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### [Bellaire-Area Teen Builds Solid Future With Legos](#)

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[Community](#), [News](#)

As many teenage boys rush home from school to plop in front of video games, 16-year-old Joseph Lewis can't wait to check the new orders that came in from his thriving online business. One customer ordered 162 of the same person. Another ordered 300 hands.

More familiar to the mass of teenage boys is a conversation Lewis had recently driving home from a Bellaire High School baseball game. A friend asked what type of car he wanted when he got his driver's license, and whether his parents would pay for it.



Joseph Lewis fills an order from his online store, *The People Person*. He normally gets two to five orders per day.

"I said no, I have my own little business and I've been making some money off of it. When he asked me what it was and I said 'Legos' he was like, 'really?'" Lewis said. "No one believes I can make money doing this, but I can."

Four years ago, when he was 12, Lewis turned a lifelong passion for Legos into an entrepreneurial venture when he formed [The People Person](#), an online store selling rare, hard-to-find Lego pieces, mini-figures and sets. He already had national recognition for his Lego building skills — Now Lewis has another title that celebrates his business sense. He was recently named a Texas Youth Entrepreneur of the Year in a competition hosted by Texas Christian University in the Dallas area.

The evidence of Lewis' lifelong Lego obsession is strewn throughout the family home just outside Bellaire's southern border. His Lego creations decorate the hearth, coffee table and hallways. An intricate pirate ship with lifelike figurines. A luxurious cruise ship — One of Lewis' own designs, built in three weeks with 5,000 pieces.

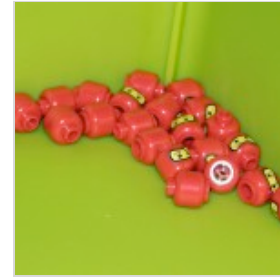
The evidence of his Lego business is even more prevalent. In the teenager's room, thousands of Lego heads, arms, torsos and bricks are meticulously stored in cubbies, shelving and under-the-bed bins. Somehow, he can always find the exact piece he's looking for to fill orders, said Klara Lewis, his mother. The inventory — more than 11,000 pieces worth about \$40,000 — has spilled into any available spot in the family's home.

"You see boxes everywhere. Boxes, boxes everywhere. So I said, we can't do this

anymore. We've got to stay with the mini pieces and the mini-figs," Klara Lewis said. "It looks like a warehouse."



In 2005, Lewis listed 15 items for sale. Today, his inventory is over 11,000 pieces worth about \$40,000.



The store sells rare, hard-to-find Lego pieces, figurines and sets.



Joseph Lewis fills an order on Tuesday. He normally gets two to five orders per day, he said.



Lewis has also won a major national Lego-building competition with his own custom designs.

David Minor, chair of the TCU Texas Youth Entrepreneur program, said he remembers Lewis was well prepared and gave a great presentation in the competition. Judges were impressed Lewis had run his online business for four years, and had grown the business over time.

"We look for kids who appear to be really entrepreneurial, and might go beyond the little businesses they're running now and do bigger and better things," Minor said. "He was just impressive."

Running The People Person has taught Lewis the basics of business. He studies past trends to determine what pieces he can sell for the most money in the future, and he purchases those items in advance at the lowest possible cost. The importance of good customer service is another valuable lesson.

As he ships orders all over the world — 36 countries so far — sometimes the packages don't arrive at all, or deliveries can take a long time. One French customer was so upset he hadn't gotten his package in four months that he wrote negative feedback about Lewis' store. Eventually, the package was returned to Lewis because it was caught by

customs enforcement in France. Lewis immediately sent the package back at his own expense, and the customer got his Legos.

"He ended up giving me a positive feedback because I handled the situation well. So sometimes you have to take a sacrifice, you have to take a loss for the order," Lewis said. "It's better to do that than to make your reputation look bad on the web site."

Klara Lewis said as her son grew up, she tried to create an environment where he could pursue what he obviously loved.

"I think one of the goals of parenting is you have to make sure the child knows how to keep themselves busy. You don't come to parent and say I'm bored, I'm bored," she said. "He always has something he's working on, whether it's Legos, or practicing piano, or practicing violin. He's a very busy kid."

Winning the youth entrepreneur award inspired Lewis to expand his business to new areas and to make his existing operations more efficient, he said. Lewis hopes to start selling custom building instructions for sets he designs on his own. He also wants to buy Legos directly from the Lego Group in Denmark, to get parts cheaper and turn a larger profit.

His entrepreneurship may expand to new areas after college, where he plans to study business or design.

"I really like business, so maybe a similar kind of thing but maybe with a different item. I don't think I can make a living off of doing the same thing, Legos. Maybe on real estate or cars or something like that," Lewis said. "Since I like Legos and I have talent for it, I could also maybe move to Denmark and work for them, design for them."

### **This post was written by:**



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