



Grain game feeds hungry

BY LAURA PRATHER
Features Editor

A mere 10 grains of rice simultaneously can improve one person's vocabulary and another person's life.

John Breen, working with the United Nations World Food Program, created FreeRice.com, a Web site linking a vocabulary game with donations to the poorest and hungriest people on earth. Within one month of the site's launch on Oct. 7, more than one billion grains of rice had been donated to WFP — enough to feed more than 50,000 people for one day, according to WFP's Web site. Altogether, Free Rice players have donated more than 4.1 million grains of rice to date.

"I think it's been a surprise for all of us how it's caught on," spokeswoman for WFP Jennifer Parmelee said. "It gives people a chance to do something fun and actually educational, and at the same time make an actual contribution. It's a direct contribution to WFP with no strings attached."

The rules are simple: The game presents the player with one word and four possible synonyms. For each correct answer, 10 grains of rice are donated to WFP. At first visit, the program randomly generates several words of varying skill levels to determine a player's level of vocabulary and then appropriately adjusts.

As someone continues to answer correctly, the level of difficulty increases. There are 50 levels, but it is very rare for a person to reach the highest level. For three correct answers in a row, a player will move up one level, but one wrong answer and he or she falls back one level.

While playing the game, the browser displays logos of businesses and organizations at the bottom of the page. The logos change each time the page is refreshed.

"Whichever logo is on at the moment that you register an answer, that organization will contribute an inkling, or the equivalent dollar amount of [10 grains of rice]," Parmelee said.

At the end of the day, WFP receives a cash amount totaling the number of grains of rice donated through FreeRice.com, Parmelee said. So far, most of the donations have gone to help villages of Bangladesh that were affected by the typhoon, she said.

"The fact that it comes in cash helps us precisely in emergency situations like the Bangladesh situation because it enables us to purchase the rice in a place that's close by and get the rice there a lot faster," she said.

Prior to the new, interactive game's launch, rising gas and food prices along with static contributions made providing food to those in need very difficult and expensive, Parmelee said.

"I think the timing of this initiative is critical for us," she said. "... The number of people who are in need, who are chronically hungry, is rising by that four million a year — it's currently around 850 million — and it's rising instead of going down."

Andrew Chisholm, native of Charlotetown, Prince Edward Island, created a Facebook group called Free Rice Challenge five days after the Web site launched. Since then, about 90 other Facebook groups and two applications have been created to support the cause, but Chisholm's group is by far the biggest with more than 53,000 members.

Chisholm, who works at a call center, said he accidentally discovered the game one day at work.

"I have this plug-in on my browser, it's called Stumble Upon, and what you

do is click Stumble and it just takes you to random Web sites," he said. "So I literally stumbled upon that Web site, Free Rice."

Chisholm said he started a Facebook group because he thought the Web site was a good cause and he wanted to let all his friends know about it.

"It's amazing actually how quick it grew," he said. "It just shows you the power of Facebook, for one. It just really shows how everyone's connected — you invite one person to it and they invite a couple people."

Visitors of FreeRice.com have the option of keeping track of their total of grains of rice donated and their level of vocabulary. Members of the Free Rice Challenge group are encouraged to post their totals on the group's message wall and so far the group's total is about 1.1 million grains of rice donated.

"Some people have brought up different concerns, like how rice is not really a permanent solution and stuff like that," Chisholm said. "And I think

they're kind of looking way beyond it. ... I think you've got to put yourself in somebody's shoes because there's a billion people on this planet that are starving and ... between 25,000 and 35,000 die each day from it. That's the population of the city I live in that dies each day from hunger."

Like many other fads and trends, the game's popularity will start to slow down, Chisholm said. However, he said he thinks the Web site will generate a lot of other related sites that will continue to create awareness about the cause.

Although donations made on the Web site have started to level off, senior Emi Griess continues to play the game in her spare time.

"The first few days I went [to the Web site] kind of a lot and now I just try whenever I have a couple of minutes of free time just go to it and do a couple of words," she said. "But if I'm really bored and I start looking at Facebook or something, sometimes I decide to go there because it actually is accomplishing something than just wasting time."

Griess said anyone can play the game but that she thinks it is geared more towards high school and college students because they are on the Internet so much.

"I think it's a really good idea because it's really simple," she said. "College students are into the Internet a lot and we waste a lot of time on the Internet, so I think it's a good alternative to things that don't really mean anything."

Parmelee said the Web site's success has been overwhelming and WFP is grateful for every grain of rice that is donated.

"It all adds up," she said. "Everybody thinks of a grain of rice by itself as meaningless. ... A hundred thousand dollars that's now been donated to WFP through Free Rice was used to provide 230 metric tons of rice to refugees who are sheltering in Bangladesh."

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Andrew Chisholm
Creator of Free Rice Challenge Facebook group

sesquipedalialia
cerulean
moribund
ultimate
prosperity
equivocate

FOOD SUPPLY

Who received food from the UN World Food Program, the distributor of rice earned at freerice.com, in 2006?

- 59 million children**
- 20 million children at school**
- 76 million women and children**
- 2 million refugees**
- 55 million in Africa**
- Total food delivered:**

4 million tons

Design by Dylan Herx/Index
Source: World Food Program

Photo illustration by Jackson Groves and design by Nick Wilsey/Index

Around The Ville

Kwanzaa Celebration

Join the Coalition of African American Women in celebrating Kwanzaa, a holiday focusing on family, culture and community. Dinner is included with the program.

12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Saturday
SUB Georgian Room
Free

True Entertainment

Come listen to the a cappella group True Men sing your favorite songs in its holiday concert.

4:30 p.m. Saturday
Baldwin Auditorium
Free

Dance Lessons

Expand your connection with culture and learn modern and traditional Israeli dances. Refreshments will be provided.

7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Friday
Baldwin 252
Free