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Can you picture an entire **community coming together** to play a game? A game that helps people **learn about themselves** and their city? A game that turns fun into **thousand$ for local charities**?

We can! This unique collaboration is all about the game. In this case, it's anything but child's play.

Titled "**Picture The Impossible**" – it's a first-of-its-kind community challenge, developing involvement and engagement through an alternate reality game format.

Beginning on September 12 and running for seven weeks, **Picture The Impossible** is a partnership between **Rochester Institute of Technology's Lab for Social Computing** and the Rochester ***Democrat and Chronicle***. The project plays to the partners' unique strengths, combining the nation's #1 newspaper in integrated print and digital audience reach with the students and faculty of the nation's first academic program for the study of social computing. The project's technical development was funded by Microsoft evolutionary live search technology, Bing.

"We are looking to see if these tools of engagement will work as a channel to meet our fundamental First Amendment obligations for audiences whom we currently don't reach with any frequency," says Traci Bauer, managing editor content and digital platforms at the *Democrat and Chronicle*. "The Alternate Reality Game format layers game systems and game content on top of every day reality – effectively improving players' *real* quality of life," adds Dr. Elizabeth Lawley, RIT Professor and the Director of its Lab for Social Computing.

Picture The Impossible is a mix of weekly challenges developed by a team comprised of staffers from the D&C and faculty and students from RIT. The games will appear in the newspaper and on DemocratandChronicle.com, the newspaper's Web site. Each week's game will focus on a different theme related to the history and culture of Rochester – including imaging, social equality, food, music, arts and crafts and "Rochester firsts."

The game begins with the announcement of a party that's going to be held on October 31, to which the players are **not** invited ... **yet**. When they "RSVP" for the party, they will be prompted to register for the game and to join one of the three factions competing to control our community.

"The underlying theme involves a fictional "secret society" known as The Gears, which has included most major Rochester historical figures (George Eastman, Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass) in its membership over the years. The Gears hold an annual Halloween costume gala but the organization, which has diminished in power and membership, is locked in a three-way struggle for control," explains RIT's Lawley.

Each faction will be associated with one of three local not-for-profits, Foodlink, Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong and Wilson Commencement Park. Earning points in the game is a result of individual accomplishment and by collaborating with teammates to help that faction's charity receive a larger donation at the end of each week.

While the game is open to players of all ages and demographics, the primary audience is young professionals (ages 25-39) who are typically college educated and internet-savvy. "Using extensive research and, more importantly, listening to young professionals, we're delivering what they've asked for most: Opportunities to network and to make a positive difference in our community," according to Jim Fogler, VP Marketing for the *Democrat and Chronicle*.

Drawing heavily on technology provided by Microsoft's Bing, participants will use online, interactive and personal skills to search the community for answers to the weekly puzzlers. "We love it! It's great to have a chance to show what Bing Maps can do in the context of a game, especially one that gets the local community and its newspaper in the mix," says Betsy Aoki, program manager for Bing at Microsoft Corp. "If you don't live in Rochester, find a friend on the ground there to help with local clues, and take up the challenge!"

Generous donations from **Microsoft**, **SCVNGR**, **WXXI Public Broadcasting** (providing updates and game clues across its broadcast services), **Kodak** (providing all of the game's prizes), and the **Marie C. and Joseph P. Wilson Foundation** made the implementation of this game possible. Alternate reality game pioneer Elan Lee also contributed to the initial design of the game.

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Picture the Impossible

www.picturetheimpossible.com