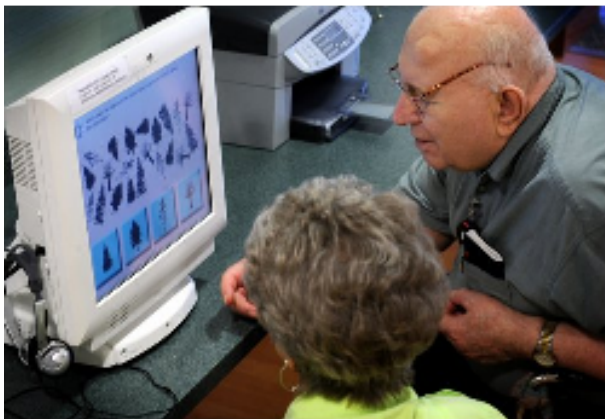


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Gazette Photographer: [Peter Barber](#)

Andrew Jacob plays a video trivia game with Annette Re at Hawthorn Ridge Retirement Community in East Greenbush. The Dakim (m)Power computer-based gaming system is updated daily and adapted to each player's ability.

EAST GREENBUSH — Andrew Jacob, 82, sat in front of the Dakim (m)Power, a computer-based gaming system designed to help maintain brain health, and began to play.

"Is this you?" the computer asked, as Jacob's picture popped up on the screen.

"Who's that ugly-looking guy?" Jacob said with a laugh, as he touched "yes" on the screen.

"In this game, I'll show you a phrase with a word missing and ask you to touch the name of the color that completes the phrase," said the computer. "For example 'shrinking violet.' Now let's try a few."

"Blank jeans," said the computer. Jacob touched "Blue."

"Snow blank." Jacob touched "White."

"Blank Hornet." Jacob touched "Green."

"Holy cow, that was three in a row," said the computer. "Great job."

Cognitive exercise

When it comes to brain health, research suggests that it's "use it or lose it," said Nancy Cummings, vice president of Hawthorne Ridge, the Eddy's East Greenbush campus that houses independent, assisted-living and Alzheimer's residents.

"We know that cognitive exercise and mental stimulation have been shown to improve the brain's ability and can be an integral part of your well-being, particularly as we age," explained Cummings.

"It's good exercise for the mind," added Jacob. "Those were easy. Some of the questions aren't so easy."

For example: "Vacationing in Paris, you arrive at 4 p.m. local time, nine hours ahead of your son's time in Portland, Ore. An hour later you call him to tell him you arrived safely. What time does he get your call?" asked the computer.

Given four choices, after thinking for a couple of minutes, Jacob correctly touched "8 a.m." as onlookers cheered.

"It sure makes you think," said Annette Re, 70, who helped Jacob read the answers because of vision problems linked to macular degeneration.

"I try to play myself every day, too," Re added. "I find it helps my short-term memory, and it's fun. My husband, Charles, also plays."

Re said she enjoys all of the categories.

"I find the math is a little hard, but I find I'm getting better the more I use it," said Re.

The Dakim (m)Power system was founded by Dan Michel whose father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 1993. Michel saw the need for an effective means of therapy and wanted to develop a tool that would not only help his father resist the loss of cognitive abilities, but would be a fun and entertaining activity.

Tailoring the games

The games, which last between 20 and 25 minutes, are updated daily and tailored to each player based on age, tastes and abilities, from those at the highest cognitive levels to those with mild to moderate dementia.

The system focuses on several cognitive areas, including long-term and short-term memory, critical thinking, visuospatial, calculation and language.

The game can be used by most seniors without caregiver assistance because of the touch screen and the system's ability to adjust the level of challenge to match users' mental capacity as they play.

Activities range from anagrams and name-that-tune challenges to interactive puzzles and narrated literary passages with follow-up questions.

"I think it's an absolutely wonderful program" said Dineen Paeglow, project associate at Hawthorne Ridge, who trains residents how to use the cognitive fitness program. "The goal is to keep your mind sharp."

Paeglow said about 35 residents of the independent living center play the Dakim (m)Power every day; three assisted-living residents play daily and several Alzheimer's residents enjoy it.

"The great thing about these units is they self-adjust," Cummings explained. "So if you are really good in math, the next time you go back, the questions get a little bit harder. And because the game self-adjusts, residents with Alzheimer's disease can play as well."

The Eddy installed the computer-based gaming system at eight of its housing and residential affiliates in March.

"Another great thing about it is that it has a touch screen, which is much easier for people like Andy who have sight problems," said Cummings.

Coming back for more

Paeglow said if residents play the game once, they usually return.

"Some of the residents didn't want to sign up in the beginning," she said. "But as the other people played and started talking about it, more started playing. Now once they start playing, most people stay on it. It's fun, but it does challenge you. The more you do it, the better you get."