

Suburban Journals

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[Andrew Jansen](#)/Journals From left, game inventors Beth Daniels of Eureka, Jane Mathews of Wildwood and Kristin Edmonds of Chesterfield display their games Dec. 19 at Unique Toy and Game store in Wildwood.

Playing to win

By [Mary Shapiro](#)

For three West County women, inventing new games took far more than a roll of the dice.

Jane Mathews, Kristin Edmonds and Beth Daniels said they've been working on ideas for their games for years.

All won some new fans Dec. 19 during a "Meet the Inventor" games showcase at Unique Toy and Game store in Wildwood, said store owner Gayle Grabish.

"These women are showing women and girls that if you have an idea like this, go for it," Grabish said.

Mathews, 52, of Wildwood is the founder and president of Jane's Games, LLC. She drew inspiration for her game, InStructures, when she taught the story of Noah and the great flood in a church vacation Bible school.

"I was struck by the detailed verbal instructions God gave Noah to build the ark," Mathews said.

To play the game, two teams called construction crews race each other to build a structure with 19 wooden building blocks per team. The teams use verbal instructions given by a crew foreman.

The foreman is the only player allowed to see a blueprint picture of the structure crews must build. The first crew to complete the building and pass an inspection, where the opposing crew compares the structure to the blueprint, wins that round.

"I designed InStructures so family members can work together as a team," she said.

Mathews, with a little help from husband Kirk, had been working for years on the game, along with friend Buz Phelan, who did the graphic design work. She waited until this spring to make the expensive decision to manufacture the game.

She produced 1,000 games in an initial manufacturing run to get some volume discounts.

"Roughly, it cost us, not counting our labor to pack boxes and collate cards, about \$20 per game. We've only been selling them since July, and we've sold about 500 games. But what you could call a profit of \$10 per game is funneled right back into covering costs of the first manufacturing run and into advertising and traveling to conferences to sell the game," she said.

Edmonds, 46, of Chesterfield is co-owner of Mindfull Games. Her company was created in 2006 with her parents, Dr. Robert and Naomi Edmonds, also of Chesterfield.

Edmonds recently released an updated version of her two-year-old Verbal Volley vocabulary-building game.

Teams or individuals go back and forth in rounds, with a timer running. They vie to come up with the most synonyms or antonyms to various words printed on game cards.

"My family always played word games, so I decided to develop a brain-fitness type of game," Edmonds said.

She first got the idea for Verbal Volley years ago, while working in the pediatric therapy center at a rehab hospital in Massachusetts.

There, she would make up games and songs for kids as therapy.

"I research the best ways to acquire, retain and retrieve vocabulary to tweak and update the game. I enjoy inventing, being a creative person," she said.

Her company has sold hundreds of games, but she doesn't know exact sales numbers for Verbal Volleys, for which there are middle school and college prep level editions.

It's hard to figure exact costs to put the game into production, because so much of her time is spent in research, marketing, and design, Edmonds said.

"But it certainly cost me, for the first prototype manufacturing run of 250 games, about \$14 per game, just for the materials and printing. Most companies don't make a profit right away, and that's true of me," she said.

All money she earns is being funneled back into costs such as advertising, traveling to conventions to publicize the game, and more.

Daniels, 42, of Eureka is creator and owner of Around the Table Games.

This year, she introduced card games called Camp Talk, Buddy Talk and Teen Talk. They joined a two-year old line of conversation games. Earlier versions were Family Talk and Grandparent Talk.

To play, someone picks a card, reads a question and starts a conversation with another.

In Teen Talk, questions include "What would the title of your autobiography be?" or "If you were a superhero, what power would you have?"

Buddy Talk questions for younger kids include "If you were a crayon, what color would you be and why?" or "Who's your silliest friend, who makes you laugh the most?"

"I felt conversation was disappearing with families being so frantically busy and not gathering at the dinner table so much anymore," said Daniels.

Starting in 2006, her daughter Kate, 10, devised questions for Buddy Talk and Camp Talk, and Daniels' niece Emily Wallace, 16, came up with questions for Teen Talk.

With legal, research, graphics, testing, production, distribution, marketing and other fees to get a game on the market, "It's fair to say I've put more than \$100,000 into my games."

Fortunately, Daniels recently received a new Governors Loan for Small Business of \$25,000 through the Missouri Economic Development Office.

"This year, we'll reach more than \$100,000 in sales," Daniels said. "But a lot of profits from sales go back into the games, toward paying off what's been invested and toward further product development. Despite that, I'm happy to be a "mom entrepreneur."

The women are selling their games online. InStructures is available for \$39.95 at www.janesgames.com, Verbal Volley is \$29.95 and is available at www.mindfullgames.com, Daniel's games range from \$7.99 to \$9.99 and can be bought at aroundthetablegames.com.