

## **LOIS stars in a new video game**

### **Waluga students create a game to educate the community about the Lake Oswego Sewer Interceptor project**

By Rebecca Mayer

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Vern Uyetake / Lake Oswego Review

Seventh graders Sean Kelly, Andrew Liu, Wren Hensgen, James Wells and Vincent Chia took second place in the Oregon Game Programming Challenge earlier this month.

The screen image shakes with the first potential catastrophe — also a frequently concern of community members skeptical about the Lake Oswego Sewer Interceptor (LOIS). It's an earthquake of a 2.0 magnitude or higher and now you must fix LOIS.

James Wells, a Waluga Junior High seventh grader, moves his diver toward the pipe leak in the video game he and four other seventh graders developed to educate people about LOIS.

Before the heroics begin, though, the screen helper Skippy tells users that in real life, the new LOIS wouldn't be effected by an earthquake because it is a buoyant system meaning that is is protected from seismic waves.

The students presented their game to the LOIS administration earlier this month, but their main audience was a group of judges at the Oregon Game Programming Challenge, organized by TechStart Education, on Saturday, May 16. The students — James Wells, Andrew Liu, Vincent Chia, Wren Hensgen and Sean Kelly — call themselves team S.A.V.E. (Super Awesome Video Game Engineers).

Last year the competition had a pilot program for a limited number of high schools. This year, the competition went mainstream and invited junior high schools to participate, as well. The students earned second place in the championship division out of 41 teams. A championship award is earned with high marks in all categories: project research and presentation, game experience, programming and team work.

Each year, the competition will select a topic and require teams to research and create an educational video game on the topic. This year the topic was water resources. The concept has as its predecessor the video game app, Food Force, commissioned by the United Nations World Food Program to educate the public about global hunger issues.

“It needs to be fun to play, but it needs to have an educational theme,” explained Lake Oswego software developer and physicist Bryan Kelly, who spearheaded the team as its coach. Kelly also coaches Lego Robotics at Waluga.

“The team I coached this season are a great group of altruistic kids, as they decided from the start that they wanted to use the OGPC mandated video game development project as a vehicle to give back to the global or local community,” said Kelly.

The S.A.V.E. team met with CH2MHill, a company that did some initial consulting on the LOIS project, as well as the LOIS administration in order to learn more about the project and the community’s concerns.

In the game, the team took common concerns about the LOIS project and incorporated them into the potential “catastrophes” that players will face. The screen helper Skippy, meanwhile, gives facts about the actual LOIS project, often bringing up a counterpoint to a common concern.

In the game, players have to fix LOIS before they run out of oxygen or pollution reaches a maximum. The game also monitors “community goodwill,” which starts at 50 percent. The player, or diver, can purchase a glue gun, flippers and oxygen tanks of various sizes to help in his mission.

In Level 1 — the earthquake level — the diver will encounter sucker fish, which will latch on to the diver and slow him down. The students included sucker fish in the game because Oswego Lake used to be called Sucker Lake. The way to get rid of the pests is to let out more oxygen and to keep moving. Of course, if you loose too much oxygen, you can die.

In Level 2, the games simulates a boat anchor hitting the pipeline. In Level 2, there are lamprey eels that make it impossible for the diver to move once they latch on to him. Again, letting out more oxygen or swimming faster will keep them away.

The team is quite proud of their game and will also present it to the Lake Oswego City Council and the LOSD board.

“We are so impressed with the work that these kids have done,” said LOIS communication director Jane Heisler. “The amount of project information that they have embedded into the fun of the game is incredible.”

The LOIS administration will have a short video about the S.A.V.E. team up on their Facebook site within the next few weeks and is looking into ways to post the game, as well.

“You do a lot of work, and then you push play and then it works,” said Sean Kelly.

The process of creating a video game integrates a variety of studies. The kids learned four aspects to video game development: design, art, production and programming, and each chose a role on the team.

Bryan Kelly sees his role as coach as a way to give kids experience talking with professionals, managing their time on a long-term project, researching and writing a concept document and working as a team. “With only little peripheral guidance from me, this is what they did this year, and I’m very proud of their accomplishments.”

He’s hoping that this year will help inform parents and get them interested in supporting expansion of programs like this.

*The S.A.V.E. team’s Interceptor game can be played online at [www.yoyogames.com](http://www.yoyogames.com) . One should be able to locate the game by performing a search using “OGPC” as a key search word.*

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