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THIS MONTH

MAY 2024

The FREEMAN

Rebuild, reuse and reimagine

Bricks & Minifigs store
opens in Brookfield

By Karen Pilarski
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262-513-2657

BROOKFIELD — For some adults the Lego fascination starts at an early age, fades, then comes back full force. Bricks & Minifigs Brookfield owner Chris Hoepfner is no exception as he has made Lego creations since he was a kid.

“It kind of phases out a bit about eighth grade. Everybody gets interested in the boys or girls, sports and different clubs. Then all of a sudden, they get really into it. They come back to it through college,” Hoepfner said.

His renewed hobby has evolved into a new Lego business at 16700 W. Bluemound Rd. Hoepfner enjoys collecting Legos from the 1990s such as Lego Space sets.

“That’s the stuff I really liked and tried to find. It’s hard to do because a lot of people have it or gotten rid of it because they’re all my age. Mom needed to move so they got rid of the stuff. I’m into the big Ultimate Collector Series (UCS) which is the really big collection ones,” Hoepfner said.

His love of Legos resurfaced a few years ago.

For 27 years he worked in sheet metal fabrication where he created prototypes for different companies, with a focus on industrial lighting and he worked on the New Year’s Eve Times Square ball. His career didn’t allow him time to work on Lego creations.

After retiring he found out about Bricks & Minifigs, a franchise, and that got the ball rolling.

Hoepfner found owning a business to be less stressful and safer than his previous job.



Karen Pilarski/Freeman Staff

Bricks & Minifigs Brookfield owner Chris Hoepfner stands behind a display at the store recently. Barbara Dehli looks at a bin of minifigs along with her granddaughter Lucy Acker, daughter Andrea Acker and Dehli's grandson Flynn Acker.

See LEGOS, PAGE 3

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Food Truck festival to return to Town of Brookfield

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD — The Town Food Truck Festival is rolling into Brookfield again this summer.

Discover Brookfield, the Town of Brookfield Tourism Department, announced the return of Town Food Truck Festival this summer, held at The Corners of Brookfield.

Each event is the third Wednesday of the month May through September, starting May 15 from 4:30 p.m.-8 p.m. There will be live music, local food vendors, craft beer and kid-friendly activities.

“We are so excited to bring back this community favorite event here in the Town of Brookfield. Summer nights out, local food and beer vendors, live music . . . This is an event we look forward to every year,” said Anna Antoine, Town of Brookfield Tourism director.

Vendors include 18 Acres, Any Street Grill, Chillwaukee Pops, Double B’s BBQ, Flips Mini Donuts, Roll MKE, Rots Hots, Tots on the Street, and Vocado MKE.

For more information on the event and to see the full list of food vendors, visit <https://discoverbrookfield.com/events/town-food-truck-festival-2024/>.

Elmbrook school board approves promotions

BROOKFIELD — The Elmbrook Board of Education approved last month the promotion of Emily Greiber to assistant superintendent of teaching and learning and Mekenna Ellis to director of elementary education.

“We take immense pride in the talent we’ve nurtured within our organization,” said Superintendent Mark Hansen. Emily and Mekenna have flourished, expanding their influence as leaders in literacy and education not only within our community but also across the broader region.”

Greiber has been employed with Elmbrook Schools since 2013, beginning as director of assessment before becoming director of elementary education in 2016.

“During that time, she oversaw the successful implementation of various new elementary curricula and resources. Prior to her time in Elmbrook, she served in several administrative and teaching roles in Greenfield School District in Wisconsin and Dysart Unified School District in Arizona,” the release said.

Ellis started at Elmbrook Schools in 2018 as associate principal of Burleigh Elementary School before transitioning to director of early literacy in 2022. Prior to Elmbrook, she was a reading specialist and literacy coach for Wauwatosa School District and as an elementary teacher at Trevor-Wilmot Grade School.

“Both Emily and Mekenna were recognized alongside their team for their work with science-based reading in 2023. Mekenna will fill Emily’s position, and Emily Greiber will replace Dr. Tanya Fredrich effective July 1, 2024. We thank Tanya for her 17 years of service to Elmbrook as she departs to become the next superintendent of Monona Grove. We are excited to welcome Emily and Mekenna into their new roles,” the release said.

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Karen Pilarski/Freeman Staff

Bricks & Minifigs Brookfield, 16700 W. Bluemound Rd., is now open.

Legos

From Page 1

“I lost one finger tip so there’s no risk of lopping off a limb,” he said.

