

GETTINGstarted

BOTTOMLESS BRICKS
Family building
new business on
LEGO foundation

BY BRAD JOHNSON

A Pittsfield family’s love affair with LEGO-brand interlocking bricks has provided the foundation of a new Adams-based business.

Last autumn, Erin and Shane Laundry opened Bottomless Bricks in a small storefront space at 57 Park St. in downtown Adams. The business focuses primarily on hosting private LEGO-themed parties for children (and occasionally adults), as well as open “build & play” time by the hour for all ages.

“We’ve been getting LEGOs since our oldest son was about 5,” said Erin Laundry, whose two sons are now age 20 and 11. “It became a family affair, building together and going to conventions.”

As a result of their LEGO fandom, the Laundrys compiled a vast collection of the toys over the years. “We have a whole house filled with LEGOs,” said Laundry.

She also noted that her husband Shane, who works in the HVAC industry, “discovered that he loves to separate LEGOs,” a task that is generally viewed as a less appealing aspect of playing with the toys.

While Shane Laundry’s affinity for deconstructing LEGOs was useful in terms of recycling the family’s own creations, it was not until later that they realized it would also fill a need in the family’s new business.

Erin Laundry explained that the roots of Bottomless Bricks date back to a LEGO birthday party that they held for their younger son, Liam, a few years ago. The success and popularity of that event led them to hold similar parties for children of their friends and family.

Given the widespread and enduring popularity of LEGOs, the Laundrys began to see the potential for a business focused on LEGO-themed parties and other activities. “We wanted to take that idea and share it with others,” she commented.

They also determined that a fixed location for hosting such parties would be both more appealing for potential customers and logistically manageable for them.

An initial search for possible shop locations in Pittsfield came up empty. “The costs were either too high or there was no visibility,” said Laundry.



Shane and Erin Laundry are joined by their 11-year-old son Liam at the front counter of their new LEGO-based venture, Bottomless Bricks, at 57 Park St. in Adams.

An impromptu trip up to Adams one day last August led them to a better alternative. “We had a hankering for Chee’s,” Laundry recalled, referring to a popular Chinese restaurant in downtown Adams. “We drove up as a family, and while we were there we decided to walk up and down Park Street to look at [commercial] spaces that were available.”

This stroll brought them to a storefront space in a building also housing Steepleview Realty. “We really liked its location and visibility,” Laundry said, noting that it also had plenty of parking available right along Park Street.

She contacted the building’s owner, Christine Randall, to discuss her idea for using the space. “She was really great and very enthusiastic,” Laundry said, noting that this connection led to a 13-month lease. “We moved in in October and were open in time for Ramblefest,” she said, referring to a town celebration held during Columbus Day weekend.

Laundry noted that the long and narrow space, at 12 feet wide and 48 feet deep, works

well for their concept for Bottomless Bricks. Inside the entrance are display cases with assorted LEGO items and new LEGO sets that are available for purchase.

Moving deeper into the shop, the Laundrys have created zones for various activities, such as a build-and play space featuring a large bin filled with 100 pounds of assorted LEGO bricks, and a racing station for wheel-based LEGO creations.

The walls and fixtures are painted in bright LEGO-themed colors of blue and yellow, and are decorated with LEGO banners, posters and related items.

Laundry explained that the family’s own personal LEGO collection was not put to use for the shop’s build-and-play inventory. Rather, the LEGOs are purchased second-hand, often in bulk, from sellers whose own kids have outgrown the toys.

These bricks are broken apart (recall Shane Laundry’s specialty), washed and disinfected before being sorted and added to the shop’s LEGO inventory. “We have about 250 to 300 pounds on hand,” she said, noting that the blocks are rotated out of the build-and-play bin regularly to be washed and sanitized.

The shop’s hours vary depending on time of year and other factors. An updated

schedule of hours and events is posted on their website (www.bottomlessbricks.com) and Facebook page.

Laundry noted that the shop is closed to the public whenever a private party is scheduled. “The party packages are our bread and butter,” she said, noting that they have been the most popular feature in their first months of operation. They also offer packages for parties held at customers’ own homes.

However, the open build-and-play time is also attracting some regular customers, and was popular during the recent holiday school vacation period. The build-and-play rate is \$8 per hour per child, making it an affordable options for morning or afternoon play date.

Laundry said the relatively modest \$11,000 start-up cost for the business was self-funded. She noted that they also operate a related online business selling items through LEGO’s bricklink.com marketplace.

Shortly after launching Bottomless Bricks last October, the Laundrys got a boost through their participation in the first pitch competition hosted by Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll) Berkshires, a new public-private partnership that seeks to give all people the opportunity to turn a promising idea into a successful business (*October 2019 BT&C*).

“The party packages are our bread and butter.”

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spotlight on new business ventures



Liam Laundry displays a LEGO set he put together from the company’s new Hidden Side series, which combines the basic enjoyment of building a designed set with interactive features accessed through a LEGO app.

Laundry applied and was chosen as one of the contestants to give a brief pitch to a panel of judges at the Oct. 22 event at the Berkshire Museum.

“It was great,” she said, adding that the hardest part was keeping her pitch within the two-and-a-half-minute time limit.

Bottomless Bricks won the third place prize of \$500 in the competition. Potentially of even greater value, Laundry’s participation also put her on track for another more intensive EforAll program.

“My intention from the start was to do the accelerator,” she said, referring to EforAll’s 12-week program of instruction on the basics of starting a business, combined with a full year of interaction with a team of three dedicated mentors.

Following a multi-step winnowing process that began with 33 applicants, Laundry was among the eight entrepreneurs selected for

the inaugural program. She was matched with her mentors at an orientation program in December, and the twice-weekly classes began in early January.

Laundry said her participation in the accelerator program fits well with her schedule for operating the shop, as well as her other activities as a musician and piano teacher.

She also anticipates that the program will help them strengthen and refine their business model for Bottomless Bricks going forward. “I think there’s a lot we are going to take away from this that will help us make Bottomless Bricks a success,” she said.

As part of that process, the Laundrys will continue to try out new activities and offerings, such as their first Brick ’N Brew event for adults scheduled for Jan. 16 (*press date for this issue*). “We’re looking to do monthly events, and maybe add adult parties,” said Laundry. ♦



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