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DeKalb arcade collects birthday cards for Pac-Man

By DANA HERRA - dherra@daily-chronicle.com

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2010 is a big summer for Pac-Man.

The chomping yellow video game icon turned 30 in May, and on Aug. 7 he will be inducted into the International Video Game Hall of Fame in Ottumwa, Iowa. To celebrate, Patrick O'Malley of Star Worlds Arcade in DeKalb – Pac-Man-Pat to his friends – is collecting birthday cards he will personally deliver to the induction ceremony.

"People can drop off store-bought cards or come in and make them," O'Malley said. "We have all the stuff you need to make a birthday card at the counter, so it won't cost you anything."

Cards celebrating Pac-Man's birthday are being collected all over the world, hall of fame spokesman Walter Day said. O'Malley and his Star Worlds crew will be in charge of handling all of the cards during the four-day festival that includes the induction ceremony. They will also man the Pac-Man display and run Pac-Man tournaments throughout the festival.

"Pac-Man was one of the first color video games, and it caught the world by storm," O'Malley said of the circular character's appeal. "He also opened the video game market to girls and women for the first time, because here was a cute character, while before, video games were all about shooting down aliens."

When asked who would be accepting the birthday cards on behalf of Pac-Man, Day said "the official Pac-Man himself" is being sent by Japanese video game company NAMCO. NAMCO founder Masaya Nakamura is also on this year's list of inductees.

The idea for a video game hall of fame in Ottumwa – which bills itself as the birthplace of competitive gaming – was first floated almost 30 years ago, Day said. Changes in the industry made it impractical, but a resurgence in interest has brought back the idea. The hall of fame is still in its infancy, but its board of directors has begun fundraising and reviewing architectural concepts for a building to house a museum and archives.

"It's the same way the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was inducting people for years before they had a building," Day said. "We had our first event last year and 3,500 people came. This year, who knows? We might have closer to 10,000."

Pac-Man's birthday is only a small component of the four-day Big Bang event, Day said, which includes tournaments, concerts, historic displays and even a ceremony changing the name of Ottumwa's Central Park to Pac-Man Park.

For lifelong gamer O'Malley, being tapped by the hall of fame to administer the Pac-Man celebration is a dream come true.

"To be asked to represent the Pac-Man event there is a huge honor," he said.

To send Pac-Man a birthday card, drop off a card at Star Worlds Arcade, 1234 E. Lincoln Highway in DeKalb, or visit the arcade to make a card.

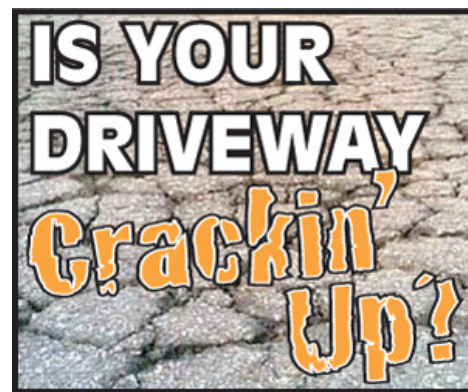
For more information about the International Video Game Hall of Fame, visit www.ivghof.com.

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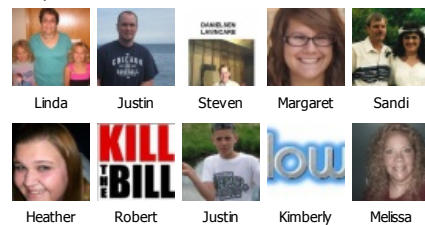
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pinwiz wrote on July 6, 2010 8:50 p.m. ...

Makes me feel old thinking that Pac-Man has turned 30, but I feel young again playing all the video games and pinball machines at Star Worlds Arcade. I made my birthday card and then bought 30 tokens for only \$5.00. Thank, Pac-Man Pat. See you in Iowa at Pac-Man's birthday celebration. This is the way to celebrate the arcades and Pac-Man!

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