

DECEMBER 19, 2008
Vol. 25 No. 36 \$3.00

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local man's board
game hits the
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LO YO! Mason man's card-based board game getting national attention thanks to *Chicago Tribune*, Amazon. | 10



MARK BOWEN | COURIER

From left to right, Lo Yo! developer Dwight Porter plays a round with daughter Alexis, 12, wife Marla, and daughter Asia, 8, in their Mason home.

Card game inventor scores with family-friendly 'Lo Yo!'

BY LISA BIANK FASIG
lfasig@bizjournals.com

If Dwight Porter were given one minute for every year it took to develop his new board game, he could actually play the game in full. Maybe with two minutes to spare.

That's right. Porter, a senior inventory analyst at Formica Corp., spent 17 years creating and developing his family game, called Lo Yo! Conceived in 1991, it finally made it to market in November and can be purchased online at Amazon.com or www.loyo-game.com.

It was a long haul, and expensive too—more than \$20,000. But Porter, of Mason, is a born entrepreneur, having owned a landscaping business and shoe store, and with experience in marketing. And that translates to tenacity. Even when other ventures pulled him from developing the game, he kept coming back to it, testing it with family members and fine-tuning the rules.

"I knew I had a hit when my kids continued to come back to me every night to play a game before they came to bed," Porter said.

So inch by inch, year by year, he worked on the improbability of being a hit in the toy industry. Such an achievement is no walk in the park. Sales in the traditional toy industry declined by 3 percent in the 12 months ended in September 2008, to \$22.2 billion from \$22.8 billion in the same period a year before, according to the Toy Industry Association.

The industry is extremely competitive because many retailers have cut back on toy space and are very cautious about what they do carry. The Internet and licensed entertainment tie-ins make it especially trying for up-and-comers, said Laurie Schacht, president of *The Toy Book*, an industry publication, and co-publisher of "Toy Insider," an annual consumer publication.

"There's over 5,000 new toys (a year) that actually do make it to retail shelves, and a lot more than that try," she said. "It just depends on the item and on the category."

Lo Yo! fits in the category of board games, which is good because that segment is actually growing, albeit marginally. Sales rose to \$2.4 billion in the 12 months ended in

September, from \$2.3 billion in the same period a year before.

Porter, whose game company is called Pfun, describes Lo Yo! as a little Uno, a little Concentration, and a little poker. The goal is to end with the lowest score after six rounds. Players are dealt four cards, numbered one to nine. In addition, there is a Lo Yo! card, worth zero, and an Oh No! card, worth 15 points. Players select from the cards dealt them or from the deck, discarding one card with each turn. A player yells "Lo Yo!" when believing his or her score is the lowest, and the game takes an interesting turn as players then discover the real winner.

Porter created his first prototype of Lo Yo! in 1991. Over the years, he'd take the handmade cards out for his wife, Marla, and daughters, Alexis and Asia, to play. Soon he expanded the test to other family and friends, noting their suggestions for rules and features. Porter said he spent a combined three to five years testing the game with more than 50 people, ages seven to 70.

Such patience was critical; one of several things Porter feels he did right. Also important: finding the best company to develop it. After reviewing about 10 possibilities, Porter chose Grand Prix International, a manufacturer in Indian Orchard, Mass. David Blanchard, project manager at Grand Prix, said he was taken by Lo Yo! The prototype—at more than a decade old—didn't look great, but it played well.

"We all have stacks of games here in the office, and very few make it home," he said. "But I've got to be honest—I'm not just saying this—his game is at my house and I've played it on many occasions. It's a great little card game."

Lo Yo! became available on Nov. 7 and sells for \$12.99. Now, Porter is trying to gain a following to get Lo Yo! on the shelf.

In late November, he attended the Chicago Game & Toy Fair, where he met the inventor of Twister and a developer of Pictionary. A couple distributors also expressed interest. Soon after, the *Chicago Tribune* listed Lo Yo! as one of its "10 cool board games."

The way Porter sees it, card games like his have an edge: They get the family together around the kitchen table, and for less than the cost of a pizza.

"If you can get together and laugh, especially in these times with the economy," he said, "then it's worth it."



Porter

Game cost
more than
\$20K
to develop.