

Encouraging the video game developers of tomorrow

by Heidi Riley

IMPACT Expo



Owner Nick McKinnon (left), programmer Neil Power, artist Shawn Patterson and programmer Jason MacWilliams are part of a new PEI video game development company called Another Castle Studios. At the recent IMPact Expo, Nick McKinnon spoke to students about the industry.

The fourth **IMPact Expo**, held in November, brought together high school students, video game artists and programmers at the **Atlantic Technology Centre (ATC)**. This event focused on the artistic and the technical side of video gaming. It was organized by the **Innovation and Technology Sector Council**.

The winners of this year's national competition called **GameGarage** were on hand to give information about the industry and to teach students the basic drawing techniques used in animation.

Game Garage team tell it like it is

This past summer, the GameGarage competition invited video game design and animation students from across the country to be part of a team that could take a video game from concept to market-ready prototype. The team spent four months at the ATC and received technical and financial support from the **PEI Interactive Media Alliance**.

The team members told the students about the huge amount of time and effort that goes into designing a game. They also took the students through a step-by-step process of drawing a character.

Those interested in the field can go in two directions

The team recommended that high school students interested in video game design can prepare by choosing to study art or computers.

Here is some advice they had to share:

- Aspiring artists should take art in high school and take it very seriously. Also, taking anatomy will help to draw more realistically.
- Those taking the computer route should take math and computer classes and learn at least one programming language to grasp the fundamentals of programming. They say by learning one language, learning the second will be easier.

Last year's winner opens a video game development business

Nick McKinnon was part of the winning team from last year's GameGarage competition. After winning the competition, Nick worked for a Charlottetown video game development company.

He recently struck out on his own and started his own company called **Another Castle Studios**, which is located at the ATC. He works with two programmers and two artists to make the new company a success. One of the artists is contracted from out of province.

The game developed by Nick and his team, **Kingdom of Gnester**, will soon be released as an iPhone application.

"Self employment is stressful, but it's great being my own boss," says Nick. "The game is our own intellectual property. We are not working for someone else."

This past summer, Nick mentored the current Game Garage team. "A career in video game development can become more than you can imagine. Opportunities such as the GameGarage competition can make that happen."

Teacher gives feedback

"It was great for my students to get a taste of the drawing and the programming part of video game development," says **Barbara Bovaird**, Visual Communications Instructor at **Colonel Gray High School**.

"It's also important for the students to see how their talents can lead to a job on PEI at one of the Island's video game development companies. They were also told about the discipline needed to be in this profession and the hours of drawing needed before coming up with something that works."



Visual Communications student Vivien Vincze with the character she drew during the step-by-step drawing instruction at the IMPact Expo.

For more about the Innovation and Technology Sector Council, visit www.itsc.ca

To find out more about **GameGarage**, visit <http://imagegarage.blogspot.com/>

For more about **PEI Interactive Media Alliance**, visit <http://imapei.com>

For more information about Nick's new company, visit www.anothercastlestudios.com

