

Making waves

Big plans flowing for Oklahoma River

The changing face of Rotary P.15

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SHANNON CORNMAN

Brick work

Building replicas of iconic metro buildings is a snap, when one is using Legos

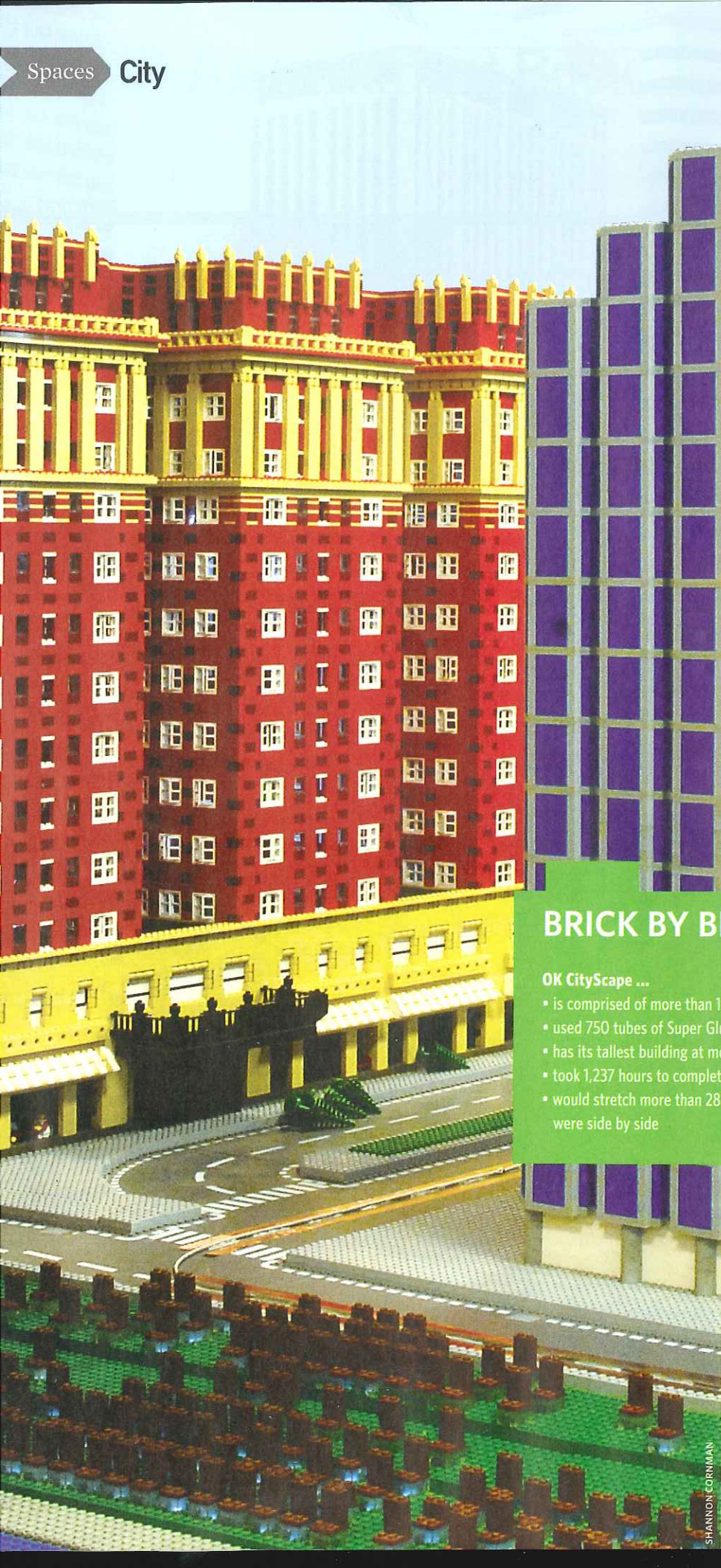
BY ROD LOTT

It only took four months to construct Oklahoma City from the ground up.

Let's clarify: entirely in Legos, that is.

As a fund-raiser for Oklahoma City Educare, an educational and developmental center serving at-risk children, many of the city's iconic buildings and attractions have been re-created in the toy bricks by Michigan-based artist Kurt Zimmerle. The results, dubbed OK CityScape, are viewable through Jan. 3, 2010, at Penn Square Mall.

"It's my back-of-the-napkin idea," says David Matthews, OK CityScape founder. "I'm just a serial entrepreneur type. I love starting things."



BRICK BY BRICK

OK CityScape ...

- is comprised of more than 1.5 million Legos
- used 750 tubes of Super Glue
- has its tallest building at more than 11 feet
- took 1,237 hours to complete
- would stretch more than 28 miles if each brick were side by side

After seeing a similar project in another state, only with model trains, he thought assembling OKC's skyline in Legos would make for a good annual revenue source for Educare. Admission fees – \$5 for adults, \$3 for children – will help cover any shortfall the center may have in its yearly operating budget.

"I thought Legos only because I thought representing the community through its skyline would be a neat way to attract sponsors," Matthews says. "It becomes a pretty compelling question: Would you like your building and your brand to be in the skyline or not? Fortunately, well over 90% of those we talked to said, 'Yes, absolutely.'"

With general underwriting provided by Matthews and Inasmuch Foundation, Zimmerle was hired to construct Lego replicas of recognizable public spaces and the building of corporate donors. According to Matthews, Zimmerle built most of the structures simply from photos.

"This is by far the largest undertaking he's ever done. It's well over a million bricks," Matthews says. "He does it all mentally. That blew my mind."

The Bricktown Canal features moving boats, while the AT&T Bricktown Ballpark is depicted with piped-in sounds of a game being played to complement the visuals. Details have not been spared; the chairs in the Oklahoma City National Memorial are lit from beneath, and even the towering Dale Chihuly glass piece in the Oklahoma City Museum of Art's lobby is

visible through its windows.

Other sites featured include Ford Center, Myriad Botanical Gardens, Skirvin Hotel, Chase Tower, St. Anthony Hospital, Plaza Court, Chesapeake Energy, The Classen, American Fidelity Assurance Co., MidFirst Bank and the state Capitol.

"Things aren't placed literally where they are in the city, but they're generally close," Matthews says.

One exception: the in-construction

Devon Tower, which will be the city's tallest building once complete. In keeping with scale, Zimmerle's finished version is too tall to sit on the raised platforms as the rest of the OK CityScape exhibit, so it's been moved at floor level, near the admissions counter.

The more complex buildings took Zimmerle between 20 and 40 hours to piece together, Matthews says, but smaller ones were assembled in half a day.

He says he expects 20,000 people to visit the exhibit, and OK CityScape has a 10-year agreement with Educare, so expect to see it become as much of a holiday metro staple as the B.C. Clark jingle.

"It's pure fun for the family, to know that you're supporting a good cause," Matthews says. "The really neat thing about this project is that it can grow and evolve over time, just like the city is." ^{BIZ}



"It can grow and evolve over time, just like the city is."

DAVID MATTHEWS

