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AARP and ESA Announce UCSC's Trainwreck Games as Winner of Social Connection GameJam Competition at E3 2016

University teams compete in video game pitch focused on promoting positive social connection for people age 50-plus

WASHINGTON, D.C. — AARP and the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) today announced Trainwreck Games from University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) as the \$10,000 winner of the AARP/ESA Social Connection GameJam. This competition, held in conjunction with E3, the world's largest computer and video game event, challenged student game designers to develop new game ideas that promote positive and sustainable social connection among users, particularly for people age 50-plus.

The three finalists were teams of students from George Mason University, Miami University, and UCSC. The teams created digital/electronic games that allow players to increase the size of their social network and increase the frequency of social connection. Team Trainwreck's Letters of Mystery game is an email-based "Escape the Room" adventure that global users can play together.

"We know video games provide entertainment, but equally valuable is their ability to help family and friends stay connected with one another, wherever they may be located," said AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins. "The Social Connection GameJam demonstrates the innovative ways that video games foster social connections and enable us to keep in touch with each other. AARP congratulates GameJam finalists for their creativity in bringing to life new games that foster social interaction."

"The AARP/ESA Game Jam was an unprecedented opportunity for our industry's next generation of video game developers to push boundaries and expand the understanding of who plays video games," said Michael D. Gallagher, president and CEO of ESA, which represents the U.S. video game industry and owns E3. "I can think of no better place than E3 to illustrate further the immense popularity of video games and their unique ability to bring generations together."

Finalists' game concepts included:

Team Trilingual from George Mason University created "Neighbors." This game's goal is to create an entertaining virtual setting that helps people connect with those who are close to them and those who share similar interests. This virtual world contains a world map where people can travel to various destinations, connect to other people and play mini games with each other. If players enjoy playing together they can choose to become Neighbors in the same neighborhood or city or country of their choosing. Team Trilingual includes team captain Kayla Harris and Lewis Sellari.

Team Puddin' from Miami University, Ohio developed "Furrow," which is a large scale social exploration game meant to reconnect family members and capture the wonder of travel and discovery originally experienced at an earlier age. Furrow is a family vacation distilled into a beautiful, intriguing and creative excursion into a virtual world. Through solving puzzles and challenges together, players of all ages and play styles can discover and appreciate each other's skills in a very personal and tangible way. Team Puddin' includes team captain Megan Linard, Christian Coppoletti and Tom Myers.

Trainwreck Games from University of California, Santa Cruz originated "Letters of Mystery," which is a co-op, email-based Escape the Room adventure. In it, players from across the world will be separated into groups where they will complete objectives by getting clues from a server and discussing the actions to take among them before submitting the answers. The interface looks like a Point-And-Click adventure, with a chatroom, and the game is email based so apps are not required. Team Trainwreck Games includes team captain Alexander Formoso, Pedro Cori and Cong Liu.

"It's important for AARP to be in the video game space because we need new voices, not only on the creation side but also on the player side," said Robin Hunicke, a GameJam judge as well as a video game designer, producer and co-founder of Funomena. "As we age, we need to reinvent the way we think about what video games mean for our society and how they create a better culture. We need to reach out and show people that video games are a fun and great way to spend time with the people you love and know."

Other judges for the event included:

- **Sid Meier** - Often regarded as “The Godfather of Computer Games,” Sid is a Co-Founder and Director of Creative Development at Firaxis Games.
- **John Ratzenberger** is a successful screenwriter, director, producer and multi Emmy-nominated actor.
- **Kamili Wilson** is Vice President of Enterprise Initiatives at AARP where she oversees the association’s “Disrupt Aging” program.
- **Freddie Wong** is a filmmaker and competitive gamer. Wong participates in several YouTube channels with his production company RocketJump.

The AARP/ESA Social Connection GameJam was produced with the support of the Higher Education Video Game Alliance (HEVGA), whose mission is to create a platform for higher education leaders, which will underscore the cultural, scientific, and economic importance of video game programs in colleges and universities. HEVGA helped promote the opportunity to its membership, which boasts over 400 members across more than 200 institutions.

Click here for information about [AARP games](#) and [recent AARP/ESA video game research](#).

Video of the AARP/ESA Social Connection GameJam is available [at this link](#).

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About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million that helps people turn their goals and dreams into 'Real Possibilities' by changing the way America defines aging. With staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP works to strengthen communities and promote the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare security, financial security and personal fulfillment. AARP also advocates for individuals in the marketplace by selecting products and services of high quality and value to carry the AARP name. As a trusted source for news and information, AARP produces the world’s largest circulation magazine, AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to political campaigns or candidates. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @aarp and our CEO @JoAnn_Jenkins on Twitter.

About ESA

ESA offers a wide range of services to interactive entertainment software publishers, including conducting business and consumer research, providing legal and policy analysis and advocacy on First Amendment, intellectual property and technology/e-commerce issues, managing a global content protection program, owning and operating E3 and representing video game industry interests in federal and state government relations. For more information, visit ESA's website or follow us on Twitter at @RichatESA or @ESAGovAffairs.

About HEVGA

HEVGA’s mission is to create a platform for higher education leaders which will underscore the cultural, scientific, and economic importance of video game programs in colleges and universities. The key is to create a robust network of resources—including unified advocacy, policymaker engagement, media coverage, and external funding—in order to incubate and harness the impact of this community in a 21st century learning environment

Additional assets available online: **Photos (1)**