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## One place where real estate is still booming

By Joseph Gidjunis  
Staff Writer

REHOBOTH BEACH — Within a millisecond, the entire virtual government of this well-known beach resort has been bought for \$5 and turned over to a man who lives in Pittsburgh.

Salisbury and Easton have met the same fate in recent months, being sold for pennies on the dollar to a woman in Florida.



The news is startling as entire states such as Maryland have sold for a few thousand dollars, and new governors have been installed. It only took \$7,751 for Maryland, \$10,458 to buy Virginia and \$1,601 bought the First State.

It's a virtual coup d'etat, but without the violence. It's happening throughout the United States and around the world with the help of Weblo.com, one of the latest Internet crazes. It has been described as Monopoly on steroids, but with real money.

For less than a price of an old used car, anyone can own a large virtual chunk of the world, said Weblo.com spokesperson Colin Trethewey. Cities across Delmarva are still up for grabs for the same price as a Big Mac. People are getting in to make money, meet people and protect their real-world interests in the virtual world.

"It is enjoyable. I'm looking at things, and what's going on. What other people are buying and doing. It's an interesting place," said Rehoboth Beach's Weblo.com Mayor John Roden.

Roden, a Pittsburgh resident who vacations in Rehoboth Beach with his family, made the purchase because the coastal resort has personal meaning. He also owns other cities across the globe. It allows him to build a social networking list between cities, something that's good for his job as an advertising executive. It's still not clear if Weblo.com will flop or be a long-term success, but the investment he's made is minimal for a potential big payout.

"To me the investment is nothing," Roden said. "But I want to see what happens." More than 9,800 cities have sold, and Weblo.com is looking to expand to sell countries and even planets, Trethewey said. England sold in a live auction for more than \$60,000. The United States may sell to the winner of a presidential election, with the voters being Weblo.com members.

What makes Weblo.com different from other simulation games and sites is that everything is real. No virtual islands or other fantasies are accepted. And only one person can lay claim to each location. If somebody wants your city, they must make an offer in real dollars.

Las Vegas has been resold twice. The last price was \$2,300. Seattle was sold for \$2,000, or profit of \$1,960.

Users also make real money by developing their empires and updating their cities with user-desired content. Popular site owners receive a share of the advertising dollars on the site, and locations or profiles that receive more than 10,000 hits start earning cash from Weblo.com. Through a legitimate pyramid scheme, the governor of Maryland also receives a share of everything that happens within it. So anytime Salisbury's mayor Heather Lingard makes money, so will the governor.

Rockville's Weblo.com Mayor Alan Glazier said his interest was protecting his own business, and a cheap way to advertise.

"Somebody is going to own it, and somebody is going to pay for it. It's a lot less money than I've wasted on other advertising," Glazier said. "Why don't I at least get control of my area."

Governments and private corporations have not expressed concerns that its virtual image is being controlled by another entity. Weblo.com said it would remove any real-world property from its virtual database, but no complaints have been filed.

Salisbury City Manager John Pick said the city's image isn't probably being harmed, so the danger is minimal, but if things change, the city would consider changing its position.

[jgidjunis@dmg.gannett.com](mailto:jgidjunis@dmg.gannett.com)  
410-845-4630



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