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Game on!

By **James McEvoy**/ Special to the Free Press
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Since the late 1970s and Pong, video games have become a staple of international popular culture, and one man from Melrose has developed a way for gamers across the country to connect.

Mike Festa, Melrose resident and recent George Washington University graduate, developed the "Ultimate Game Trading Community" after spending nine months developing GameTraderWorld.com.

The site, which launched last Friday, Nov. 3 by Festa, the son of state Rep. Mike Festa, D-Melrose, offers an abundance of other features besides the ability for users to exchange games.

The system actually works quite simply: Users create lists of games they want to trade and specify what they want in exchange, either in monetary terms or in games they want.

Once someone finds a game they'd like, they can pay the user or make their own offer. The user can then accept the offer based on whether or not they trust the prospective trader or find the offer fair.

Both traders pay shipping - GameTraderWorld.com only charges a 99 cent transaction fee.

Additionally, there are forums where users can chat away, read game reviews and other's wish lists. There are also user ranks and awards for gamers.

The project, started in February, was possible due to Festa's nearly 10 years of experience in Web design. He created his business, Festa Technologies LLC, on Aug. 31 and then released his beta Web site on Oct. 1.

Festa's motivation for the site is more than just providing a service - it also provides him a way to spend time with his fiancé.

"My continued motivation for this project, besides the pride of having a great Web site that makes games more affordable to gamers, is to be able to go back to live in France this spring, while Emeline completes her last semester," he said.

Festa met his fiancé while she was an exchange student at his alma mater, George Washington University.

Festa believes the site will actually benefit from competition from the likes of EBay, Craigslist and video game stores, both chains and those independently operated.

"I am actually not concerned with the competition, but rather inspired by it," he said. "I've tried to take the best of what the Web has to offer and combine it in a unique way to target the most important aspects for my target audience, gamers."

One example is a feedback system that he's adapted and is something Festa believes has been essential to the success of the EBay experience.

"Each user has a rank that they improve by interacting with the community," he explained.

He also believes that GameFly, an online game rental site, provides a good service, which he can emulate in his business.

"The key difference between what Game Trader World offers and what GameFly offers is that gamers get to own the game and do it for significantly less," he said.

Festa believes there is little or no effect on his business given the local celebrity of his father, state Rep. Mike Festa, since GameTraderWorld.com is for users nationwide. To the contrary, he admits there could actually be a benefit at the local level.

"I hope that local residents will be interested in the service for themselves or their children on its own merit," he said, "but I think that seeing my name will [perhaps] make them more inclined to read about it in the first place. Certainly it helps locally to have my father's name, but as this is a nationwide service, it doesn't impact the launch that much," he said.

Festa has been an avid gamer himself for the majority his life, with his first experience in gaming occurring when he received a Nintendo Entertainment System for Christmas when he was five. Since then, he's been hooked.

Among his favorite games are some of the multiple role-playing games, known as RPGs, including Elder Scrolls III and IV as well as Phantasy Star Online.

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Festa said he plans to add more features to GameTraderWorld.com in addition to releasing bi-weekly feature packs for the site.

Before its official launch, Festa's Web site was only a beta version - but he said he has received some positive feedback regardless. He realizes there is room for improvement and has added a feedback feature to help facilitate any possible upgrades.






"I want this to be an open community where we take the best ideas and use them to make something that works well for everyone," he said. "This launch signifies the publicity of the site and I hope to start receiving feedback from new users soon."

More information regarding the program is available at www.GameTraderWorld.com.

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