The store offers a variety of Lego pieces and sets. Bricks & Minifigs Brookfield also books Lego parties in the party room which can accommodate 20 kids. There is a large racetrack and attendees can create a race car out of Legos to race. The room can also be used for other events. Bricks & Minifigs Brookfield also plans to hold classes.

“We will do mock events and set up AI training and stop motion classes,” he said.

The Brookfield store has employees who are knowledgeable in Legos to assist with buying, selling and trades. Hoepfner is also currently hiring more staff.

A great way to recycle

The franchise has three principals: Rebuild, reuse and reimagine.

“Rebuild with thousands of LEGO pieces to choose from, ensuring you’ll have those childhood LEGO sets rebuilt in no time. Reuse is our way of saying that we buy, sell and trade anything LEGO brand and pay top dollar for it. Reimagine with new sets by creating your own masterpiece straight from your imagination,” the company website said.

In addition to selling, the store will buy Lego items.

Hoepfner mostly has adult Lego enthusiasts who come in the store although kids do come in with their parents. College-aged customers sell whole Lego collections because they need the money or don’t have room in the dorms. Yet they get drawn back with visions of bricks and end up buying items anyway.

He hears from people who need more space, they are getting married and need money or need to pay rent, or they want to make room for more Legos.

The store also does trades.

“We evaluate everything based on the cleanliness of it, if it has instructions or not and if all the minifigs (mini figures) are there. That would determine the condition of it and we go from there,” he said.

Inside the store there are display cases of built Lego creations but also displays of minifigs. What is in high demand depends on the series. Queen Amidala from Star Wars was in the case for \$250 but there are different price ranges depending on the

condition and demand.

People come in because they lost a minifig or bought a set that didn’t have it included. Hoepfner said often the owner likes to keep the figure and gets rid of the set.

The store also has a “Bin of Shame” which is for non-Lego pieces.

“A lot of people will do Mega Bloks or other Lego products get mixed in. We try to sort it out and clean. If we accumulate enough stuff we will donate it to a school or charity function,” Hoepfner said.

Building memories

Hoepfner loves children and providing the experience of building creations and memories. He likes building things with his two children, now adults.

“My daughter is getting back into it with me again. If I get a broken package or something I ask her to put it together. The other day I had a top cut off of one of the stitches. She said she could put it together. My son has more of a challenge to see how fast he can do it,” he said.

His son put the Star Wars Lego Millennium Falcon together for him which has over 4,900 parts. It took him over a week.

One day his wife was working at their butcher shop and she pointed out Gringotts Wizarding Bank (from Harry Potter). Their family held a Thanksgiving Day Challenge to see how fast their kids could put it together. His daughter stayed up with Hoepfner late into the night to finish it.

“It was a fun time,” he said.

Hoepfner hopes to emulate that environment of fun and creativity in the store.

He loves hearing the stories that come from employees and customers. On Friday, Andrea Acker, son Flynn, daughter Lucy and mom Barbara Dehli were in the Brookfield store.

Acker said her husband is really into Legos and now their daughter is interested.

“She can do the regular or grown-up sets. She rebuilt one of the Technic ones my husband has. It’s like a monster truck,” Acker said.

Legos have hugely influenced not only the kids but their relationship. Acker and her husband incorporated Legos into their wedding with the wedding party designing their own minifig and other aspects.

“Everyone comes in with their own story,” Hoepfner said.

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Six decades of wagging tails and pleasant purrs

Elmbrook Humane Society celebrates 60th anniversary

By Isabella Kostolni
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262-513-2651

BROOKFIELD — In 1965, there was only \$8.67 in Elmbrook Humane Society’s checking account. Founded the year prior, the organization operated out of an old bus. Referred to as the “dog pound,” they housed local strays.

Conditions were less than ideal. The bus lacked heat and running water. It was situated in a hard-to-find location. Owners had trouble claiming their pets.

But at the heart of it all were a handful of volunteers. Their kindness and dedication to animals never wavered, and it’s thanks to them that EBHS is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

After a handful of moves, the organization arrived at its current home in 2004. Located at 20950 Enterprise Ave., Director of Special Projects Becky Tetzlaff says EBHS services upwards of 1,200 animals each year. The organization boasts a 98% adoption rate because of its commitment to finding the right home for every animal.

“Although we might have animals that stay with us for six months ... there’s a home for everybody,” Tetzlaff said. “It can be hard to see these animals sit and sit, but it just takes the right people.”

