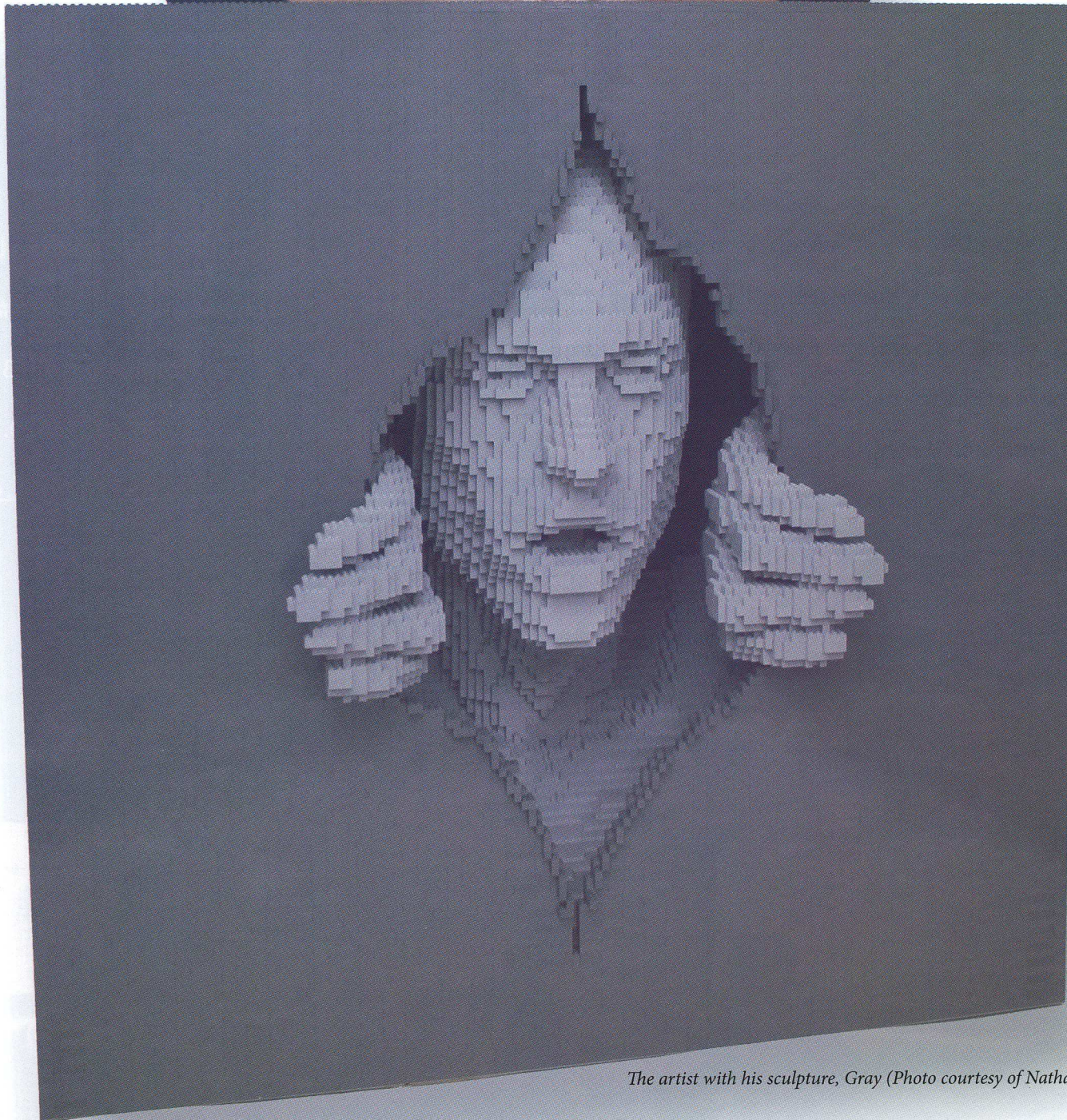


# BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUCCESS .....



*The artist with his sculpture, Gray (Photo courtesy of Nathan Sawaya).*

**.....ONE BRICK AT A TIME**

By: Brenda Silva

**W**hen an artist chooses a working medium, it is often the result of something that appeals to the artist—whether it is a sculptor choosing marble, a painter choosing oils, or a corporate attorney choosing Legos. For Nathan Sawaya, it had nothing to do with the Lego itself, but rather, how he could use and transform a viable medium into an art form. Eventually, Sawaya left the corporate environment, and went on to make a name for himself in the art world, as well as in the hearts of youngsters around the globe.

