

Orinda CoasterDad Plans to Open MakerSpace Site

Goal to bring physics, family and fun to kids everywhere

By Diane Claytor



Lyle Pemble works on his latest projectile-shooting robotic.

Photos Diane Claytor

When Will Pemble took one of his three homemade roller coasters to the Maker Faire in San Mateo last month, he had thousands of kids and their parents clamoring for more information. How and where did he build it? How could they learn to build one? Could he teach them to build their own? All these questions gave Pemble an idea: "I could set something up," he said. "I should create an environment where more than just my kids and their friends can experience the excitement of creating and learning." And that is exactly what Pemble is planning – the CoasterDad MakerSpace, a facility "that will be just like my house only bigger and more organized."

Pemble is not a man who focuses on the negative, rarely uttering the word no. "If you say no to an idea, you get an instant result. Nothing changes. Nothing is learned. Nothing positive happens," Pemble said. Last year, when his sixth-grade son, Lyle, said, "Wouldn't it be cool to have a roller coaster in our yard?" Pemble immediately admitted that it would, indeed, be cool. "I flashed through the mechanics of it and figured it wouldn't be so hard to do, and that's why we built it," he said. "For me, it was a very natural response to a very reasonable question."

Walking into Pemble's Orinda house, the first reaction is that this is definitely a kid-centric place. Besides the roller coaster, which takes up most of the backyard, the living room walls are covered with framed pictures drawn by Lyle and his sister, Ellie. The "work" area/lab, complete with computers, 3-D printer, robotic materials and lots of small pieces most visitors wouldn't be able to identify, fills about one-fifth of the living room, an area Pemble admits will likely take over the whole space in due time. All of this is done with the support of Pemble's wife, Liz, whom he de-

scribes as the "sane one." According to Pemble, Liz enjoys and participates in all his "crazy" endeavors.

"Most of what I do," Pemble said, "comes from my passion for wanting to educate my kids and make sure they have every opportunity to learn. That's what my house is for; that's what the MakerSpace will be – a place where kids can think stuff up and make it come true. Kids' minds are entirely agile. They're typically so much more open-minded."

Last year Ellie was convinced that Lyle was entering her room when she wasn't there, and she wanted to bust him. Pemble asked how she could accomplish that. The two of them put their heads together and came up with the Brother Buster, a motion sensor that hooks to the computer and, when someone enters Ellie's room, sends her a text. Pemble, whose energy and creativity seem boundless, explained, "All I wanted to do was teach her how to make something to solve her problem. And this was a 13-year-old girl's solution to a 13-year-old girl's issue. At one level or another, we are a family of makers."

Pemble's house already attracts the neighborhood kids, and the MakerSpace will only expand on that. "Kids show up here and don't want to leave," Pemble noted. "When they're here, it's not just to play. They learn, they ask questions. They answer questions. They don't just get to ride the roller coaster, they learn how and why it works."

He hopes to take all this to the next level in the fall with the opening of the CoasterDad MakerSpace, a 4,500-square-foot facility in Concord. "A MakerSpace is a creative, do it yourself space where people can gather to create, invent and learn. It opens the mind and allows for infinite ... connections," according to Pemble's website. The plan is to have classes in 3-D printing, drone and robot building, electronics, cooking, videography and YouTube production, as well as the opportunity to "invent kooky new things with science-y tools." Pemble, a self-described tinkerer, proclaims that it's always been his mission to "let kids know that the coolest stuff ever – rockets, airplanes, things that go boom and things that go fast – all come from math and science."

Pemble's goal is to let the kids "drive the curriculum, teach them things they're interested in, offer all sorts of interesting, stimulating opportunities and then step back and let them try and learn and fail and retry," he said. His son, Lyle, will teach a robotics class. After all, Pemble said, "What's better than having someone who understands both robotics and the other kids actually teach the class. He's someone other kids can relate



The Brother Buster was developed and built by Will Pemble and his daughter, Ellie, to keep her brother from entering her room when she's not there.

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