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in other gaming online. Faster internet speeds and changes in the video game industry have nearly rendered extinct the days of passing a single controller back and forth in a game like Super Mario Bros. Now, playing competitively or in teams requires multiple consoles, screens and usually multiple copies of the same game. During the club meetings, opponents can play in the same room with people on the other side of a table by linking systems with direct connections or over the school's wifi.

"What we do in Satellite Gaming is much more fun than being alone on the couch," Jacob said, adding that joining the club was something of a no-brainer. "If you have the choice between gaming and doing something resourceful, of course you are going to choose gaming."

Natalie Smith and Mikayla Gersztyn were the only two girls in attendance on Monday, Feb. 5, but they didn't mind being the only ones.



KEIZERTIMES/Random Pendragon
Jamie Harris shows members of the Claggett Creek Satellite Gaming Club how to connect a local area network (LAN).

"Most of my friend group is boys, so it's not like it's real different," said Natalie, for whom the club is a chance to try out games other than the ones she has at home.

Mikayla said she and her brother frequently play *Call of Duty* and *Minecraft* at home, but she prefers *Call of Duty*.

"I like the strategies of hiding out and attacking the other players," she said.

But the club provides other opportunities as well.

"We learn about respect because the winner stays in the competition and handing over the controller can be a big deal," said Mikayla.

Scheduling club meeting for Monday helps Marcos prepare for the week ahead.

"Nobody wants to get out of bed on Monday, but then you think about Satellite Gaming and you look forward to getting to do it and getting through the day because you will feel joy being here," Marcos said.

Harris points to Marcos when asked who exemplifies the lessons of Satellite Gaming best.

"With middle school, humility can be a difficult thing for them. Marcos is always asking how he can help when other kids are asking if they can

play first. He's kind of shy and reserved, but he's got a heart of gold. And he's like that all the time, not only when he's trying to impress me," Harris said.

OLD SCHOOL GAMER

The first notions of what became Satellite Gaming formed during Harris' high school years.

"I would go to parties just because I knew there would be people playing video games there. I was really into Halo 2 and I wanted to be a competitive gamer," he said.

While other students at the parties were drinking or finding other troubles to get into, Harris was on the couch with a Xbox controller in his hand. However, it didn't stop his parents from asking questions about what he'd been up to if he came home smelling of uniquely identifiable odors. Eventually, they told him just to invite his friend over for a gaming night on New Year's Eve.

"I told them it would be like 40 people, but they said it was okay. We ended up with 50 people playing almost two full games of Halo 2. Then we started having parties like that on a regular basis," Harris said.

When he became a youth

pastor for Lakepoint Community Church in Keizer, Harris quickly discovered video games were a unifying interest for many of his new charges.

"One of the best ways to reach students is finding out what they do and doing it with them or celebrating what they can do," Harris said.

In that respect, finding ways to connect wasn't much of a challenge. The only barriers to entry are what parents will allow their students to play. Depending on the school, options range from games rated "E" for everyone, like *Super Smash Bros.*, up to M-rated games like *Call of Duty*. Parents need to sign waivers if they are okay with their kids playing the M-rated fare, but Harris tries to make sure all decisions are informed ones.

In addition to club meetings at the three Keizer schools, Satellite Gaming also hosts regular tournaments at CCMS and invites youth from throughout the area to attend. While the kids play in the tournament, parents are invited to take part in informational sessions.

"We educate them on the ESRB ratings and how to make positive decisions on which games and how long their kids should be allowed to play," Harris said.

A lot of the defenses parents put up to the idea of video games end up being straw men.

"They worry about a kid not being active enough when playing video games, but they are okay with them being a bookworm. The amount of physical activity is about the same," Harris said. "We just want the parents to make sound decisions about the types of games their kids are playing."

For the kids, the focus is on appropriate behavior even when operating behind an online alias. They can earn experience points and level up during the tournament simply by being good sports and courteous to everyone else.

The last tournament drew a field of more than 400 players. The next one is slated for Friday, Feb. 23, at Claggett. Details and pre-registration can be found at www.satellitegaming.net.

The lessons Harris tries to impart have a habit of showing up in unexpected moments. When he was walking through Claggett during a lunch period Monday, a pair of kids started chuckling as he passed. Harris stopped and asked what prompted the giggle-fit. It turned out one of the two had gotten suspended from Harris's Twitch channel for inappropriate comments. Twitch is a video game streaming site where gamers can play video games and offer comment on their play at the same time.

"I told him he was either making fun of my wife or being really raunchy," Harris said.

The teen responded that it was the latter.

"I asked why he did it and he told me he felt like you could get away with whatever you want online," Harris said.

That's precisely the kind of behavior Harris hopes to redirect through the club.

"If you are in a basketball game and trying to get to the hoop, you might throw a little elbow to try to get someone to back off. That might go unnoticed, but online, the elbows are words and there are real people on the other side of the keyboard," Harris said.

RESET

If there is one story Harris will likely never get tired of telling it's about a mother who attended one of the tournaments with her son.

She waited outside the Claggett cafeteria while her son progressed to the quarter-finals and then Harris asked if she would like to prop the door open so she could hear what was happening. She told Harris she was busy with work, but ended up sitting in the doorway halfway in and halfway out of the tournament floor.

Once players reach the final rounds, they get to play on the Claggett stage with a big screen in front of them. As her son continued vanquishing foes, the mother was drawn into the game more and more. Increasingly, she was putting her work aside to spectate.

By the time her son made it to the semifinals, she was stopping completely to clap and cheer as her comprehension of the game grew.

In the final round, her son made the game-winning kill for his team and she was filming the moment on her phone.

"I turned around and she was crying," Harris said. "She said she felt detached from her son for so long and it was the first time in a long time that she understood him. That's what this is all about for parents: celebrating the effort the same way you would kicking a pigskin ball through two yellow lines."

For more information, to volunteer or become a sponsor of Satellite Gaming, visit the organization's website. Spectators are also welcomed and encouraged at the tournament on Feb. 23. The games begin at 5 p.m.

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