Among this group of aspiring young artists is 12-year-old Nick Connell, who was recently surprised by his parents with a belated birthday trip from his hometown in Grossepointe, MI, to meet his Lego-building idol at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood.

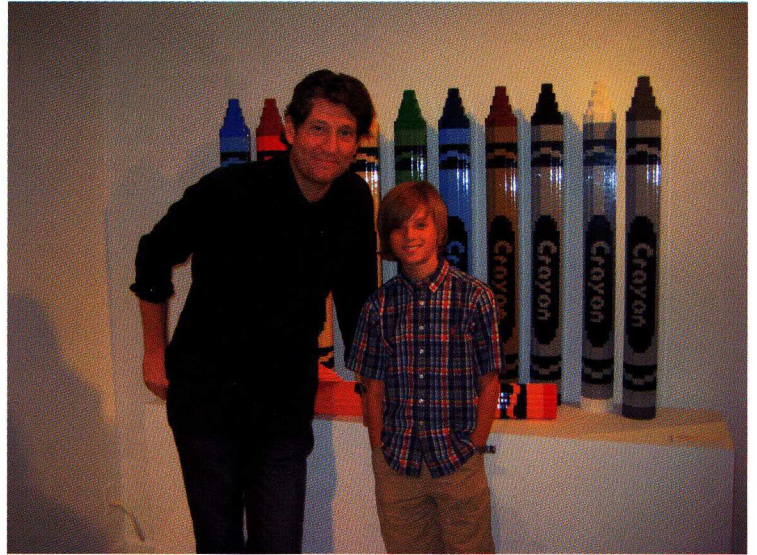
Nick's mother Melissa said, "Nick has played with Legos since he was five or six, and he's already won a Lego-building contest back home. He wants to be the next Nathan Sawaya, and I believe he can do it." She also said Nick often works on projects with his seven-year-old brother, who also has an affinity for creating with Legos.



*Yellow (Photo courtesy of Nathan Sawaya).*

When Nick finished his contest-winning Lego design, adults immediately pointed to its similarity to Rodin's *The Thinker*; however, the kids were the wiser as they corrected the adults and noted that it was, in reality, Tim Tebow kneeling in prayer.

Aside from perception limitations, the Lego as an art medium has had its share of color and shape limits throughout the years. For example, Legos are not available in flesh-colored bricks, which can often limit artists when constructing human works of art. In contrast, purple bricks never were available until recently, when the *Harry Potter* franchise came along, bringing with it a new option for the expanding color palette. As Sawaya noted, it's the lack of curves, not colors, that presents challenges when creating rounded edges within a sculpture.



*Nathan Sawaya and aspiring Legos artist Nick Connell (Photo courtesy of Brenda Silva).*

Sawaya was first introduced to Legos—the quintessential building blocks for the imagination—as a child. The original tubs of rectangle-shaped primary colors, and subsequent playsets that became must-haves much later, offered hours of imaginary playtime with the benefit of easy deconstruction and new construction on another day.

It was in the world of Legos that young Sawaya could create what his imagination desired. "When I was young, I wanted a dog, so I created one out of Legos. When I was older, if I wanted to be a rock star, I would simply create a guitar. The sky was the limit with what I could create, if I could dream it, I could create it. This was my 'wow' realization with Legos ... their endless possibilities."

