

# PR EXECUTIVE IN FOR A RIDE

## Fun is assembling new LEGOLAND one brick at a time

BY ADAM DURSO

MANY PEOPLE SPEND THEIR LIVES SEARCHING for a “fun” job while others believe that such a thing doesn’t exist. For Matt Besterman, MS ’16, fun is one of the building blocks on which his current position was founded.

In May, Besterman was named public relations manager for LEGOLAND New York, the newest location for the theme park inspired by the popular toy.

“My business these days is basically getting children excited about fun,” Besterman said. “It really is a dream opportunity.”

Slated for a 2020 grand opening, LEGOLAND New York will be the biggest theme park yet built by Merlin Entertainments. Under construction on 500 acres in the town of Goshen, New York, just over an hour from New York City, the 150-acre resort will feature more than 50 rides, shows and attractions, including the popular Lego Mindstorms, Bricktopia and Lego City; and a 250-room Lego-themed hotel. It will be the third LEGOLAND in the U.S. (others are located in Winter Haven, Florida, and Carlsbad, California), and the ninth in the world behind locations such as Japan, Denmark, England and Dubai.

When he isn’t conducting regional, national and international media outreach or planning PR events, Besterman is helping redesign the resort’s website and guiding its social media strategy.

“There are so many aspects to this,” he said. “My job is never boring.”

Falling into what he considers the “brass ring” of jobs was unexpected and involved equal parts foresight and serendipity. Prior to joining the LEGOLAND team, Besterman worked for 20 years as a TV news producer, 10 of them at NY1 News in Manhattan, where he directed coverage of stories ranging from the devastation of Superstorm Sandy to the annual New York City Marathon.

Besterman, who lives with his family 15 minutes from Goshen, had covered the development and site selection process of the park since 2015, while serving as executive producer of Spectrum News Hudson Valley. During this time, he realized that his field was drastically changing. He enrolled in Quinnipiac’s MS in Interactive Media and Communications program to keep on top of those changes and expand his career outlook.

“I hadn’t decided yet if I was going to stay or leave TV news, but I wanted to be prepared for whatever came next,” he said.

The online communications program gave Besterman a broad background in user experience (UX), web and graphic design techniques, social media strategy and various digital storytelling platforms. A few months after completing the degree, Besterman decided a career change was in order.

“I’d had enough of covering fires and shootings,” he said. “I’m a storyteller—it’s what I do—but I wanted different stories to tell.”

Over the next year, Besterman worked as an independent public relations consultant and freelanced for several firms. His chance to tell the kinds of stories he wanted came in early 2018, when LEGOLAND posted the public relations manager position. Besterman jumped at the opportunity, but wasn’t entirely confident that his hard news background would be a good fit at first.



“Throughout that whole interview process, I thought, ‘Nah, this isn’t going to happen.’”

But Besterman made an impression with his public relations experience, diverse skillset, knowledge of the New York media and enthusiasm for the park and its parent company. He quickly realized his decision to return to school and earn his master’s when he did was a prescient one.

“The skills I learned in my program really stood me in good stead while I was changing careers,” he said.

That change came at an opportune time. The resort, Besterman believes, will be a central attraction in a major tourism corridor that stretches across the Hudson Valley. He is already helping to plan the release of annual passes, advance hotel reservations and other future promotions.

“We are the first major theme park to open in the Northeast in decades,” Besterman said. “And we fit with the Hudson Valley’s identity as a center for creativity.”

He looks forward to attending the 2020 ribbon-cutting with his wife and children. While his kids, currently 20, 18 and 16, may be a bit older than the park’s target demographic of 2-12, Besterman hasn’t ruled out other possibilities.

“They certainly won’t be too old to work at LEGOLAND, will they?” he quipped.

Matt Besterman with a tabletop model of the LEGOLAND New York theme park under construction.