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SPORTS

Own a part of virtual community

By Alicia Coffman, news@mariettatimes.com

For the right price, no one can be denied the privilege of being the mayor of Marietta — online that is.

Anyone who has ever dreamed of serving as a governor or yearned to own a state, town or property can get all that and more through virtual worlds like the newly formed Weblo.com.

Weblo.com is a virtual world that isn't 3-D or make-believe, but is instead based on the real world with real people and places represented. Members can purchase and create a Web page dedicated to cities, states and numerous other things. The pages usually include information about and pictures of the person or place.

Members and owners of Weblo pages can also make real-world money.

"It's been referred to as 'Monopoly on Steroids,'" said Sean Morrow, director of marketing for the Web site.

Members can make money by being a mayor or governor, for each person that looks at their page, the advertising on their page, transaction fees from those people living in their territory and eventually even a profit if they sell what they own, he said.

For example, Morrow said, Las Vegas recently sold and the seller made a \$1,970 profit. With time, the prices for cities and properties will go up.

Founder Rocky Mirza launched Weblo on Dec. 6, 2006, and the site already has 38,000 members. Mirza decided to create the world so that people could actually make money while they are having fun on the Internet, Morrow said.

"Most people just realize that they are online all the time, they might as well get paid for it," he said.

Weblo.com quick facts

n Began in December 2006.

n Has 38,000 members.

n Marietta can be purchased for \$25.

n Ohio can be purchased for \$16,290.

n Pages on common people or celebrities can be created for free.

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Internet users can also create a page for a celebrity, their own family or other people for free. Cities can be purchased for a minimum of \$25 and states for a minimum of \$100, Morrow said.

Marietta is still for sale for \$25, he said. Ohio is for sale at the price of \$16,290, which is cheap compared to the \$53,000 paid for California. Prices vary in accordance with populations of the city or state.

Morrow said Weblo was created in the nick of time. By 2011, 80 percent of all active online users will maintain a presence in a virtual world, he said.

“People should buy while it’s still a growing trend and then in a few years when literally a majority of Internet users will be part of the virtual world they can sell, for a lot of money,” he said.

Weblo also creates a way for families to do something together, Morrow said. If parents invest and the kids make the pages, suddenly there is family bonding and an opportunity for the parents to teach business skills to their children, he said.

George Molden, a computer support technician for Washington State Community College, said it’s undeniable that games and online usage are increasing rapidly.

“Virtual realities are a way for teenagers, and really anyone, to escape from the real world,” he said. “It gives them a chance to be their idea of happy. Virtual worlds can serve as quite a distraction from anything going on in the real world and bring fantasies to life.”



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740.373.2121 (local) | 800.531.1215 (toll-free)

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