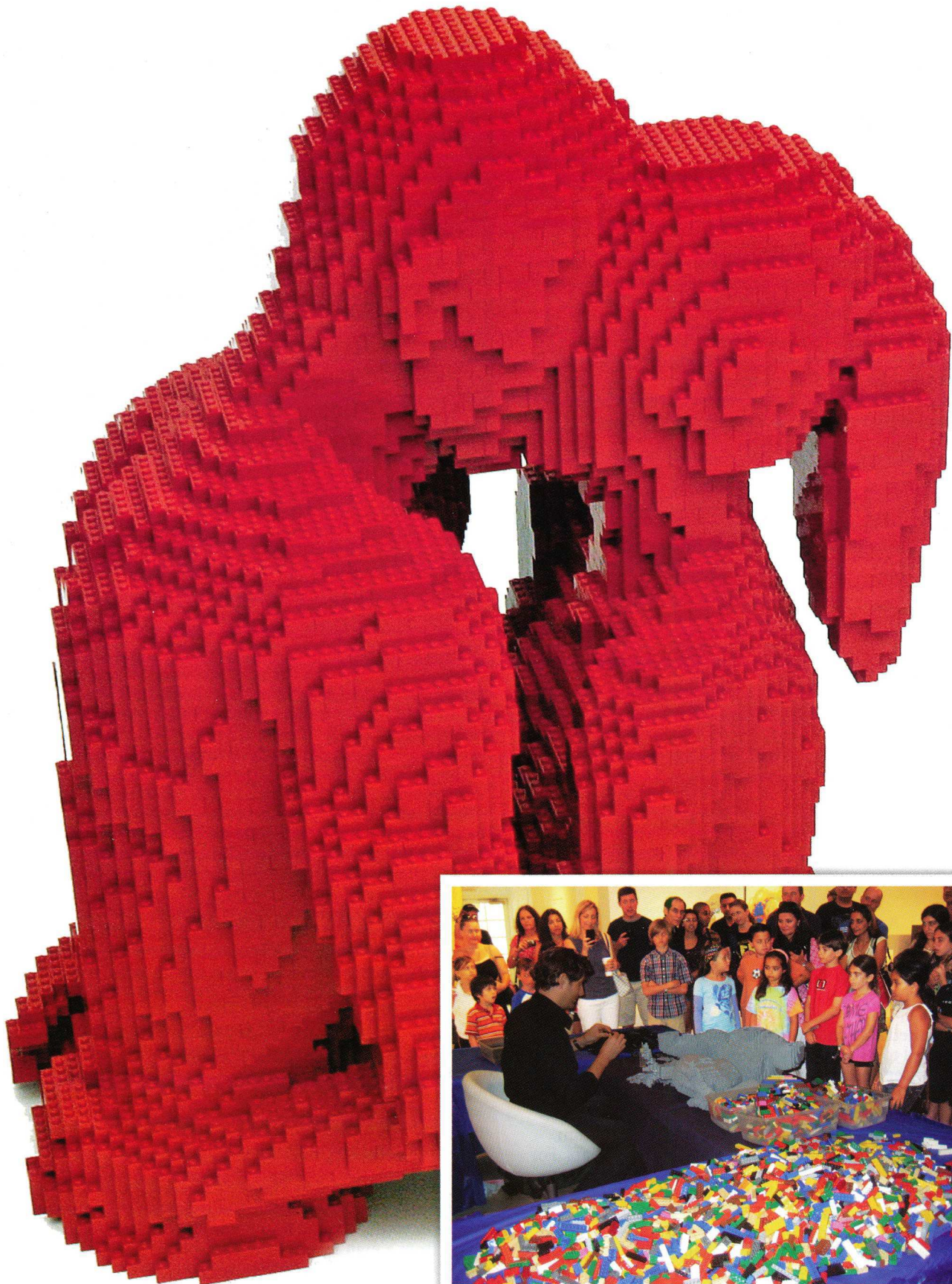
Legos ultimately took a back seat in Sawaya's maturation process, with college and law school becoming his priorities. A corporate law position followed, and while his love of creative expression still existed, it just couldn't pay the bills. Legos simply became a way to unwind after a day spent fighting for justice in the legal system.

In 2004, after a great showing at a nationwide contest, Sawaya was offered a highly coveted position at Lego Land, that of "Lego Master Model Builder." As Sawaya's options expanded his doubts did too. But once he took the position, he began an education and professional career made possible by a favorite toy from his youth.

Over the years, Sawaya has had the typical ups and downs in his new career, with the good outweighing the bad. One scenario involved a child so overwhelmed by a giraffe sculpture that he hugged it before anyone could stop him. Both child and giraffe went crashing to the ground. Sawaya received the news via phone, and found himself moved by the reaction to his work, but also a bit saddened by the loss of the piece.

For those interested in following Sawaya's footsteps, his advice is, "Practice, practice, practice. Get inspired by your imagination. Believe in yourself and follow your passion. Success will come." Great advice from a man who continues to prove you can make a successful living by playing with toys.

*Kiss (Photo courtesy of Nathan Sawaya).*



*Nathan Sawaya answers questions during his "live build" at the Art and Culture Center (Photo courtesy of Brenda Silva).*

## NEW MILITARY ACADEMY BRINGS HOLLYWOOD TO ATTENTION

*Educational program geared towards structure, self-discipline, and success.*

By Brenda Silva

While many students are busy enjoying summer activities and dreading the new school year, other students are planning for a year filled with daily uniforms, physical drills, and challenging coursework intended to offer keys to a successful future. At the new Hollywood Hills High School Military Academy, students chosen for enrollment in the new magnet program will adhere to a curriculum designed to “create responsible adults who will be successful in their post-secondary educational choices.”

