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NEWS | LOCAL

SCHOOL MATTERS

City council lessons with Legos

In Matt Bowling's unique Kidizens after-school program, students are learning important life lessons by creating miniature cities out of Legos.



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The Kidizens classroom at 4074 Fabian Way in Palo Alto houses a large Lego table, where tiny towns take shape brick-by-brick; a mock city council chambers; separate rooms for Lego parts storage and assembly; and a voting booth.

In September and January, when program sessions kick off, the 1,000-square-foot Lego table is completely empty. It forms the base for the cities, which start out with nothing more than a budget and a council of students who discuss what to build. The table soon brims with houses, airports, businesses, roads, power plants and power lines.

"I played a lot of SimCity growing up," acknowledged Bowling, formerly known as "Mr. B" at Duvoneck Elemen-

tary School.

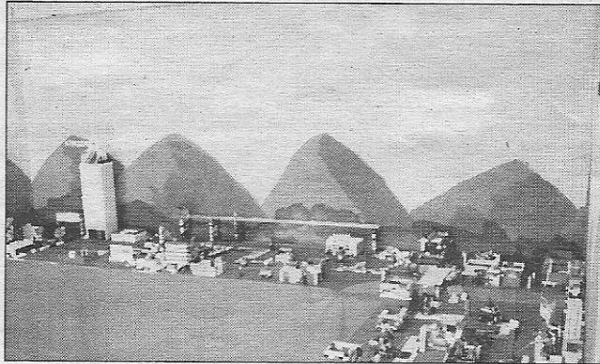
Every Kidizens session — classes meet once a week — includes a council meeting where decisions are made, such as determining which businesses should receive a license and what should be done in response to circumstances like floods, tornadoes and other natural events Bowling manufactures to teach participants life lessons. The weather and water levels are the same for each city but change periodically.

"We had a flood last week and the town where the kids didn't do anything

about rising water levels lost a lot of buildings," he said.

The Kidizens program boasts a dimension of cooperative play that SimCity lacks — participants must talk with each other to plan, model and execute their public works projects, and do things like deal with dissent. Students learn how to listen to one another respectfully, state their opinions, propose motions and vote.

The program is open to students in the third- through fifth-grades and costs \$39 per week. More information is available on the Web at www.kidizenspaloalto.com.



Each child participating in the Kidizens civics lesson begins with the child building up their town with a limited amount of resources and space while trying to meet certain goals.

Photo courtesy of kidizenspaloalto.com.