

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## HITLab creates Launceston-sized virtual suburb

A group of nine HITLab students have pushed the boundaries of technology, creating a software program that allows users to build 3D virtual worlds, through the use of a state-of-the-art facility called the VisionSpace.

Project manager Jonathan O'Duffy said the WorldPlay project was inspired by a YouTube concept video by US filmmaker Bruce Branit, called World Builder.

In World Builder, a man creates a virtual street, complete with buildings, trees and flowers, using only hand gestures.

HITLab founder Prof. Tom Furness, often described as “the grandfather of virtual reality”, officially commissioned the assignment, which was completed as part of the Immersive World Project unit: an advanced study unit at the School of Computing and Information Systems at UTAS.

Mr O'Duffy said that by holding a specialised controller in one hand a user could enter the WorldPlay virtual world and create just about anything they liked, in a virtual space the size of Launceston.

“It is like a giant playground,” Mr O'Duffy said.

“You can make a park, you can make trees, lamp posts, letterboxes, churches, benches, houses, skyscrapers, cars, streets, you name it.”

“We are really pleased with how it's turned out, because it has been a complicated and difficult idea to implement, from the coding right through to the 3D modelling.”

Mr O'Duffy said the nine-member team had invested more than 2500 man-hours in the project.

“The team members all come from different backgrounds,” he said.

“We have students from psychology, education and computing. Some of the students are from overseas: Ireland, England and Korea. And even though the project was based in Launceston we had a student working on WorldPlay down in Hobart.”

“The HITLab is right at the forefront of augmented and virtual Reality technology; it is right on the edge.”

“This is both a good and a bad thing. It is great that we get to take part in a project like this, but the flip side to that is that not many people have gone before you with this technology – you have to make your own path.”

Prof. Tom Furness said he was delighted with the final outcome of the World Play project.

“I commissioned the WorldPlay project knowing it was ambitious,” Prof. Furness said.

“It would tax the efforts of the most accomplished students anywhere. I have been surprised, delighted and even blown away by what the students have done. They have met and even exceeded my expectations.”

Mr O’Duffy said the WorldPlay software could have practical applications, including in architecture and design, traffic management simulation, and urban planning.

The long-term goal of the project is to become a 3D authoring platform for designing and creating virtual worlds, such as Second Life, and innovate the way 3D content is created.

**Mr O’Duffy and his team will demonstrate the WorldPlay software for the media at 10.30am on Thursday, October 27, at the HITLab at Newnham.**

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