

STOP before you GO

Written by Story and photos by Andy Gibbons III Sun Correspondent
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Local players of the new phone-based game, Pokémon GO, have insights worth sharing

There is a motto in this fast-paced and impatient digital age that flashes on every smartphone screen— it's not Disney Frozen's "Let it Go," but rather, "Let's Go!"

Pokémon Go made record-breaking history in the mobile app world, currently beating Twitter and even pornographic apps in terms of use. However, if you aren't a millennial or a Generation X parent, you probably aren't an expert of the Japanese franchise "Pocket-Monsters," known as Pokémon in America. It has its own anime cartoon show, trading card game, merchandise, and video games.

Now it's in your backyard ... literally — OK, maybe not actually in the real world, but in "augmented reality," thanks to the app's use of your smartphone's GPS, camera, and Google Maps.

But what happens when you can't Go play Pokémon Go because of technical difficulties? On July 17, local players experienced this first-hand when they were stopped from having a large group-journey through town because of the threat of rain and overloaded game servers.

The few players who did show up met at one of the game's many "Pokémon Gyms," which have real-life counterpoints like Gallup Christian Church. Several church members, including the pastor, are avid players.

"It's a good way to get off your couch and be active," Nathan Hilderman, a volunteer with the church's technology ministry said. Later, he added that the game's a "great way to practice social skills."

Go gets users out of their homes by walking and exploring their cities to hatch Pokémon eggs. The app uses GPS tracking to see if someone is actively moving, but cuts off at 15 mph to make sure no one is cheating by using a vehicle.

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The four players who stuck around to see if the servers would get back online shared tips. One local said he found a way to trick the game by strapping his phone to a ceiling fan and letting it spin on a low setting.

“When it says be aware, *be aware!*” Go player Riley Etcitty said from the beginning.

The others agreed, admitting that some of them have tripped and are concerned that local traffic accidents may soon follow from carelessness.

Etcitty also shared an app for users who have dogs they would like to take for a walk while they play. It’s called “WoofTrax” at wooftrax.com, and every time you walk your pet, it accumulates real-world dollars toward the animal charity of your choice. Another dog owner said Pokémon Go was the best thing to happen to his dog since he was rescued from the local animal shelter three years ago because of all the walking the game has inspired.

“If anything, I believe Pokémon Go will attract a crowd of people who are new to the Pokémon franchise into making a purchase,” Devin Richards, store manager of Gallup’s Gamestop video game store, said. “It’s no coincidence that a new Pokémon title, and possibly a Pokémon themed [Nintendo] 3DS, is releasing this same year.”

So far, the game has had favorable reviews among Gallup players, aside from the frustrations of frozen servers.

“I think the community has become the very thing Pokémon was meant to be. A friendly rivalry, a challenge.” Richards, a player himself, said. “To put it in the perspective of the [Pokémon TV Show] theme song, “You teach me and I’ll teach you.”

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