

Fund-raiser

Zap Zone sheds some light for PlayScape

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At Zap Zone's core is a glow-in-the-dark maze of ramps and mirrors, filled with phasor-clutching combatants shooting off spears of simulated light.

Then, there's "Kator the Robot," firing and being fired at from behind walls, through metal grates and at point-blank range. The atmosphere feels like being inside a video game.



"It feels real," said Farmington High School student Layna Bodily, 16, among the teens and preteens who spent part of their midwinter school break at Zap Zone Xtreme Lazer Tag, in the Uptown Farmington Plaza. "You've got to watch your back and stuff."

Stefan Marion, 16, a Lapeer West High School student visiting the Farmington facility, concurred that "It's a lot more realistic" than typical video arcade fare.

It might feel realistic. But, as intended, it's an other-world kind of realism, filled with alien references, said Zap Zone's general manager, Gus Smail.

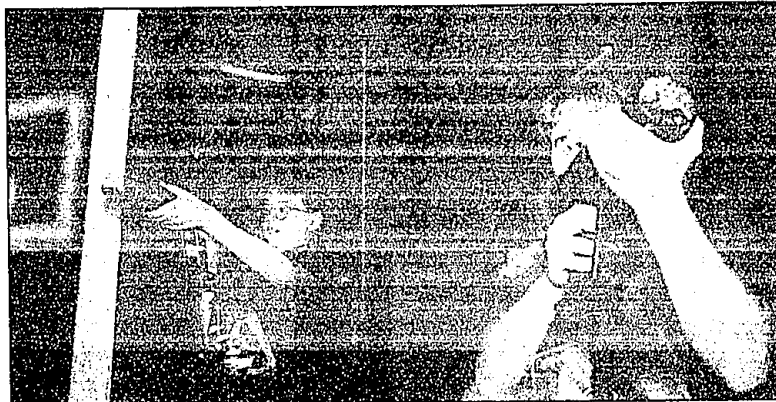
There's even an alien theme in available prizes, which are won by amassing tickets in the Zap Zone arcade section. Most impressive is a 39-inch-tall green alien — the prize for collecting 5,000 tickets — sitting on top of a soda pop machine.

Planet PlayScape

"The whole goal here is, 'Where am I?' " said Smail, whose code name is Gaz. "It's to make you feel like you're in Star Wars."

Next week, Zap Zone could become "Planet PlayScape," thanks to a unique fund-raiser. From 4-10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, Feb. 22-25, about 50 percent of all \$5 individual game admissions will be earmarked for the "Kids World" PlayScape, the facility slated to go up later this year at Shiawassee Park in Farmington.

Smail said he was approached by a member of the PlayScape fund-raising committee about holding such an event, and immediately realized it was a winning idea.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BADDLEE

Aim, fire: Alex Brinza and Dan Heathfield search for the opposing team during a battle at the Zap Zone, which is hosting a fund-raiser next week for the Farmington PlayScape.

"If more people hear about it, we'll raise a lot of

money for the PlayScape," said Smail, whose 9,000-square-foot facility opened in October. "We've assured the city that there will be \$500 that we'd donate. But I know it'll go way over that."

Stationed above the front counter, where "Gaz" announces winning scores for the green and red teams after their laser tag contests conclude, are "Kids World" promotional materials, trumpeting next week's fund-raiser.

Zap Zone Xtreme Lazer Tag is located 31530 Grand River in the Uptown Farmington Plaza. For more information, call (248) 471-6777.



Winning idea: Gus Smail, Zap Zone's general manager, is a PlayScape supporter and welcomed the idea of having a fund-raiser.

SWOCC from page A1

al, SWOCC is clearly raising the stakes. If Time Warner doesn't respond, the authority will likely deny any later renewal proposals. The matter then will go to an administrative hearing as required by federal law, Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff said. "Neither side knows what that third party will do," Lauhoff said.

SWOCC officials are confident based on previous court decisions, which have ruled that cable companies have to make community a priority when renewing franchises.

"SWOCC has researched and listened to what the community wants to have and it will make that case," said Lauhoff, who serves on SWOCC. The original franchise agreement ended May 1997. Since then, Time Warner and SWOCC have continued operations under the original agreement from 15 years ago.

Federal law gives current cable providers first preference on renewals, unless they fail to meet federal regulations.

Informal talks have stalled, which prompted the formal proposal request. SWOCC, with the help of industry consultants and focus groups, came up with the community needs. "I think we've been reasonable with our requests," Hills City Manager Steve Brock said. "We haven't asked for nearly the things during informal negotiations that we have in the RFP (request for proposal)."

"If they want to play hardball, we'll play hardball."

Brock reiterated items listed in the request for proposal are not a wish list. "I think it establishes the bar of what's needed in terms of cable outreach and cable needs in our community," he said.

At a public hearing in Novi,

school officials and community access supporters said new production equipment is needed. Customers said they want more channels and reasonable rates.

Time Warner representatives attended the hearing. "The ball is in their court," Brock said.

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Paczki

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otherwise is a sluggish month. Farmington Bakery is not limiting Lenten traditions to one culture. Baker Jeff Pavlik is making hot cross buns, which are a British delicacy consumed during the pre-Easter season.

Hot cross buns are yeast-raised and filled with raisins and other fruits, similar to coffee cake. A cross is glazed across the top.

The pastries will be available through Lent unlike the paczki, which left one shutout customer stunned.

"I didn't think Farmington people got up at 6 in the morning," he grumbled as he left paczki-less.