that any LUG that wishes to receive any support from LEGO for its activities needs to have an ambassador. What are the main support programs that are available to LUGs in this new program?

**KDS:** We will have some additional documentation to come out in August on this subject but the main support programs are.... LUGBULK, LUG support, event support, LCBP

**HBM:** Now that the rules for the new ambassador program have been published, have you been able to implement all the changes you originally designed when you started working on remodeling the existing program?

**KDS:** Almost! I am very happy that we were able to find what I consider a great compromise. From the start of the project to re-design the LAN we (community support) had a number of issues to resolve, and the ambassadors who participated in the development had issues too. Through a number of revisions, conference calls and discussions we were able to build a strong framework.

**HBM:** In what direction do you think the ambassador program should evolve?

**KDS:** My goal with the LAN is to make it one of the key and essential programs for TLG to turn to for AFOL input. We want the ambassadors to work together to help better each other and also to help us understand the pulse of the AFOL ecosystem. It will require discipline and commitment from the community team as well as the new ambassadors, but I strongly believe there is a very bright future filled with invaluable insights, best practice sharing, and a lot of fun!

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