EBHS doesn’t treat animals like commodities, and it ensures all animals are comfortable, regardless of their length of stay.

The organization’s facility underwent an extensive renovation and footprint reconfiguration from January to October 2023. The renovation swapped where the dogs and the cats and small animals were housed.

EBHS did away with the old kennel setup. Now, dogs have larger, more comfortable spaces to lounge and play. Each door has a treat tube so visitors can send the dogs a snack when they visit. Tetzlaff says the dogs are much calmer in their new space.

Small animals, which can be sensitive to noise and stress, are now in a quieter area. Cat suites are available for under socialized or fearful felines. Other cats are housed in multi-level condos. EBHS prioritizes enrichment for their cats, so they keep cat TV playing in the background and hang bird feeders outside the window to provide visual stimulation. There are also three larger socializing rooms for the cats to come out and play.

The organization relies on its team of 225 volunteers to help socialize the animals and care for them. One-hundred-ten of those volunteers are on a weekly rotation, and many more foster animals in their homes. Executive Director Natalie Hoskins notes that these compassionate caregivers are the reason EBHS has been able to serve the community for six decades.

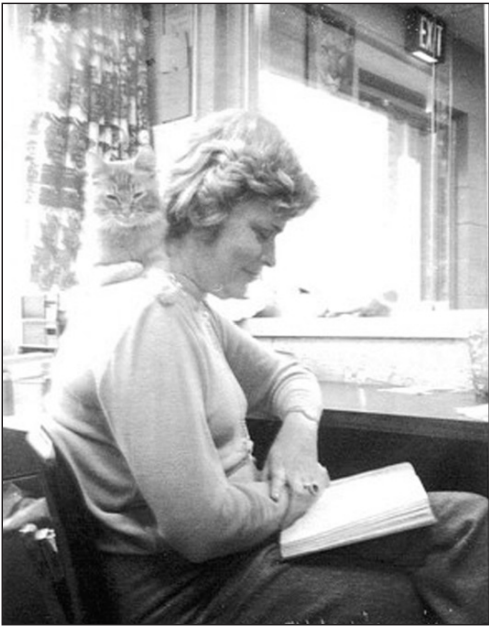
“You can’t do what we do without people,” she said.

And the people who adopt these animals are an important part of EBHS’s mission too. Hoskins says that the organization’s biggest pivot was going from a “true shelter,” which it hasn’t lost in any capacity, to becoming more human-oriented in its approach to helping animals. Because, after all, that’s who takes care of the pets.

“We want to do our best to promote that human-animal bond in everything that we do,” Hoskins said. “It’s no longer just an adoption center. ... That’s the evolution of us, to be very community-centered.”

The recently expanded training and education room assists in that goal of being a resource for pet owners and animal lovers. EBHS hosts dog training and cat behavior courses, as well as other educational programs, camps, classes, and parties.

But sometimes community pet owners



Courtesy of the Elmbrook Humane Society

Circa 1979, a shelter cat sits on the shoulder of an Elmbrook Humane Society volunteer.



Isabella Kostolni/Freeman Staff

Executive Director Natalie Hoskins holds puppy Spicy, who arrived at Elmbrook Humane Society the morning of March 20.

just need a little bit of support, and EBHS will be there to help in those situations, as well. Hoskins recalls the case of a dog named Muffin. An older gentleman had raised her since she was a puppy, but when Muffin began developing health problems, he wasn’t able to provide her with the care she needed. He approached EBHS for assistance, and the organization took over Muffin’s care.

Several vet visits revealed she had cancer, and EBHS paid for her surgery. Muffin was only given a few months to live, so a hospice foster home took Muffin in. Two years later, she was thriving. A new owner adopted Muffin and she’s still alive today. Her original owner has received updates throughout her journey and is grateful that Muffin is being taken care of.

“Elmbrook really does truly everything they can for every single animal. ... Every animal is cared for to their own individual needs,” Tetzlaff noted. “And that can be trying, that can be financially really restrictive. But that’s not what it’s about.”

The organization makes the most of its budget, but relies on community support to continue assisting animals in need. The organization’s annual gala helps to raise funds. The 60th Anniversary Gala was recently held. EBHS enjoyed showcasing all the work it has accomplished.

Hoskins says she can’t predict what the next six decades will look like, but she hopes EBHS’s mission won’t change too much.

“People are always going to have animals in their lives,” she said. “There is always going to be a need for a humane organization to be around.”

For more information about Elmbrook Humane Society, visit <https://ebhs.org/>.



