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Game designer hopes success is in the cards

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After 20 years or so of designing games for other people, Don Cornelson decided he wanted to take the plunge himself.

"I finally decided it was time to make a move and make an impact," he said.

Last month, from his offices on State Route 522 near Main Street in Bothell, Cornelson and his Tame Tiger games launched Word Frenzy, a card game that seems to combine elements of Scrabble, Uno and musical chairs.

Played with letter cards, players try to be the first to spell a four-letter word, passing cards they don't want to other players. The word must relate to a chosen category card.

For example, if the category was food, you might try to spell "bean" or "fish." When the first player to spell out a word lays down his cards, each player must grab a "frenzy prize" from the table. There is always one less prize than there are players, making the prize grab a contest in and of itself.

Cornelson said he had the basics of the game in the back of his mind for a long time, but it took him about a year to put it all together and come up with a finished product. He plans to use the Tacoma Holiday Food and Gift Festival to launch the product, putting it directly

in front of consumers for basically the first time.

Cornelson is convinced he can take the game to a mass marketing level, though presently it is locally only available online. Still, the game has picked up a couple of national awards, including winning the 2009 Seal of Approval from the National Parenting Center.

"It's sort of stealth education," Cornelson said, stating the game can help young players with everything from basic language skills to spelling. Still, he insists he didn't "leave out the fun" in favor of education when creating the game. He just as strongly argues it is not aimed at children alone, but all ages.

According to Cornelson, friendly disputes can erupt as older players try and get "creative" about how a word fits with the chosen category. He also said the grab for frenzy prizes can get quite frantic.

Sold separately, the "prizes" are foam blocks Cornelson said won't hurt or scratch furniture. He decided to package the prizes separately from the Frenzy card deck to make the game more compact and inexpensive, adding players can use just about any household item — spoons, for example — as Frenzy prizes.

Cornelson said he became interested in games during his childhood, but for reasons you might not expect. Growing up the son of missionaries in India, Cornelson



Shown here with a display for a holiday consumer show, game designer Don Cornelson hopes you'll soon be able to find his Word Frenzy game in a store near you.

TOM CORRIGAN, Bothell-Kenmore Reporter

said he often had to invent his own fun.

"We were pretty isolated," he said. His family moved back to the U.S. when he was 10.

"I still remember the shock of seeing what all these kids here had to play with," Cornelson said.

He believes the interest in creating his own ways to play stuck with him even as he grew older.

In the 1980s, he patented a variable game board system. Since then, Cornelson has helped develop various board and trivia games. A themed variation on Monopoly, Dairyopoly is one of his best sellers. Tame Tiger trivia games include a rock-and-roll set and a licensed game based on the Billboard Hot 100 music list. All in all, Cornelson figures he has about two dozen games published, with a few more in production.

Cornelson admits video games represent difficult competition for his board

and card games. Still, he said, the sluggish economy actually may work in favor of Tame Tiger.

"In tough economic times, people go back to what is really important," Cornelson said. In his opinion, that means reconnecting with family and friends, which can be tough to do with a video-game controller in your hand.

According to Cornelson, games can catch on very quickly, creating production problems for the supplier.

"You have to be able to manage growth and you have to be able to move quickly," he said. "It's a problem we would love to have and we're looking forward to having it."

For more information or a better look at Word Frenzy, go to www.frenzycard-games.com.

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