

Valley Vendors Flock to E3

TECHNOLOGY: Video game studios and hardware makers to debut products at convention.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

If it's June in Los Angeles, then it's time for E3, the annual video game trade show at the Los Angeles Convention Center formally called the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Running June 12-14, the extravaganza of all things connected to video games is the largest show of its kind and draws in companies from the San Fernando Valley area as exhibitors.

Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, Performance Design Products and Key Code Media, all in Burbank; and 505 Games in Calabasas are among those from the Valley with exhibitor space at the show. 505 will highlight its "Walking Dead," "Indivisible," "Underworld Ascendant" and "Bloodstained: Ritual of the Night" games at the show.

Additionally, Gayle Dickie and some of her on-air talent from Gamer World News Entertainment network in Studio City plan to attend as well.

New to E3 this year is the Coliseum, a main stage at L.A. Live across from the convention center that features panel discussion and interviews with video game developers, filmmakers and others associated with the industry.

One of the panel discussions on June 13 features the creators of the game that Warner Bros. Interactive is unveiling at the show, "Lego DC Super-Villains," which has an October release date.

Ames Kirshen, vice president of interactive and animation for Warner Bros.-owned DC Entertainment and one of the scheduled panelists, said the game's original story flips the DC universe and allows players to star as memorable villains.

"DC's roster of iconic Super-Villains is unmatched, and fans will love teaming up with the Joker, Harley Quinn, Lex Luthor and a host of others to save Earth from a greater evil," Kirshen said in a statement.

Big pie

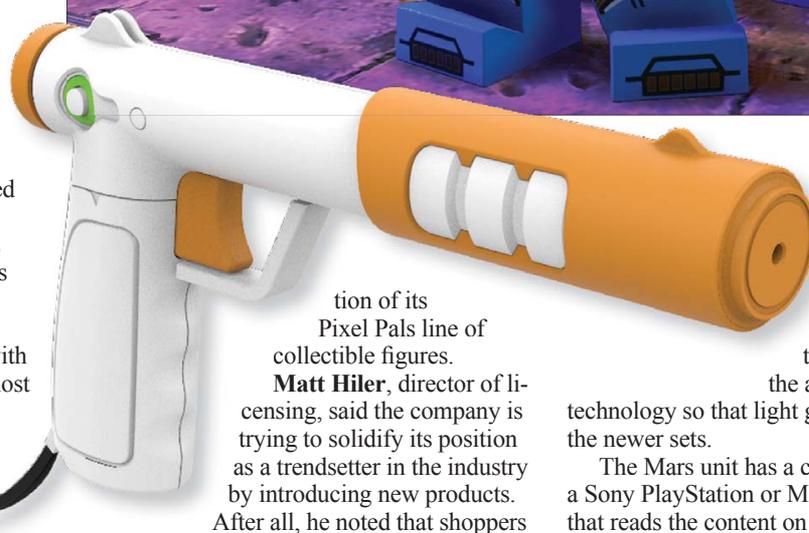
The video game industry brings in billions each year and is only growing bigger.

According to figures from Entertainment Software Association, an industry trade group and producer of E3, and NPD Group, in Port Washington, N.Y., the U.S. video game market brought in \$36 billion in revenue last year, an 18 percent increase from 2016. About \$7 billion was for peripherals and other hardware, which is the area that Performance Design Products, or PDP, operates in.

At E3 this year, PDP will highlight its usual core products of headsets and controllers, as well as two new products and the continua-



Bad Guys: Warner Bros.' 'Lego DC Super-Villains'; below, light gun from Performance Design Products.



tion of its Pixel Pals line of collectible figures.

Matt Hiler, director of licensing, said the company is trying to solidify its position as a trendsetter in the industry by introducing new products.

After all, he noted that shoppers can go into a lot of retail stores and see the same products year after year with minimal changes.

"We are constantly trying to innovate within the category and provide gamers with unique experiences," Hiler said.

Pixel Pals, which have new characters coming in the fall and next spring, are distributed worldwide and PDP partners with retailers such as Walmart Inc., Target Corp., Best Buy Co. Inc. and GameStop Corp. to sell the collectibles. It also works with distributors that get them into smaller independent shops.

Coming early next year is the Mars line of light guns, a pistol-shaped control device. Light guns had been popular until cathode ray tube

televisions were phased out for plasmas and flat screen sets, Hiler explained.

PDP spent three to four years to address the advancement in TV

technology so that light guns could work with the newer sets.

The Mars unit has a camera that attaches to a Sony PlayStation or Microsoft Xbox console that reads the content on the TV screen and a wireless light gun that communicates with it, Hiler said.

"We are the first company in a while to come up with a light gun and no other company has come up with this technology," he added.

PDP has made two games to use with the light gun and is in talks to create a partnership with a major game developer and publisher for other game titles as well.

While the company has published or co-published game titles previously, the title to use with the light gun are the first concerted effort to develop its own.

"This is the most we have invested into a game and it is a lot different because we also developed our own platform with Mars," Hiler said.

The second of the new products to be shown at E3 is the Victrix pro sports headset, which comes in two models. The \$300 model available this month comes with what Hiler calls the first for the market – active noise canceling capabilities that eliminates up to 70 percent of ambient noise. The less expensive version without the noise canceling function will cost \$200 and is available in October.

Both headsets come with microphones that were originally designed for the military's Cobra helicopter. The models also have air vents.

"If you were to watch e-sports tournaments, you will notice the players take off the headsets between matches. A lot of that is because of the humidity that builds up in the earcups," Hiler added. "The vents crack open in the back and immediately release that humidity."

Media coverage

As a fast-growing segment of the video game industry – viewership is expected to reach 380 million this year – e-sports is of particular interest to Dickie and her Gamer World News Entertainment network that launched in April with 13 ad-supported channels. Content is typically filmed in Studio City. For E3,

however, the network will stream

live the gaming company news conferences with commentary from technical experts Rob

"Captain Rob" Steinberg and Tian Wang, Dickie wrote in an email to the Business Journal

"I think the news conferences set the tone and after all that news is out there," Dickie wrote in her email. "It's all about dissecting and commenting on everything that is laid out from all the publishers."

What Dickie hopes to get out of attending E3 is more than just live commentary. She is also interested in news about the newest game services, mobile games and whether there will be more virtual reality content coming. Specific game titles the network is paying attention to include "Assassin's Creed Odyssey," "Smash Bros.," "NBA2k19," and "The Last of Us Part 2," which Dickie described as a favorite of Steinberg's.

While E3 will be a big deal for the network this year, Dickie said she thinks there is room for a more inclusive global gaming festival that she calls Gamer World Expo.

"We're hopeful to make some major announcements in the fall for 2019," Dickie said in her email.



Super: Collectible Pixel Pal figure; above right, Victrix headset with noise cancellation.