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In virtual world, Lincoln's worth \$800

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON / Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Feb 13, 2007 - 12:14:27 pm CST

The answer: 800 real American dollars and Internet access.

The question: What's it take to make an average Joe the mayor of Lincoln?

Joe Swink's the name — that's The Honorable Joe Swink to you.

Some respect, please. He's your new virtual mayor.

He's 41 and lives in Rosalie, up in northeast Nebraska. Builds trailers in Wayne for work. In his first remarks to the press as mayor, he said: "Honestly, who wouldn't want to be mayor of Lincoln? Heck, you got the Huskers down there."

What's it take to call yourself virtual mayor of Lincoln?

An account on Weblo.com — a new Web site that seems a collision of MySpace and eBay, or perhaps better described by one Weblo rep: "It's like Monopoly on steroids."

Started by some brains in Montreal and introduced to the public on Dec. 5, Weblo is both social networking site and trading game.

It's the trading and money-making potential that has caught the fancy of the site's 10,000-plus members.

If you believe the Weblo introductory page: "Everyone makes money at Weblo.com!"

Members of the site can own and trade cities, states, properties, organizations and even manage celebrity Web pages.

Like the real world, the goal is simple: Buy low. Enhance what you have while you got it. Then sell high.

And the money is very, very real. A PayPal account is needed.

Someone bought California for \$53,000. Someone bought Regis Philbin. Someone bought the NRA.

Lincoln originally sold for \$15.88. Omaha went for \$19.83.

Memorial Stadium? Two bucks.

That's no diss to Nebraska's favorite cathedral. All property starts at \$1 or \$2.

Even the Empire State Building was originally bought for \$1. That person eventually sold it for \$250.

The original owner of Lincoln also made a decent chunk of change when he sold the Capital City. Swink considers the \$800 well spent.

He estimates he's spent more than \$1,200 buying about 50 Weblo cities throughout the country. He's also mayor of Norfolk, Wayne, Blair — even a few small towns in Ohio.

"I honestly believe this is the next generation of MySpace," Swink said.

The difference — people at Weblo will tell you — is that MySpace makes all the money off ad revenues.

Weblo splits 10-50 percent of the ad revenue with a member each time someone clicks an ad on his page. (The site has five membership levels, ranging from free to \$269 a year. The more you pay, the bigger percentage of ad revenue you're said to receive.)

Said Weblo director of marketing Sean Morrow: "This all began with the question, 'Why is it that there is only one company making huge amounts of money? Why aren't the members themselves making money?'"

And so a guy goes on Weblo and buys California for \$53,000 knowing he'll cash in a few cents every time someone clicks on his page.

He'll add a little more to the pot when someone clicks on any city in California.

So far, the California virtual governor has earned \$265.46.

How's Nebraska's virtual governor doing? Not so hot: We don't have one yet. No one's bought the state.

The title will cost you. To be exact: \$2,406.

Reach Brian Christopherson at 473-7438 or bchristopherson@journalstar.com.


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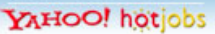
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