

Montreal man paid \$5 on the web to become virtual mayor of Brockville

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It cost Montreal resident Alan Morrison all of \$5 to become Brockville's new mayor.

Well, virtually, anyway.

The 40-year-old West Island resident, one of the nearly 30,000 members of the "virtual world" known as Weblo.com, recently spent that sum to purchase the company's virtual rights to Brockville.

"I just thought it would be fun," he said in a telephone interview.

The unemployed former office worker in the aerospace industry is also the virtual mayor of other cities and towns including Napanee, Tweed, Orangeville and Kamloops, B.C.

"It's a nice small town," he said of Brockville.

Weblo bills itself as a "social networking" website with "localized, relevant content about the real world."

The Montreal-based company was launched officially last December and now has nearly 30,000 members worldwide, said Weblo's senior director of marketing and operations, Kelly Ekins. Members use real-world money to buy virtual representations of real places on Weblo, said Ekins.

What they get is a small web page where they can put up relevant content about the place in question and derive revenue from relevant advertising funnelled to it by Weblo, she said.

The site is based on the American model, so Canadian provinces end up having "governors" rather than premiers, she said.

Hence, as Brockville's virtual mayor, Morrison must pay Ontario's virtual "governor" a cut of his ad revenue and other percentages on transactions on his page.

It may sound like a game, but many people figure they can make money off it. Weblo staff said the virtual equivalent of California sold for \$53,000, while virtual Ontario sold for \$16,900.

But Brockville residents hoping to see themselves represented on Weblo may be a little disappointed. So far, there is very little Brockville-related content on the site. What figures most prominently is a MySpace video about a Bigfoot encounter.

Morrison said he bought up a few small cities on Weblo hoping the upstart company will prove as popular as another virtual world, Second Life, where people have been making money on similar transactions.

Should Weblo prove as big a cyberspace hit, he may even get a profit by selling Brockville to someone else. (The city's current resale price is listed as \$100.)

Interested area residents can get to Brockville's Weblo equivalent by going to www.weblo.com/property/city/Brockville/62368.

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