

*Life's a game*

# Collin College hosts Global Game Jam

**G**LOBAL GAME JAM's (GGJ) secret theme was revealed in a hush in Australia. By the time it was relayed to Texas most of the world had begun the 48-hour crunch to create unique games. In a few short hours jammers in Hawaii would enter the melee.

**The Jam heats up**

Collin College student Will Foldi sat in a room with more than 50 programmers, students, professors, graphic artists and other professionals anticipating the challenge of creating a game in a mere two days.

The room fell silent as facilitators started the online video explaining the international theme. Words appeared on the screen, tormenting the viewers by asking if they were ready, and then the secret was revealed—a heartbeat. After digesting the concept and its open-ended possibilities, Foldi turned to the people next to him, and they began to brainstorm.

"It was the coolest thing because groups made different games. We started at 7 p.m. and brainstormed until midnight. We came back the next day at 10 a.m. and worked on our parts individually. I was the programmer. We used the Unity 3D game engine that I used in my classes to build the game and Maya to make the 3D assets or objects. I continued to work from 11 p.m. to 10 a.m. off-site. I slept under a desk for maybe two hours. I had to get it done. If we didn't have the programming, then it would be just a bunch of objects not doing anything," Foldi said.

**Jam-packed with participants**

Holding a 2012 Guinness World Record as the world's largest game jam, the 2013 Global Game Jam drew even more participants with 319 jam sites in 63 countries.

According to Marshall Pittman, Collin College professor of communication design, North Texas jammers watched live streaming video of their counterparts in the U.S. and in countries such as Sweden, South America, Turkey, Costa Rica and Mexico. One of four sites in Texas, the college has hosted the international event for the last three years, and Pittman says people travel from as far as Arkansas to participate.

"We have an exceptional facility at Collin. Jammers have access to Mac and PC labs, white boards for planning, and comfortable collaboration areas," he said.

Pittman notes the last GGJ boasted more than 16,000 registered jammers and more than 3,000 games. In 2013, the Collin College site produced 11 games, ranging from Windows phone and PC games, to text adventures and monopoly-style board games. He adds that anyone interested in the free event, regardless of



Adam Hill, software developer, Will Foldi, Collin College student, and Marshall Pittman, Collin College professor of communication design, cannot wait for the upcoming 2014 Global Game Jam.

experience or skill set, is welcome, and he asserts that GGJ offers unique opportunities for community members, students and professionals.

"Students have the opportunity to work with professional programmers and graphic artists on tight deadlines. GGJ is an intensive practical laboratory that reinforces what I teach in class. Today, I run the Game Simulation and Group Project class like the GGJ, except we have more time. Everyone pitches ideas. We put them all on the board for a vote and spend the semester working in groups on different projects," he said.

According to Pittman, Adam Hill brought GGJ to North Texas and asked Collin College to serve as a host site. A software developer for Improving Enterprises in Addison, Hill was working in Florida when Susan Gold brought GGJ, previously known as Nordic Game Jam, to the

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U.S. Five years ago, he was one of the first attendees. When he moved back to Texas, he brought the international opportunity with him.

In January 2013, Hill was working for Code Authority and asked founder and president Jason Taylor to sponsor pizza for the GGJ event.

“GGJ is a microcosm of the game industry. One advantage of GGJ is community building. Industry professionals observe students’ abilities and see how they work in high-pressure situations. This community is how companies acquire their next set of employees. Will (Foldi) impressed me because he learned on the fly. His game was awesome. I was impressed that his team completed the game in 48 hours. He impressed Jason just like he impressed me,” Hill said.

Foldi and his group based their game, *Lost One*, on the concept of a young child awakening from a nightmare with his hands partially covering his eyes, searching for a parent. The object of the game is to listen to auditory clues and pick up objects, such as a pacifier or blanket. As players get closer to the objects, the sound is amplified. Two members of the Dallas International Game Developers Association named *Lost One* the best overall game at the local site.

Foldi took the weekend off from waiting tables to attend GGJ and says the decision probably cost him a couple hundred dollars. However, he says the experience was more than worth it.

### **Jam’s my bread and butter**

Foldi said, “GGJ is the greatest single thing that has ever happened to me in my career. It helped me get a job as a developer at Code Authority in Frisco. We provide software development, applications and Search Engine Optimization. Companies can purchase the software we are developing. Currently, I am working on a project for the oil industry. I owe my job to the skills I learned at Collin College and Global Game Jam.”

The 2014 GGJ will take place January 24-26. Registration for the event is slated to begin in December. To check out the 2013 games or for more information, visit <http://bit.ly/CollinGGJ> or contact Marshall Pittman at [Mpittman@collin.edu](mailto:Mpittman@collin.edu). 