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Published April 22, 2007 01:06 am - We know our elected mayor as the very real Mayor John Fretti, but did you know that our fair city also has a "virtual" mayor — a woman from Toronto, Canada, who goes by the name of Kitty?

Join Weblo.com and 'buy' the state of Georgia

By **Billy Bruce**
The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — We know our elected mayor as the very real Mayor John Fretti, but did you know that our fair city also has a "virtual" mayor — a woman from Toronto, Canada, who goes by the name of Kitty?

"Kitty" purchased Valdosta and Lawrenceville for \$5 each on Feb. 3 at Weblo.com — an online game that's gained a reputation as "Monopoly on Steroids."

When you "purchase" a city at Weblo.com, you become its "mayor," or a state, its "governor," and you earn very real money.

Kitty had previously "owned" Gainesville, which she bought for \$5 and sold for \$10, according to Colin Trethewey, director of media relations at Weblo.com. Contacted by Trethewey, Kitty declined a request for comment by The Times.

Governorship of a state provides ample earning opportunities because state owners earn 10 percent of membership fees anywhere else in the state, Weblo.com CEO and founder Rocky Mirza explained.

And Georgia is one of the few big states still up for grabs, Mirza noted.

Membership at Weblo.com is free, but many participants choose to pay \$279 a year for VIP membership privileges that increase their opportunities to earn money, Mirza said.

"So if 100 members join in Georgia as VIP members, the governor earns \$2,790," he said. "Weblo is free, but some members buy upgraded memberships so they get discounts on purchases of city and earn more. State owners can also resell the state for profit. Ontario, Canada, was originally purchased for \$11,450 and resold for \$16,900. State governors also earn a percentage of all transactions in the entire state and ad revenue from the entire state."

Lowndes County isn't for sale because Weblo doesn't sell counties, but a virtual copy of every real city, state and property is up for sale. More than 6,000 cities have sold for real money and the virtual mayors of these cities are making money from all transactions in their territories. More than 3,000 U.S. cities have sold at Weblo, Trethewey said.

Properties? What properties? Well, the Empire State Building was sold and re-sold for profit. California sold for \$53,000. Texas sold for \$23,000. Thousands of people are spending real money to buy virtual cities, states, properties and even celebrities, Trethewey said.

Could this be legal in the United States?

"Yes, it is legal in all 50 states," Mirza said.

Weblo.com was Mirza's brainchild. He launched the Web site on Dec. 5, 2006, from its headquarters in Montreal, Canada, but took nine years to



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develop and birth the concept. Montreal is famous for game development companies and talent. Game companies such as E.A. and Ubisoft are based in Montreal, Mirza said.

"What would you say if someone told you that they could duplicate the world we live in, from the Grand Canyon right down to the pebbles in your backyard?" Mirza said. "Weblo.com is the perfect parallel universe uninhabited and ready for exploration and acquisition. Now there are two identical worlds, one the world we live in, the other an online copy.

"History is made by discoverers, those of us who eagerly venture into the unknown — boldly going where none have gone before and staking a claim for their king, their country and themselves. Marco Polo did it by camel; Columbus by ship; Armstrong by rocket. Now anyone, anywhere on earth can do it with Weblo."

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