



Play takes  
children's  
mind off  
illness

Life

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# LEGO® DUPLO® ON RIGHT TRACK

UNIQUE MIXELS  
ARE A NEW MIX



LEGO® BRICKS

## GIVE HOPE

TO DYING CHILD, AGING MAN

SOME SAY IT'S THE POWER OF THE BRICK; OTHERS DESCRIBE MIRACLES IN BRAND STORES. WHATEVER IT IS, LEGO BRAND RETAIL STORE EMPLOYEES ARE CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AND SPARKING MAGIC MOMENTS.

BY STAASI HEROPOULOS

Mark Harmon manages the LEGO® brand store in Concord, North Carolina, USA, and he may never forget the call he got in May 2010 about a boy with cancer. "A family friend told me the boy (Vinny) wasn't expected to live until his 6th birthday and they wanted to have a LEGO birthday party for him."

The party, featuring Max the LEGO mascot and several play sets was for family only; there were no friends. The only outside guests were from the LEGO Group. After the party, Harmon formed a special bond with the little boy who was being treated at a local children's hospital. "We started holding LEGO therapy nights at the hospital for Vinny and his friends," he says.

They played with bricks for hours; very often Vinny sat in Mark's lap. The children played, had snacks – and for a while, forgot about cancer. So did their parents.

Vinny, a cancer patient, would often sit in store manager Mark Harmon's lap and build during LEGO therapy nights.

"The kids are scared; their parents are scared but we would play with them and all of their fears would go away for a short while. It's the power of the brick. They escaped. They weren't sick kids in a hospital; they were just kids playing."

Vinny died in February 2013. He lived nearly three years longer than doctors had predicted - nowhere near as long as his family had hoped. Vinny helped plan his own funeral and requested that Harmon, his LEGO friend, speak at the funeral. There were 600 people in the church and another 1,500 watched online.

"That was tough. It was a celebration of life. You're celebrating life and this really neat kid who touched so many people. I gave everyone a brick to stay connected with Vinny," says Mark Harmon.

### The Spark

Millions of people visit LEGO stores each year and there are thousands of stories – most small, many miraculous. Kelly Spremulli, assistant manager of Retail Operations in North America, has created and begun posting those stories on a global LEGO Web site called The Spark. The site presents stories about special moments LEGO store employees create with their guests.

"The common denominator is the feeling of pride and happiness that our employees experience after creating these moments in their stores. When they submit these stories to me, I can tell they're genuinely happy and grateful to be a part of that moment," she says.

