Tetris in the Sky: Gamers Play on Philly Building

KATHY MATHESON, Associated Press

Philadelphia (AP) — Sam Robinson said it's been about 15 years since he last played the videogame Tetris on a Game Boy. On Saturday night, he played it on the side of a skyscraper.

View: Giant Tetris Game Displayed on Skyscrapper **[1]**

Robinson, 30, was among the hundreds of Tetris fans who had a little fun Saturday with a big version of the classic video game on the side of the 29-story Cira Centre in downtown Philadelphia.

"It has been probably 15 years since I played Tetris last on a Game Boy, and it's much different playing on the side of building that's a half-mile away," the city resident said. "Everything's happening so quick."

The hundreds of LED lights embedded in the building's glass facade normally display colorful patterns. On Saturday night, images of supersized shapes "fell" on two sides of the mirrored tower as competitors used joysticks to maneuver them, creating a spectacle against the night sky that organizers hoped inspired onlookers and players to think about the possibilities of technology.

It wasn't the first time Tetris has been played on a building. But the 100,000-square-foot "screen" — which includes the north and south faces of the structure — could be a record.

The spectacle kicked off a citywide series of events called Philly Tech Week. It also celebrated the upcoming 30th anniversary of a game revered as the epitome of elegance and simplicity, said Frank Lee, an associate professor of digital media at Drexel University.

Lee, a game designer who oversaw creation of the giant display, said putting it on an office building was like making a huge virtual campfire.

"This project began as a personal love letter to the games that I loved when I was a child - Pong last year, Tetris this year. But it ended up as a way of uniting the city of Philadelphia," Lee told the crowd.

Lee already holds the Guinness World Record for the world's largest architectural video game display for playing Pong on one side of the Cira Centre last year. Pong, the granddaddy of all video games, is an electronic version of paddleball developed by Atari in 1972.

Tetris, created by Russian computer programmer Alexey Pajitnov in 1984, challenges players to rotate and arrange falling shapes into complete rows.

It became a global phenomenon in the late 1980s after game designer Henk Rogers, who had seen Tetris at a trade show in Las Vegas, acquired the rights and struck a deal to put it on Nintendo's original Game Boy.

Rogers, who was among the players on Saturday in Philadelphia, said he can't believe the longevity of Tetris, which decades later continues to mesmerize players on more than 30 platforms.

"If a game lasts a year, that's amazing," said Rogers, now managing director of The Tetris Co. "They usually go out of style very quickly."
Rogers said several new Tetris products and initiatives are planned for release around its June 6 anniversary. He declined to discuss details.

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