Courtesy of the Elmbrook Humane Society

From 1964 until 1968, the Elmbrook Humane Society operated out of an old bus. It lacked both heat and running water.



In 1968, the Elmbrook Humane Society constructed its first brick-and-mortar shelter off Barker Road. The shelter was a one car garage with attached dog kennels.

Courtesy of the Elmbrook Humane Society

Elmbrook Humane Society Timeline

Information provided by EBHS staff

■ **1964:** Called the “dog pound,” an old bus with no heat or running water housed local strays. Animal lovers ran the pound as volunteers, and animals were held for seven days. The bus was hard to find, making it difficult for owners to claim pets.

■ **October 1964:** Gertrude Bergmann incorporated the Elmbrook Humane Society in collaboration with Myrna Mavroff and local police officer and attorney Mr. Zirbel.

■ **1965:** Volunteers continued running EBHS. Funds were depleted by the need for food, supplies, advertising and vet visits. In June 1965 there was only \$8.67 in its checking account.

■ **1968:** The City of Brookfield granted EBHS half an acre of land with a one-year lease to build the first brick-and-mortar shelter. The shelter was a one-car garage with kennels located off Barker Road.

■ **1969:** The city extended EBHS’s lease five more years. Animals were doubled or tripled in kennels and cages. The small building housed animals, as well as food, supplies, equipment, and a desk for volunteers. Volunteers often took animals home when they needed special care. Esther Dittman volunteered at the shelter seven days a week.

■ **1971:** EBHS moved from its original location to make room for the future development of an industrial park. The city assigned the shelter a new location, but continued to honor the five-year lease. Volunteers raised \$5,000 to build the new shelter through craft and rummage sales.

■ **1976:** A new facility was built at 21210 Enterprise Ave. On Dec. 23, EBHS moved into the new shelter. Cats were transported in carriers, while 15 dogs were let loose to run across the marsh to the new building. Jane Schmitz, the first paid administrator for EBHS, is recorded as saying that “the dogs did exactly what the staff knew — run right to the new shelter door.” That same day, two stray dogs arrived at the shelter.

The building was not funded with tax dollars. EBHS received support from the city of Brookfield, village of Elm Grove and the village of Butler, along with donations, yearly fundraising events and growing memberships.

■ **1979:** EBHS’s shelter proved to be too small to house the growing animal population. Brookfield and Elm Grove citizens helped raise \$12,000 to construct an addition. The added space allowed EBHS to separate dogs and cats and allow for bet-

ter communication with the public.

Educational programming, a spay and neuter program, seminars for adult pet owners, obedience training, and responsible pet classes for young people were part of EBHS’s new initiatives.

Three groups of volunteers became formalized: Pet therapy volunteers (who visited 15 local nursing homes with shelter animals), junior volunteers (about 40 people who spent hands-on time with the animals) and an auxiliary group (the backbone of the shelter’s fundraising and events).

■ **1988:** Shanty was EBHS’s mascot from 1978-1988. Then-Executive Director Patti Muraczewski was Shanty’s owner and trained her to a high level of obedience. Shanty was used for children’s education and adult demonstrations.

■ **2001:** Huntzinger Construction Company offered to purchase the shelter for \$175,000, but the board turned down the offer as EBHS had no place to go. The organization serviced 1,590 animals that year.

■ **2004:** EBHS needed to expand again as the current building lacked adequate ventilation, which made the spread of diseases a threat to the animals. The organization purchased its current building, 20950 Enterprise Ave., from Municipal Well and Pump early in the year. It moved into the new facility on Sept. 26. Over 100 volunteers walked the animals to the new shelter, four doors down from the previous one.

In December, EBHS was recognized by Brookfield’s Mayor Jeff Speaker for its years of service and dedication to the community. Dec. 4 was proclaimed as “Elmbrook Humane Society Day.”

■ **2012:** EBHS formally became a no-kill organization, the first in southeastern Wisconsin. The organization wanted to stick to its roots as a safe haven for animals. No governing agency for no-kill shelters exists, so EBHS established its own policy which meets the criteria of national standards.

■ **2023:** EBHS completed a major renovation. The project expanded the training and education room, added more office space and reorganized the adoption floor to give each dog a private suite. The shelter cats are now housed in their own area, and noise was reduced for small animals. The new layout maintains low stress levels for all animals. EBHS also added a dental suite which allows staff to better care for the animals.

■ **2024:** EBHS employs 28 staff members who are joined by 225 volunteers. The organization services upwards of 1,200 animals annually.

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