

Home-grown Ambrosia feeds software niche

Tucked away in a stately yellow farmhouse about a 10-minute drive from campus is Rochester's future.

It's easy to miss, but it's right there – a few feet away from the bustling intersection and office parks dotting each of the remaining corners in the Rochester suburb of Brighton. Behind an unassuming sign identifying Ambrosia Software Inc. sits the small firm founded about 20 years ago by Andrew Welch '92 (photography).

Ambrosia is a private, growing company, doing business in a burgeoning high-tech field – the type of firm that's increasingly driving Rochester's new economy.

It all began for Welch as a 15-year-old high school student designing computer typefaces. His programming skills helped pay for college and, back when he was still an RIT student, he wrote his first computer game – "Whacky Wheel," an electronic version of the TV game show Wheel of Fortune – which eventually led to the founding of Ambrosia. The start-up's first offering was "Maelstrom," a 3-D Asteroids-style game.

Today, Ambrosia (Greek for "food of Gods") has a bountiful harvest of more than two dozen computer games, including "DEFCON" and "pop-pop" (two of the most popular), and a growing number of applications and utilities, such as Dragster, a file-transfer tool; iSeek, an Internet search utility; iToner, a custom ring-tone tool for use with Apple's iPhone; and EasyEnvelopes, a free envelope-printing "widget."

Two newer releases have generated the most recent buzz: SnapzProX, an image and movie capture application for easy creation and editing of QuickTime movies and screenshots (it's Welch's voice that declares "Cut!" and "That's a wrap!" inside the program); and WireTap Studio, professional audio recording and editing software that can capture audio output from other computer programs.

Winner of a 2007 Editors' Choice Award (commonly called an "Eddy Award") from Macworld, WireTap Studio was favorably reviewed by the magazine and Welch was interviewed about the software for a Macworld podcast. A self-described "Mac geek," Welch explained on the podcast how he ended up making computer applications, rather than shooting news photos, for a living:

"I was fortunate enough to have a friend of mine, who was a pretty famous photojournalist, who basically said, 'Unless you get really lucky, I suggest you do the computer stuff.' So that's what I'm doing."

The advice was also providential for other RIT graduates currently employed by Ambrosia Software, including digital artist Marcus Conge '02 (industrial design) and system administrator Jake Cebula '05 (applied networking and systems administration), along with others with RIT ties through co-ops or classes. Welch goes by the title "el presidente."

Away from the cavernous farmhouse – which housed a law firm



Andrew Welch '92 frequently brings his dogs to the office. This one is Aya, a Weimaraner.

before becoming Ambrosia's third home – Welch and his wife, Polly (the former Woon Fei Tay) enjoy their dogs, Kumba and Aya, who occasionally accompany Welch to work, joining Hector, an African gray parrot, who lives at the office.

Welch met Polly when he was asked to evaluate student-designed Web sites created as a project for a class instructed by Conge, who teaches at RIT as an adjunct professor. One of the designs Welch critiqued was created by Polly, a student in the class.

"We started talking, and it turned out she was from Malaysia," Welch recounts. "By coincidence, I was on my way to Malaysia for a vacation. One thing led to another and she ended up stuck with me for life! That is an RIT love story, in a sense."

Cut! That's a wrap!

Michael Saffran

Web extras:

For more about Ambrosia Software Inc.'s products, visit ambrosiaSW.com. To hear a Macworld magazine podcast interview with Ambrosia Software founder Andrew Welch, visit

<http://podcasts.macworld.com/2007/10/downloads/mwpodcast97.mp3>

To read Macworld magazine's selections for its 23rd Annual Editors' Choice Awards, visit <http://www.macworld.com/article/131153-3/2007/12/eddyawards2007.html>