

Getting Paid to Play

■ Former PVNET intern scores at top computer game company.

By Michelle Fisher
Special to the News

To call Stephen Peterson a "computer game enthusiast" may be a bit of an understatement, as the former Palos Verdes on the NET intern readily admits that his love of gaming is "close to an addiction."

"I can play games for up to eight hours a day at work and go home and still want to play computer games," says Peterson.

For more than two years, Peterson has worked as a tester at Activision, a leading international publisher of computer and video games, including those based on franchises such as "Star Trek," various Disney films such as "Toy Story 2" and Marvel Comics properties like "Spider-Man" and "X-Men."

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gained at PV on the NET, I wouldn't have had the confidence to know what I was talking about [in the interview] when they asked me about computers and hardware," Peterson says. "PVNET was pretty much my training ground. It played a large part in getting me started and helping me to get this job."

Building Blocks

The Palos Verdes Peninsula High School graduate forewent college in favor of pursuing a career and getting paid to do what he loves most. He worked as an intern for two years at the Rancho Palos Verdes-based computer technology center, gaining valuable knowledge of computer software and hardware. He learned how to build a computer, set up networks and design web pages. He was responsible for ensuring that all the PVNET computers were functioning properly and also worked on RPV City Hall's hardware.

"I worked mostly on the software side but also gained hard-

ware knowledge, especially the mechanics and building computers from scratch. That transferred very well over to Activision, where it's quite common for hardware changes to be made," Peterson says. "If the computer setup doesn't allow a game to play properly, you may need to swap out video cards. So that's where my PV on the NET experience really comes into play."

Peterson adds that his experience setting up computer networks also proved vital in his current position. "In the workplace, all computers are linked together. To know how to communicate from one computer to another is really valuable," he says.

But his favorite part of being a PVNET intern was participating in Friday Night Network Gaming, when a dozen interns would play against each other for hours on end. "We'd always network all the computers together, find a game that was great to play with multiple people and just go for hours and hours battling against each other," recalls Peterson. "We played a variety of different games, but the most popular one was Total Annihilation, a

Peterson started out in quality assurance as a tester and worked his way up to the position of senior tester, which, he says, involves taking on more of a management role, overseeing other testers and making sure that games are playable before their deadline.

"The job of quality assurance," he explains, "is to communicate all the problems the game has when being played. Once the testers find those issues, the senior tester will communicate those problems with production, then they go and work that out with the developer."

In a nutshell, Peterson is paid to play computer games. He and his co-workers test out the software to make sure it works well on different platforms. The Activision ad he initially responded to called for "an extreme game enthusiast." Peterson says that with all of his gaming experience from PVNET, he fit the bill.

"Without all the computer experience I

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real-time strategy game." He notes that there are three types of video games: real-time strategy games, adventure games and first-person shooting games.

PVNET Director Ted Vegvari says that it's rare to find such a large group of student interns with similar interests. He says that Peterson stood out because of his leadership abilities and design talent. "Steve was like a little manager and he had talent in graphics as well. He would take a lot of information and put it together and help the other kids get their jobs done," Vegvari says. "He had a strong sense of where to go next to finish a project and do it really well. He was able to keep everything on track."

A Good Fit

Peterson says he believes using Vegvari as a reference helped him to land his position at Activision. "Working so closely with Ted allowed me to

show him what I could do. He relayed that to my employers and it turned out for the best," he says.

"Quality assurance — that's his personality," Vegvari says of Peterson. "He can take responsibility. His responsibility as an intern included setting up a specialized network for group and Internet gaming competitions. This provided him with skills that have helped him tremendously in his current job, where computer networking skills are key."

Adds Vegvari, "Even when he was here, I could see that he would be called upon to do more sophisticated things and manage people and projects."

Despite the responsibility inherent in his current position, Peterson insists that his job is more fun than work.

"I found my dream job," he says. "A couple of years back I couldn't even think about a job like this existing."