

Centre aims for digital cutting edge

New masters program will try to keep B.C. at forefront of video-game industry

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The Province

Sunday, September 16, 2007

Vancouver's new graduate school for gamers, the Centre for Digital Media, was officially opened Friday -- in reality and online.

The special ceremony involving students from the school's digital media masters program was done in the real world and in a virtual world called Second Life as a nod to the school's vision.

"We're talking about a newer world here," said Premier Gordon Campbell, before unveiling the new school online with the click of a computer button.

The Great Northern Way campus will be a physical and virtual network of resources, programs and facilities, with graduating students receiving one degree with the seals of four schools, including the University of B.C., Simon Fraser University, BCIT and Emily Carr.

The school is financially supported by both government and the technology industry and is intended to "maintain Vancouver's digital edge," said Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell.

The provincial government is striving to make B.C. a leader in the digital media industry. The province is already one of the world's largest centres for video-game development, with more than 156 companies. The world market is expected to grow from about \$28 billion in 2005 to about \$42 billion in 2010.

Campbell encouraged the students and faculty to "create magic in the years ahead."



CREDIT: Arlen Redekop, The Province

The audience got a few giggles as Premier Gordon Campbell opened the Centre for Digital Media Friday, while his real-time avatar mimicked his every word and move on a screen above.

EA Studios president Paul Lee said people often ask him, "When are you going to get a real job and stop playing video games?"

But the video-game developer said the advancement of digital media technology impacts more than just gamers and represents the future of the Internet.

When approached by the provincial government a few years ago for ideas on how to make Vancouver a world leader in the digital industry, Lee recommended the creation of a graduate school.

"This is what will establish Vancouver as a world leader for years to come," he said.

Elmar dela Cruz will likely be among the 20-month program's first graduates in 2009.

"It's a really good program so far," he said, taking a moment to talk as his fellow students demonstrated new video games.

The UBC graduate said he'd like to be the creative director at a video-game company some day.

"What I really want to do in this program is create games that are both educational and inspirational for kids. Not boring games. I want to push the edge. To push graphics to their fullest.

"We live in Vancouver and half the time it rains. I have no problem with kids being indoors and playing games. It's an awesome form of escapism."

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