

# LOCALNEWS

## All about gaming

Engineering students design board games for fifth-grade critics

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

Playing games as an assignment on the last day of school before Christmas break was well-received last week by an anxious group of fifth graders.

Angie Cody's students could hardly wait to get their hands on a race across the country, a horse racing challenge, and battle of dice – a few of the games a Falls High School engineering class designed for the group to play.

"We wanted a unique game that was edgy," said Gary Harala, a senior in the engineering class. "We came up with some sort of battle and we figured the best way to construct it for fifth graders was with dice."

The seniors, juniors and sophomores who are enrolled in the class launched at the beginning of the school year split into groups to design original games for two to four players that could be learned and played in about 15 minutes.

Dave Olson, who co-teaches the class with Timm Ringhofer, said the project was developed as a problem-solving exercise.

"We gave (students) a set of parameters to work within and had them come

up with a unique solution," Olson said. "We really wanted them to do some technical writing and come up with a set of appropriate instructions for their game."

Expecting the exercise to stir some hesitation, Olson said he was surprised how quickly the students took to the project.

"The kids got into their groups and really went to work," he said. "They thought it was fun because we spent two days playing a multitude of games in the classroom to get ideas from. We played traditional family board games, math games, and even some old-time games that my father taught me from when he was a boy in the 1920s."

The biggest challenge, Olson said, was writing game directions for a fifth-grade level. Along the way, he said instructions had several holes in them leaving the board games open to be interpreted in many ways.

"We switched up the groups and had them play each others games to test for problems," he said. "Two of my art metal classes also volunteered to play the games...and they left constructive criticism about each of the games and the instructions. This helped the groups to rewrite and improve on their game."



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE

Fifth-grade students Jade McGuire, left, and Hailie George play a board game designed by students in a Falls High School engineering class Dec. 20.

The end result appeared well worth it.

"By the end (of playing the games), the fifth graders wanted to keep the games for themselves," Olson said. "It got louder and louder as the hour went by. We decided that if the high school students do not want the games for themselves, we are going to give them to Mrs. Cody's class after the Christmas break."

A project like this, Olson concluded, solidified the strides being made by students in the class since it began in September.

"We are making up the class as we go and we are seeing that some projects

are more engaging than others," he said. "One thing I think has changed is how (students) approach a problem. There is much less hemming and hawing than in the past. They tend to jump in and go, less wait time for a leader of the group to emerge."

Once students return to the classroom after a two-week winter break, Olson said they will study flotation and boat design, computer code writing and look at alternative energy sources.

"It has been an adventure so far and the students and the teachers are all learning together this first time through," he said.



From the left, John Glover, Will Peterson and Ashton Hielscher appear to enjoy the game they play in Dave Olson and Timm Ringhofer's engineering class.



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