

From: [Sandy C. Gholston](#)
To: [Archive](#); [Shelly L. Armstrong](#)
Subject: Ferris News Services release on modern gaming, Yes Wii Can
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Attachments: [Yes Wii Can.Pg.7.tif](#)

Good afternoon,

Included in this e-mail, below, is a feature story regarding Ferris State University students engaging residents at Metron in Big Rapids through the use of a modern video game system, the Wii. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

There is a photo attached below



Yes Wii Can.Pg.7.tif

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Leah Nixon
Ferris State University
Assistant Director of News Services
leahnixon@ferris.edu, (231) 591-5604

Yes Wii Can: This is Not Your Grandparents' Video Game – or Maybe it is

BIG RAPIDS – On a recent afternoon at the Metron skilled nursing facility in Big Rapids, several residents sitting in wheelchairs or leaning on walkers were playing video bowling using a Wii console. Ferris students supervised, letting the players roll their virtual bowling balls down the cyber-lanes while helping with technical issues only when needed.

The activity stems from a Ferris Foundation Exceptional Merit Grant, “Promoting Healthy Aging through Interactive Technologies,” awarded to Social Work professor Michael Berghoef. The grant is designed to help promote both physical and cognitive health among the elderly. Judging by a collective groan when a bowler rolls a split, it’s working.

“The idea was clever, but I didn’t imagine it would work this well and have pretty much all the intended effects right away,” says Berghoef of the project informally dubbed by students “Wii Can Help!” “These are people who would otherwise have been in their rooms or maybe passively watching television – and they were pretty rowdy. It kind of had the camaraderie of an actual bowling alley.”

The use of such interactive technology is in line with a shift of focus in care for the aging toward active, community-based services. With an anticipated 1 in 6 Americans being elderly by the year 2020, the need for social workers versed in the newest trends in gerontology is great. While this is a huge societal challenge, it also offers new career possibilities for students who recognize the need and have the skills to meet the challenge.

“There’s a huge need for adequately trained workers in the field of gerontology,” says Berghoef. “The need far exceeds the number of workers who will be ready for a graying America. The default position for many students is that they want to work with kids. It’s not

that they don't want to work with older adults – they just haven't thought of it. This grant puts that option out there early on.”

Berghoef also notes that the experience of working with an aging population is important preparation even for those who may work with a younger clientele. “A lot of kids have a grandparent as their primary caregiver. Aging is an issue that is going to present itself, so students need to be prepared.”

Ferris students are involved in the very hands-on grant just as it was Ferris students in gerontology field placements who brought the idea of trying to find funding for the project forward to the Phi Alpha Social Work Honor Society, and ultimately to Berghoef, who suggested submitting an Exceptional Merit Grant proposal. With Berghoef helping to coordinate the effort, students wrote the grant collaboratively on-line using Google Documents, each student taking responsibility for an area of the grant to research and write. The academic rigor that was exercised also extends to quantifying the benefits of an activity that so far has had glowing, but mostly anecdotal, reviews.

“This is a great research opportunity, which we are exploring. There hasn't been a lot of formal research done – so we're building on informal research. We want to do something that students think is valid. I've been asking them what aspect of this they think would be compelling,” Berghoef says. “Such research will help to establish the efficacy of making other assistive technology –especially on-line information technology – more accessible to older adults.”

In addition to the electronic activities, the grant provides for purchase a variety of more traditional, low-tech games such as cribbage, Scrabble and Yahtzee that involve counting and strategy which promote cognitive thinking and social development. However, judging from the response of the Metron residents using the Wii's controller to knock down virtual pins, the world of gaming as experienced through one of its most user-friendly interfaces is going to be the biggest crowd-pleaser in the grant's array of fun and engaging pastimes.

“I wish I could have bottled that experience,” Berghoef says of the Wii's Metron debut. “It was really heartwarming.”



Sandy Gholston
Marketing Specialist
University Advancement & Marketing
Ferris State University
420 Oak Street, Prudden 101
Big Rapids, MI 49307
(231) 591-2021