



It's a group effort, with Chris Weidman, 13 (from left), Brian Franks, 13, Scott Hart, 13, Josh Overr, 13, and Mike Gunchak, 12, all of Plymouth, tackling one of Nintendo's newest games.

PHOTOS BY BILL HANSEN

Nintendo Mania

By Pat Schulte
staff writer

The line stretched through the Cobo Hall concourse like 'Hands Across America,' only at times eight to 10 people thick. Thousands upon thousands of them, all waiting in line

Sharon Zatklin of Farmington Hills and her son Eric, 4½, found the floor was the best place to sit to work the Nintendo controls.

to do one of two things . . . play the latest Nintendo games or watch — patiently — as their children played them.

When the doors opened, it was if a dam broke. Kids blew through the doors like millions of gallons of water rushing through a couple of

cracks. Parents tagged along.

"Radi!" "Awesome!" "Yeah!" seemed to be the brunt of the dictation used by those playing the games.

Sometimes you'd hear a "This one stinks, let's go," but that was rare.

They came to play dragons and thugs, race cars, run a small Italian

man through an obstacle course, drop rectangles into slots and take on whatever else the minds of Nintendo and its subsidiaries could throw at them.

"I'd rather they do this than watch TV," said Ralph Greenberg of West Bloomfield, who's son Eric and friend David Adler, both eight, were busy working-out on the latest in home video games. "These games teach them to read and think for themselves, not to mention enhancing hand-eye coordination."

The Nintendo World Championships resembled a cross between a Van Halen concert and a set from "Lost in Space." Sections of silver piping linked everything together like a massive space ship. The staff was dressed in bright orange jumpsuits and always on the move with their walk-talkies.

THERE WERE satellite dishes, giant inflatable figures like Bugs Bunny, RoboCop, Batman and a ninja. There were even life-sized versions of the "Super Mario Bros." stumbling around in their huge-head costumes.

And there was noise. Buzzers, beepers, screamers, whistlers, bonkers, bonkers, donkers and boomers. Never before had so many different noises been assembled under one roof.

The Nintendo show was strewn across three football fields worth of Cobo Hall. It took 13 semi-trucks (Janet Jackson only uses seven) and a crew of 25 people to haul and assemble the giant touring video game.

There are around 500 video screens. And at 34 hours of playing time over the course of the weekend — that's five minutes per game — Nintendo fans would play more than 200,000 games. At an arcade, at 25

cents a crack, that would come out to about \$50,000 in tokens.

Luckily, for the 30,000 in attendance, there was a flat rate charged.

The Nintendo World Championships expects to draw more than a million people to its 30-city tour that criss-crosses the United States and Canada. The list of the show, besides Nintendo's sub-contractors showing off their latest games in a section of the show called "Power Walk," is the competition.

"IDIOTS," AS they are affectionately known, will try to put up the highest score in their age group on a triathlon-like video game that combines the games "Super Mario Bros.," "Rad Racer" and "Tetris."

The winners at the Detroit show were Shaun Joyce of Dearborn, with a score of 990,175 in the 11 and under class, John Wyman of Milan with 1,243,065 points in the 12-17 age group. And Chris Dillard with 199,175 in the 18 and over class. They will advance to the finals in Orlando, Fla., this fall in hopes of winning, among other things, a car.

Along with the kids were the parents. A few had caught the video game bug themselves; others didn't really know what to make of it. And most felt that the games were a great idea as long as their kids didn't spend too much time in front of the television set.

"Some of the easier games are pretty neat, but I don't like to see the kids spend their whole afternoon in front of the TV," said Linda Hart of Plymouth, who was there with her son Scott and a bunch of his friends. "I did manage to beat Scott in 'Volleyball' before."

"The games are great for strategy skills, especially in teaching the kids to plan ahead," said Erin Kreis of

Redford, who brought her son Steven to the show. "One time, when we first got the game, after Steven went to bed, I played it until late in the morning. . . I couldn't put it away. I like the easy games, but I don't like the violent ones."

"THE KIDS love it, but I don't really know that much about it," said Lee Taylor of Farmington Hills who had brought his daughter Kelly to the show. "It seems that back when we were growing up we'd be out on our bicycles or playing football or baseball or something . . . not sitting in front of a TV screen all day."

The kids defended themselves, saying that home video games are a viable tool for stress reduction. Oh yeah, and that they're "AWESOME!"

"The games give you something to do, a way to relax from the homework scene," said Mike Gunchak, 12, of Plymouth.

"This is great, I've never seen so many games before in my life," said Josh Duerr, 13, of Plymouth. "Awesome!"

One of the more popular games on hand was Nintendo's "Game Boy," a hand-held version of the home video system.

"It's great for school," joked Chris Weidman, 13, of Plymouth.

Finding out about the strategies involved in mastering the games was a task in itself. Answers like "After you get here, make sure you get this (bink, bink, dweeb), bonk, sounds the game), then after you do that, make sure that you're here."

When the screen finally faded on the Nintendo World Championships stop in Detroit, Julie Parise, public relations director for Olympia Arenas Inc., put it best: "Hey, what this really is is a trade show for kids . . . kind of like the Detroit Auto Show, but for children."



Saving the past with more than a feather duster

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As a result, "we do a lot of preventative (work)," Heller said. One of the things her department does is try to offer a more ideal setting for art.

"We have a controlled situation where we have air filters and also try very carefully to maintain climate conditions to make relative humidity and temperature very constant," Heller said.

Dramatic changes in temperature and humidity can damage art, so the DIA keeps its temperature around 68 degrees with the relative humidity around 45 percent in the summer and 35 percent in the winter.

IN ADDITION, the DIA utilizes controlled lighting. Ultraviolet light, which fades, damages and degrades art, is filtered out, Heller said. Paper, photographs and textiles are still exhibited only two or three months a year due to their sensitivity to the harmful effects of light, she added.

Plans are being developed for building renovation and expansion of

'We have outgrown this facility. We have only 8 percent of our collection on exhibit and we're the fifth or sixth largest museum in the country.'

— Barbara Heller
head conservator
Detroit Institute of Arts

the DIA which will allow for "ultimate climate and lighting conditions," Heller said.

"We have outgrown this facility," she said. "We have only 8 percent of our collection on exhibit and we're the fifth or sixth largest museum in the country."

"The collection is here because of our forefathers. We would like to have many, many generations beyond us be able to see the same things in the same condition as we have been fortunate enough to see."



Matt Fleischman removes a dried cleaning poultice from a marble statue.