The idea for the new Military Academy began with Robert Runcie, the Superintendent of Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), and provides an opportunity to partner with the city of Hollywood to offer parents and students something more than a JROTC program. In comparison with existing JROTC programs, in which the students only wear a uniform one day a week, the academy cadets will wear uniforms all day, every day, and attend classes separately from new and returning Hollywood Hills High School students. This is intended to maintain a continued sense of discipline among the cadets, who will only have classes with other cadets, and also have a separate lunch period from other students. The program will be housed in an existing building on the high school campus, which presents no cause for concern as all cadets will have limited interaction with other students.

Runcie said, “In Broward County, we have the second highest JROTC program in the country, with over 6,500 cadets in our schools. JROTC exists in every high school in the county, but the new military academy will only exist in Hollywood. As a new program, we’ll monitor its progress as it continues to attract students and their parents.”

The new school year begins August 20; however, incoming military academy students are required to show up one week earlier for orientation. The first-year student body is limited to 400 students, with a range of criteria necessary for admission into the program. During the application process, the grades of a prospective student are reviewed, as well as their extracurricular activities. In addition, the student and his or her parents are interviewed as an additional factor for admission. For students who may have had academic blemishes on their record, the interview process allows for questions, answers, and explanations that serve to provide additional insight into the student’s potential for success, rather than relying only on recent FCAT scores and current transcripts.

Once a student is admitted to the military program, the academic expectations are understandably higher for cadets than for students not enrolled in the program; however, the curriculum offers diverse subjects intended to both challenge the cadets while holding their interest in the classes. Questionnaires completed by students helped develop the initial class offerings, and among the languages offered to



*Curriculum Supervisor Colonel Jim Armstrong adds to Supt. Runcie’s comments (Photo courtesy of Broward County Public Schools).*

cadets during their first year will be Arabic and Mandarin, with Hebrew, French, and Spanish offered in later years.

When considering the potential for success with the new program and its cadets, Colonel Jim Armstrong, Curriculum Supervisor of Broward County Schools, said, “The new program is a high-level military academy modeled after the existing structure of the military, with highest ranking students receiving promotions among the ranks, who will then serve as leaders to the other cadets. These high ranking cadets will exhibit the self-discipline and attitude toward their teachers that we want to instill in all cadets.”

Col. Armstrong said, “The success of our first year will dictate the program’s future. It’s our intention to have new incoming freshman and continuing sophomores next year, which will allow for the chain of command to continue, along with presenting new leadership possibilities among the students. Ultimately, we’re looking forward to the continued success of the academy, and our first graduating class in 2016.”

In years past, military school was thought of as a threat to problematic teens, but that is not the case with the new program. Superintendent Runcie quickly addressed the stereotype. “Our military program won’t be viewed in a negative light because it focuses on building up a student’s self-discipline, not disciplining problem children.”

Based on students who have applied for enrollment into the military program, problem students have not been a consideration, as students who desire to attend the academy have presented with admirable, high-level qualifications. In fact, many of the students seeking admission already are interested in the discipline and structure the school offers,

# BACK TO SCHOOL

finding the credentials required to attend equal to the attraction to the school. Making the program even more attractive to parents are the non-existent costs and fees necessary to attend, with the U.S. Army contributing funds for uniforms and curriculum needs, and free transportation provided to students who live south of Sunrise Boulevard.

## *A win-win scenario*

Along with the benefits to the incoming cadets, the military program also offers additional benefits to the city of Hollywood. Colonel Armstrong said, “By offering this program in Hollywood, it enhances the image of the city and makes it more appealing for families who want to raise their kids within a great school system. It also makes doing business in Hollywood more attractive to current business owners, as well as businesses looking for a city where they can relocate and be successful. We really feel this program is a win-win—both for the students and their families, as well as for the city.”

Superintendent Runcie pointed out that the ultimate goal of the military program isn’t about turning its cadets into soldiers, but rather, the program is designed to help educate and develop high school kids into mature adults who will make the most of post-secondary opportunities available to them, and become successful in their endeavors.



*Superintendent Robert Runcie announces the opening of the new military academy (Photo courtesy of Broward County Public Schools).*

Looking toward the future, Runcie said, “We look forward to many successful years with this new program, and hope to be an example for other cities with the number of graduates the program produces. The success of our students is what we’re all striving for, and we know the students admitted into this program won’t accept anything less.”



*JROTC students from Broward County (Photo courtesy of Broward County Public Schools).*