

BEST OF '09 INNOVATIONS

Toys & Games

It's fun to play video games. It's even cooler to make them.

Our nod in the toy and games category goes to Dan Slutz, a 17-year-old inventor of *Rhythm*, a music-based platform game where players battle evil forces utilizing various musical styles as weapons to advance, conquer and defeat their enemies.

The game earned the national Invent-a-Game Challenge from By Kids For Kids this year. Slutz (pronounced *slootz*) of Canton, Ohio, won a \$10,000 U.S. savings bond. Game maker Electronic Arts is developing *Rhythm* into a free, online game.

In the game, players assume the character of "Rhythm." The objective: Return the "Platinum Record" back to Rhythm's hometown, Melody. The Platinum Record holds the key to the enjoyment of music for all ages. Rhythm fights enemies who seek to rob the world of music.

"This," said Slutz of getting his game commercialized, "is a dream come true." ■



Consumer Electronics

We've all seen guys wearing Bluetooth earpieces and said to ourselves, "Dude, that's really a bad look." Women seem to have more techy-fashion savvy when it comes to these things.

So it's with a sense of aesthetic relief that the **ORB** is nearly ready for its commercial debut. The ORB is a finger-worn ring that twists open to become a cool-looking Bluetooth headset for hands-free calling.

Developed by Hybra Advance Technology in partnership with product-development firm AbsolutelyNew, the ORB drapes elegantly over the ear and looks more like jewelry. The deluxe edition will retail for about \$175 and feature a flexed organic light-emitting diode screen to keep caller ID and calendar reminders. It also offers voice-to-text communication.

On the drawing board: limited edition models featuring decorative gemstones, to be priced based on the value of the jewels. ■

Visit www.hybratech.com



Pet Products

In June, inventors Mark Robinson, Michael McGuire and Roy Eng secured a patent for their wheelchair for dogs.

Walkin' Wheels offers an easier alternative to caring for disabled pets. Most dog wheelchairs have to be customized and can take up to two weeks to design and deliver. Walkin' Wheels requires only four measurements, can be ordered online and is available for next-day delivery.

The product may have received an inadvertent marketing boost in September during the season premiere of the ribald, animated television series *Family Guy*. In that episode, "Road to the Multiverse," Stewie and Brian travel to a dimension where dogs rule the world. Joe Swanson, the paraplegic cop with severe anger issues, is seen in dog persona using a Walkin' Wheels-like contraption.

Walkin' Wheels retail for about \$400 and up. ■

Visit <http://handicappedpets.com>



Organics/Green Products

Going green was all the rage in 2009.

One of the products that captivated us was the **Owi 6 In 1 Educational Solar Kit**, which teaches kids the benefits of solar energy while they create six different toys, including an airboat, windmill, puppy and two kinds of planes.

A mini-solar panel drives the small motor. The kit comes complete with 21 snap-on parts. No tools required. Great for budding eco-minded engineers.

It's available at a variety of online retailers for about 20 bucks. ■

