

ARTS & CULTURE

Gaming back on the table at Delight

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What started as a Dungeons and Dragons game among friends transformed Hannah Felton and Colton Kirshner-Lira's lives for the better.

In January 2020, they took over ownership of Delight, Cottage Grove's local game store, from Uyen-Thi Nguyen, who had decided to pursue her art more full time.

Felton and Kirshner-Lira had started playing games at Delight about two years before Nguyen decided to step away from the shop. By the time Nguyen was ready to move on, they were regulars. Before closing permanently, she asked the two if they wanted to take over the store. After some initial hesitation, they ended up going for it.

Felton has a background in business and Kirshner-Lira in gaming, so it was the perfect setup.

Unfortunately for the pair, January 2020 was mere months away from the complete shutdown of social interaction, a key component in most, if not all, tabletop games.

"It's been a bumpy ride," said Felton.

Throughout the pandemic it's been challenging to keep things on a roll, especially since so much of what Delight focuses on is considerably better in person and the majority of their revenue comes from gaming.

Recently though, Delight was able to get games up and running again, focusing mostly on Magic: The Gathering, a multiplayer trading card game.

This tabletop game is popular around the world and almost any local game shop who sells Magic cards will inevitably host a Friday Night Magic games. These games are promoted and scheduled by Wizards of the Coast worldwide, the gaming company behind Magic: The Gathering and Dungeons and Dragons, among other games.

"If you've got a local game shop that's part of the Wizards network that sells Magic, they do Friday Night Magic," says Kirshner-Lira.

Near the end of the summer, Delight was also able to open its doors for summer camps, and now throughout the fall has been hosting its after school program The Guild in the Grove.

The program is open to all and if the cost for any family is too high, scholarships are available. The request for a scholarship is trust-based in an effort to make the program accessible to everyone, regardless of financial status.

Kirshner-Lira and Felton understand that it can be tiring and frustrating to have to fill out income verification forms and so they have a "no questions asked" policy.

The shop's goal of accessibility has led community members to donate gaming supplies so kids can learn how to play games like Warhammer without having to invest the hundreds of dollars it takes to own the miniatures.

"People just started bringing us their armies," said Kirshner-Lira. They would drop off a couple hundred dollars worth of Warhammer miniatures because they were moving or no longer needed them.

It really helped Delight in "trying to create a situation

where the store has armies and pieces for people to play with, that you don't have to buy. And you can experience that hobby without having to invest a ton of resources of money and time into it," said Kirshner-Lira.

The shop also has a selection of used gaming books and board games that make it easier for kids to play games without having to go out and buy them.

The next step is to hopefully get more roleplaying games back on the table, an example being Dungeons and Dragons.

In November they plan to start hosting Adventure League games on Sundays, which is a way to play Dungeons and Dragons with a little less of the "crunchiness," as Felton says.

Adventure League runs in a drop-in format, single day adventures that only last a couple of hours, when the average Dungeons and Dragons game can last anywhere from months to years. It's an opportunity for people to take their characters to different game stores and groups and still be able to play together and have a satisfying adventure.

Felton also plans on running what she calls Monster of the Week, an episodic opportunity for kids to fight a monster every Friday through a roleplaying game setup.

Felton and Kirshner-Lira find that playing collaborative games like Dungeons and Dragons and Magic provides kids with an opportunity to expand their social abilities.

Going forward, they hope to keep providing a space for kids to learn through their "nerdiness" and just enjoy themselves.

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October Art Walk is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 29 and its feature exhibition "The Living Art" will be on display from Oct. 28-30 downtown.

The work is a combination of paintings, music, dance, poetry, song, culture and stories put on by artist Tumelo Michael Moloi and featuring performances from Joshua Caraco, John Mambira, Ratie D and John Page.

The exhibition preview runs from 3 to 6 p.m. on Oct. 28. The Art Walk exhibition runs from 4 to 8 p.m. on Oct. 29, with a live performance from 6 to 7 p.m. The following day there will be an exhibition from 3 to 6:30 p.m. and live performance from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

"The performance part of it and the living part of it is the same," Moloi said. "It lives in the same world."



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