

Wheel of Destiny

Tony Aceti working to market and sell the word game his mother created to help him improve his spelling grades.

by Susan Thomas Springer /
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The game of roulette involves betting, winning and losing. The life of an inventor is fairly similar. Yet if an inventor brings hard work and tenacity to the table, they just might be one of the few who are successful.

Tony Aceti bet the word game his mother invented before her death, which uses a roulette wheel to pick letters, would be popular. Now his bet is finally paying off.

Today this hay farmer is an award-winning businessman.

Aceti's journey has taken a few decades, included some bumps, and has forced him to learn everything from computers and copyrights to manufacturing and marketing. Now he's prepared to compete within the big league and bring Mingle Word-Roulette to an international audience.

"To meet the ultimate goal of having people all over the world play my mom's game-it's overwhelming," said Aceti.

It all began when a young Aceti fell behind in spelling. As a boy growing up on a ranch in Oregon, he was more interested in trying to dig to China and taking apart lawn mowers than he was in studying.

So his mother invented a game where they sat at the kitchen table spelling words after spinning a roulette wheel with letters rather than numbers. "She had this idea to motivate me toward spelling," said Aceti. "I needed a hook- I learn by doing, not by reading a book."

Mingle Word-Roulette is played by spinning four silver balls in the wheel which land on vowels, consonants or letter combinations such as "th."

Players compete to spell as many words as possible with the letters from each spin.

Aceti said people of all ages enjoy playing including students who, like him, want to improve their spelling skills.

Even though his mother, Rose, was battling breast cancer, she continued to improve Mingle and tried unsuccessfully to sell it to large game manufacturers. She died in 1981 on Aceti's 23rd birthday.

Rose's last words to her son were to move forward with the game that had brought them so much fun.

At first, Aceti tried to honor those words but was daunted finding supplies and marketing the game. He sold games slowly, then decided to return to hay farming and put hundreds of plastic roulette wheels in his closet, where they stayed for 25 years.

"Even during those years, I always had the desire to do the game," said Aceti.

About a year ago, Aceti decided to re-launch the game.

His practical reasons for trying again included the physical demands of farming on a 50-something body and seeing the power of the Internet to sell product.



"I had a really steep learning curve on the computer," said Aceti.

Aceti created a website but soon learned having one doesn't mean buyers will find it. He tried Amazon only to see his game listing buried under the established games such as Scrabble and Monopoly.

So Aceti tried a lower-tech route and brought Mingle Word-Roulette to art fairs and shows around the state. The public feedback gave him a great opportunity to improve the game.

"I've perfected the product so much that it's very playable," said Aceti. He adds that people are intrigued when they see Mingle at shows and move in closer to find out how it works.

This past June, Aceti took his game to Pittsburgh, Penn., to attend America's largest invention trade show and came home with the top award for his category. He was surprised to win first prize in the games and toy category at Invention & New Product Exposition (INPEX).

(In another unexpected twist, Aceti was interviewed at the show by comedian Jim Norton for a bit in a feature that recently appeared on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno.)

The award brought him more than applause and a plaque. It gave him the opportunity to advertise in The SkyMall catalog, which is seen by 88 percent of all domestic air passengers, reaching more than 650 million air travelers annually.



Aceti's phone and e-mail have been hopping since his award. Along with media interviews, he's received inquiries from buyers but hasn't found the right one.

He is considering a sale carefully because the possibility of the game leaving his hands is both scary and exciting.

So now Aceti is focused on manufacturing 1,000 games, so he's prepared when his advertisement hits SkyMall around the holidays.

"I've turned my house into an assembly plant," said Aceti.

He has game supplies in two bedrooms and the garage of his Bend home along with two shipping containers at his HAY DEPOT.

Farming and international business may seem worlds apart, but Aceti says the values he learned on a ranch such as responsibility and honesty have honed his skills to be successful with Mingle.

Aceti calls Mingle a game of skill, strategy and luck. Those are the same elements which have brought his mother's invention from the kitchen table to thousands of people.

To learn more about Mingle Word-Roulette or to order your game today visit www.minglegame.com.