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Salem man's Sudoku Cube newest fad in toy world

By LARRY SHIELDS

Salem News staff writer



Jay Horowitz of Salem holds two of the newly-minted Sudoku Cube game toys that he invented this year. Production is just gearing up and the toy is expected to be a runaway best seller in 2007. (Salem News photo by Larry Shields)

SALEM — "I think Sudoku is the first global craze," said Jay Horowitz, inventor of the Sudoku Cube.

"They say over 400 million people are playing it and it's growing. Looks like we've got a good one here."

Horowitz, a Salem resident for three years, is a traveled and tenured toy manufacturer, inventor and businessman who since his childhood in New York City has had toys in his blood.

His grandfather and father were in the business and the 59-year-old inventor has



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purchased the molds and intellectual rights to a number of once heavy-hitting toy companies like Marx Toys and Ideal Toys.

He also owns the molds and product rights, but not the name, to the famed Rubik's Cube, a once hot-selling toy that the Sudoku Cube shares common elements with.

The idea started when Horowitz, who is a close friend of Evel Knievel, was invited to Daytona Beach to appear with him last March.

On the return flight to Sebring, where he owns American Classic Toys Inc., Horowitz was sitting next to a woman doing the Sudoku puzzle in a newspaper. The Salem News is also among newspapers nationwide carrying the puzzle daily.

"She said it was the greatest puzzle rage," Horowitz related.

She invited him to play along and that's where the obsession took hold and his toy-oriented inventor's mind kicked into gear.

"How do I apply a new theme to an existing product?" he thought.

By the end of the flight, Horowitz was thinking of the Rubik's Cube molds he owned along with the other rights.

"So I had the germ of an idea," he said, adding he related his idea to company personnel and bought some books on Sudoku.

"I read them, figured it out and then got the Rubik's Cubes, but I couldn't figure out how to put the numbers on," Horowitz explained.

He hammered away at it for over a month, letting his muse take over when it called.

"We couldn't figure it out. I plugged myself in and one day it hit me. I got the inspiration at first to use three contiguous sides. I didn't have all six sides, I had five of the six sides," he said, adding he left one side blank.

His patent attorney thought he should put false numbers on the blank side, but Horowitz felt uncomfortable doing that.

"I eventually figured out the pattern and got all six sides," he said, adding that he filed for a patent last May.

Today, the small Sebring company is taking international orders and gaining priceless publicity from publications like Reader's Digest which just listed the toy as one of its five things it didn't want readers to miss in its October issue.

It described the invention by asking, "What happens when a current fad meets a 1980s craze?"

It said the Sudoku Cube "adds a whole new dimension to the trendy number puzzle by putting it in a Rubik's Cube context."

Another publication, "Time Out New York," said the toy, which sells for \$9.87, is "a gratifying combination of Rubik's fun from days gone by and the numbers-based puzzle that currently has everyone transfixed on the subway.

“Allowing for nine levels of difficulty (solving on face is easiest; making all six sides work contiguously verges on impossible)...”

The Sudoku Cube, which is available online at www.sudokucube.net or locally at Leonard’s Hardware in Sebring, comes with a booklet that Horowitz wrote.

It has a history of Sudoku, etiology of the word, instructions on how to play, how not to play, levels of play, tutorial puzzles and information about American Classic Toys.

Horowitz started his own company in South America in 1969 where American products already designed and developed became popular after cycling through the American marketplace.

“Last year’s hits from the U.S. became next year’s hits in South America,” he said of his business in Bogota, Colombia.

But after eight or nine years, Horowitz said, “We had problems. Embezzlement, robbery, kidnapping and extortion. I cooperated with police and set up crooks and put them in jail, so I had enemies.

“But what was the point? I’m a toy manufacturer.”

He returned to the States in 1978, settled in Miami and got down to business, founding American Plastic Equipment in Florida.

That company, which he was president of, provides molds, machinery and technology to plastic toy and houseware manufacturers.

Along the way, Horowitz has owned the assets of Marx Toys, founded a collector toy company under that name, written a book on Marx Toys.

Horowitz also purchased molds and intellectual property rights to the Ideal Toy Corp. from CBS in 1985.

He later formed American Classic Toy Inc., the company he currently heads, and reissued classic American toys and games made from original molds to the original specifications, updated to meet current technology and safety standards.

It was in 1994 when, he said, the opportunity to invest with Mahoning Valley Plastics Co. in Sebring presented itself along while American Plastic Equipment Inc. and Mahoning Valley Plastics formed a joint-venture in The Marx Toy Corp. with Horowitz remaining the president and chief shareholder of Marx Toy Corp., an Ohio corporation based in Sebring.

In 1995, the assets of American Plastic Equipment were moved to Sebring, with warehouses in Columbiana and Sebring, which have since been consolidated.

With American Classic Toys, Horowitz, who plays the piano and is into classic, Broadway and standard music (he’s played in Timberlanes and at the Salem Community Center for an audience), said he’s doing what he has done for the past 37 years.

“I issue toys from original molds with new twists and presentation.”

Born and raised in New York, Horowitz is single and speaks Spanish, English, Italian, German, Portugese, and is learning Mandarin Chinese.

He studies Chinese while working out early each morning at the Salem Community Center, listening to lessons while he breaks sweat.

Larry Shields can be reached at lshields@salemnews.net

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