

D&C, RIT offer some alternate reality fun

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STAFF WRITER

Collaboration and competition will come together for a good cause in Rochester this fall. The *Democrat and Chronicle* and the Rochester Institute of Technology's Lab for Social Computing have teamed to create *Picture the Impossible*, a game the community will play for seven weeks, earning points that will lead to charitable contributions.

The first-of-its-kind project is based on Rochester's history of innovation and risk-taking, and provides games, puzzles and activities that will require players to work together for solutions.

Picture the Impossible, which begins Sept. 12 and runs through Oct. 31, challenges participants to work puzzles in the newspaper, online and by visiting Rochester landmarks and neighborhoods. Early registration, which is worth 100 extra points, begins today at picturetheimpossible.com.

"The alternate reality game format layers game systems and game content on top of everyday reality — enhancing (players') real-world experience," says Elizabeth Lawley, an RIT associate professor and the director of the Lab for Social Computing.

Each week the challenges, developed by a team of newspaper staff

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members and RIT students and faculty, will focus on a Rochester-related theme, including imaging, social equality, food, music, arts and crafts, and Rochester firsts.

"I like the idea of a game that blends offline and online together," says Web developer Vince Cardillo, 24, of Rochester. "The idea of having to leave your chair and explore the city is great. But ultimately, I think it's fun to know that when you're out and about playing the game, other people around you might be playing it, too, and that's neat."

Here's how to play: When you register, choose one of three organizations you'd like to support — Foodlink, the University of Rochester Medical Center's Golisano Children's Hospital or Wilson Commencement Park. The charities are tied in the game to three factions in a fictional secret society known as The Gears, which has included historical figures in its membership over the years.

Starting Sept. 12, complete the puzzles and games in the daily newspaper and on picture

theimpossible.com to earn points. Scavenger hunts and other local challenges throughout Rochester will offer another way to earn points.

Points that players and their team earn will translate to charitable donations. Points earned also can lead to prizes, such as Kodak cameras and printers.

Winners of challenges throughout the game will be invited to a Halloween gala Oct. 31 at RIT's Center for Student Innovation.

Although *Picture the Impossible* is open to everyone, it's geared toward young professionals, an audience the *Democrat and Chronicle* is increasingly embracing, says Traci Bauer, managing editor for content and digital platforms at the paper.

"The common thing we hear is this is a group of people that really cares about giving back to the community — volunteering, contributing to charities and making the community a place that will retain more young people," Bauer says. "We really wanted one big project where we could say, 'This is a chance to get deeper into that.' We think that once we lay that foundation and people get familiar with what this community used to be known for, then we can start hav-



ing a better dialogue about where to go in the future.”

Jim Fogler, vice president of marketing for the *Democrat and Chronicle*, agrees: “Using extensive research and, more importantly, listening to young professionals, we’re delivering what they’ve asked for most: opportunities to network and to make a positive difference in our community. And we’re giving them what they asked for in a really cool way.”

The game benefits from partnerships with WXXI Public Broadcasting, SCVNGR, Eastman Kodak

Co., and the Marie C. and Joseph C. Wilson Foundation. Many parts of the game are based on technology provided by Microsoft’s Bing. “It’s great to have a chance to show what Bing Maps can do in the context of a game, especially one that gets the local community and its newspaper in the mix,” said Betsy Aoki, program manager for Bing at Microsoft Corp., which also is co-sponsoring the Oct. 31 party. □

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To register and learn more

For more information,

go to www.picturetheimpossible.com or www.facebook.com/picturetheimpossible.

Weekly themes

Sept. 12-18: Arts & Crafts

Sept. 19-25: Local Food & Drink

Sept. 26-Oct. 2: Rochester Firsts

Oct. 3-9: Performing Arts

Oct. 10-16: Imaging & Optics

Oct. 17-23: Famous Figures

Oct. 24-30: Social Justice

Oct. 31: Gala Party

Picture the Impossible

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