

Pointers For Parents

Play Well Today And Live Well For Years To Come

(NAPSA)—According to noted experts supported by recent research, playtime actually prepares kids for their futures. Perhaps one of the best places to see the benefits of play in action is in the halls of some of the institutions educating the toymakers of tomorrow. For example, at the Fashion Institute of Technology's Toy Design program, where students create toys that entertain, educate and inspire kids, Chair Judy Ellis sees the lifelong benefits of play firsthand. "Our incoming students all need to be able to think conceptually and translate those ideas into action. When children have access to toys that respect their imagination and intelligence, it can foster these abilities from an early age."

While all kinds of play can deliver these benefits to children and adults alike, construction play—building with blocks, sticks or bricks—seems to be gaining in popularity in part because of its perceived ability to develop motor skills, problem solving and creative thinking.

To help encourage this new generation of builders, LEGO Systems created LEGO Master Builder Academy, a new program



Play provides important lessons for youngsters' future success.

that teaches the techniques of model designers via a yearlong toy subscription. Children learn successful building methods such as locking and model stability while they play; at the same time, they learn transferable skills such as how to conceptualize, design and create on their own.

This curriculum has been carefully developed to strengthen, test and reward core building skills by an elite group of designers known as the LEGO Master Builders. They hold one of two important jobs: They either design the many LEGO sets sold each year, or they design and build all the spectacular, one-of-a-kind models on display around the world. "The No. 1 question I hear from parents and

children alike is 'How can I learn to build like a Master Builder?'" says Erik Varszegi, a Master Builder based in the U.S.A.

Varszegi offers parents these tips, also found on www.LEGOmba.com, to help teach kids about design and building in order to bring their ideas to life, all while having fun:

- Put it on paper**—he uses special graph paper to design models, but any graph paper or lined paper will help kids translate their ideas into reality—whether it's building a sandcastle or making a one-of-a-kind cake, it's easier to translate scale and proportion once you've seen it on paper.

- Assemble the elements**—gather your bricks, ingredients, art supplies, whatever pieces you need to make your creation; have them in one place so you can plan your approach and make any adjustments before you dive in.

- Make mistakes**—remember, you're experimenting and creating, so there's no such thing as a "right" answer. Take chances and keep a fresh eye on what you're making. Some of the world's best inventions have been a result of a "mistake."