

Ride the rails with BayLUG's 2023 holiday Lego show

by [Heather Zimmerman](#) / Palo Alto Weekly

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Over the course of a weekend in late November, an unusual mountain took shape inside a building at the Museum of American Heritage. Surrounded by redwood trees, the craggy peak towers over a nearby Western-style town; train tracks circle the area. The mountain's terrain looks especially rocky due to its unique composition, which also makes up everything around it: Lego bricks.

This scene is the centerpiece of the 19th annual holiday show by Bay Area Lego Users Group (BayLUG), and aims to re-create — with some artistic license — [Roaring Camp](#), a historic railroad tourist attraction located in Felton in the Santa Cruz Mountains, not far from Santa Cruz. The park is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

The holiday show takes place at Palo Alto's Museum of American Heritage through Jan. 7.

The Roaring Camp display is collaborative, as are most in the show, made up of pieces created by different club members. What you'll see in the display is pretty accurate, said Russell Clark, BayLUG president.

"Last year we actually did a field trip. A whole bunch of us went to Roaring Camp as a group, we rode the train, we took pictures of everything, we documented every building, every major landmark that they have, because we wanted to make sure we covered everything," Clark said.

When choosing whether to create Roaring Camp as a town in the old west, which it's patterned after, or to represent it as it is in contemporary times, club members opted for the latter.

"You're gonna see people dressed up as cowboys who are working there and then you're gonna have regular figures that represent the public. So we modeled it as it actually is, which is a tourist attraction," Clark said.

The park hosts numerous special events, including a Bigfoot Festival and Civil War reenactment, which are both depicted. Even the Thomas the Tank Engine train chugging around the display has a real-life counterpart, as Roaring Camp hosts family events featuring rides on the cheery locomotive.

Roaring Camp seems to be on board with the project, providing its logo for the club to use on a re-creation of its landmark covered-bridge entrance.

"That gives it the full effect," Clark said.

BayLUG is also slated to bring the display to the park next summer.

But where the real Roaring Camp is surrounded mostly by forest, the Lego version has some pretty cosmopolitan neighbors at the moment: three unique Lego metropolises, including a gingerbread village and a Lego Micropolis city made up of smaller-scale legos built in modules that allow for greater ease of collaboration. The third city is the club's large, colorful cityscape that's a regular part of the holiday show, but appears in different configurations each year.

There's also a large collection of Lego Space robots and spacecraft.

The sprawling gingerbread village has all the amenities a Lego gingerbread mini figure could want, including a lighthouse keeping watch over a chocolate lake, an ice cream shop, pet store, even an arboretum, and on the more practical side of things, a post office and a hospital.

The display went all in with wintry whimsy, extending the gingerbread theme to the landscape.

"It doesn't have rocks and it doesn't have foliage — everything's made of candy, so the mountain is like giant marshmallows and we have trees that are like gingerbread cookies," said Lela McKenna, who organized the village.

The village builds upon a concept from a previous winter wonderland that the club created.

"This year we expanded it and I'm really proud of how it came out and just how wonderful and creative everyone was with it," McKenna said.

The club's membership represents a wide age range, with members between about ages 6 and 90, according to Clark.

One of the youngest members, Abigail Castagnetto, 10, takes part in the club with her family, including her younger brother, aged 7. This year, Abigail contributed a campsite for the Roaring Camp display and house inspired by Hansel & Gretel for the cityscape.

BayLUG's annual holiday show at MOAH, located at 351 Homer Ave., Palo Alto, is on display from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on weekends through Jan. 7. Admission is \$4 per person, cash only. For more information, visit baylug.org/holiday-show.