



Interview with Nate Flood by Jetro de Château

HBM: What is the name of your community?

LOLUG: LOLUG. The name is an acronym for Lincoln Omaha LEGO User Group. Lincoln and Omaha Nebraska are the two major cities located in eastern Nebraska and the area where our LUG operates. Prior to Covid-19 our meetings would be held in Omaha (odd months of the year) and in Lincoln (even months of the year). Events that showcase our creations are held across both cities and across the State of Nebraska.

Nebraska is very sparsely populated with the majority of people living along the far east border. We are an agricultural state where the majority of the land is dedicated to crops and livestock.

HBM: When and how did the idea for your community come about and what was its original purpose?

LOLUG: In 2012 AFOLs Chris Malloy and I met through Flickr when we both realized we lived in the same city and were both fans of LEGO. We met at a local restaurant and decided to start a LUG as there wasn't one in the area. Chris came up with our logo which included a circle to represent Omaha and the State Capitol building which was in Lincoln.

The purpose for starting the LUG was to bring together Adult Fans of LEGO and discuss and build with LEGO. Neither of us knew what the future held and how LOLUG would evolve over the years but neither of us expected the path the group would take.

HBM: To what degree has that goal been fulfilled and how has it evolved over time?

LOLUG: The goal when Chris and I started LOLUG was to just find enough AFOLs to be recognized by LEGO and put together a few events to showcase our creations. By using social media extensively and scouring LEGO online forums such as Eurobricks, Classic Castle, and FBTB, LOLUG grew quickly in terms of membership as AFOLs in the area quickly flocked to the meetings. The group quickly outgrew the meeting space in restaurants and switched to community rooms as the group had build competitions, presentations, show and tell of MOCs and set drafts.



One of LOLUG's first events to showcase our creations was held in the back of a hobby store called HobbyTown. HobbyTown would play an essential part in the evolution of LOLUG. The store is one of the largest LEGO retailers in Lincoln. The first event had a hundred people visit and ask questions about our creations. LOLUG continued the events twice a year and eventually the line was out the door waiting to see what we displayed. Television and newspapers completed dozens of stories about our group. Radio stations conducted live streams from our events and conducted interviews with our members during the events. The showcases also added to the growth of the group as many AFOLs attended and wanted to be involved.

As of today LOLUG has grown to over 100 members, is a registered nonprofit and helps organize the area's largest LEGO convention called Brick Days.

The Brick Days event is a partnership with HobbyTown and stemmed from the back of the store events that they hosted. Brick Days has become a multi-day event that includes LEGO vendors, games and activities and incredible creations along with other LUGs across the midwest. It is held in Lincoln and in Omaha during the year.





LOLUG often refers to itself as a tribe. We are a very close family and when a new member joins they are quickly welcomed into the fold. It's been said from some members, who previously had social anxieties, that LOLUG helped them overcome their fears. Overall we are a tribe that loves LEGO, good whiskey, and good conversation!

HBM: How many people are working on the operation of the LUG?

LOLUG: The LUG currently has a five-person Board of Directors along with an attorney. The BOD consists of a President, Vice-President, Secretary/Treasurer, Social Media Coordinator and an At-Large position. The positions (besides the attorney) are voted on by the membership of LOLUG. The election process is established in our By-Laws. While the LUG has a Board of Directors; all the members help at our events and our meetings. The BOD is only for leadership as the LUG is a very tight knit group of friends. We often do activities together outside of the LUG. Members will also lead a meeting when they give a presentation about a new build technique, such as building trees and landscaping to building Great Ball Contraptions.

HBM: What plans/goals do you have for the future of the community?

LOLUG: LOLUG hopes to continue success with Brick Days and turn it into a well known convention that spans 4-5 days. We want to continue our work with other non-profits and our community including the City of Lincoln. Prior to Covid-19, the

LUG was working on a second series of trading cards that we would produce that would have city landmarks. We were going to cooperate with our library system to have young readers work on a scavenger hunt involving these landmarks where the trading cards could be collected.

HBM: How is your community funded?

LOLUG: The funding began as a "pass the hat" to help pay expenses but evolved to include donation boxes built out of LEGO that are displayed at all our events.

LOLUG has developed a tiered membership system where one level is a "basic member" and another is a "subscribing member". The subscribing members pay dues which offsets the costs of advertising, website fee's, etc. LOLUG also receives a donation for working at Brick Days.

HBM: How do you see the future of your community?

LOLUG: LOLUG will become an even bigger non-profit in the Lincoln and Omaha community.



We are donating to causes throughout the area with LEGO gift baskets that are supported by the membership. The reaction from the public is mind numbing as so many people are excited to be receiving a huge basket filled with LEGO sets! A simple gesture in these trying times really goes a long way in giving joy to somebody who desperately needs it.

HBM: How has Covid-19 changed/affected your community?

LOLUG: While we weren't able to meet in person during 2020 we continued to meet on Zoom. We still have monthly build challenges and vote as we would if we met in-person. We still have presentations, and in fact, they are a bit easier online than in person. By being active in the community the LUG has grown faster than ever with more members wanting to join our happy group of LEGO enthusiasts.

HBM: How would you describe your relationship with LEGO?

LOLUG: LOLUG has an outstanding relationship with LEGO. We strive to be representatives of the LEGO Group at our events and promote the LEGO hobby to everyone! We are very thankful that they allow us a small voice in their very large community. We hope by sharing our experiences on the LEGO Ambassador Network that we can inspire other ambassadors from across the globe.

HBM: What changes/improvements would you like to see in that relationship?

LOLUG: We have grown a rabid fan base of



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followers, in fact LOLUG is the most followed LUG on social media in the USA. Our events are extremely well attended by the public and are comparable to other LEGO Conventions so we would love to see a LEGO Brand Retail store in Omaha. Of course we don't expect it as we are in Nebraska and with that comes some preconceived notions that we still ride on horses with covered wagons. One of our members was recently asked

if we had running water in Nebraska (the answer was yes).

HBM: Can you share any anecdotes about your community?

LOLUG: As previously mentioned we are a tight knit community and we travel really well together to Brickworld Chicago (an 8+ hour drive). The pre-party usually turns into the "LOLUG Bar" where we have discussed printing banners and giving our bar a name. One time the microphone used by Brickworld staff for announcements was left unattended and it became an impromptu comedy show hosted by LOLUG member John Olive. We are fairly certain the microphone will never be left unattended again. Fun fact: LOLUG member John Olive auditioned for American Idol. While John does have an amazing voice; he sadly wasn't selected to continue his singing career.

Nebraska gets very few celebrities at our Comic Con's. Sean Gunn (Guardians of the Galaxy) was the highlight at our Comic Con and he happened to walk by and notice Eric Price's (one of our members) MOCs based on Guardians of the Galaxy. Eric was thrilled when Sean asked if he could take pictures of it and visited our booth

before heading to the hotel that evening. We are fairly certain Eric still gets giddy when we bring up Sean Gunn.

LOLUG loves to display at any event and once during a local convention our tables were across from an amateur wrestling ring. Two members decided it would be best to begin voicing play-by-play for any and all to hear that walked past. Needless to say; the play-by-play became more popular than amateur wrestling.

