

## CRDA backs esports events in Atlantic City with \$700,000

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ATLANTIC CITY — The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority is betting that esports will bring millennials and other young people to the resort well into the future.

Its board voted Tuesday to invest up to \$700,000 promoting events put on in the next 18 months at Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall and the Atlantic City Convention Center by Ingame Esports Inc.

Esports are competitive video games, running the gamut from fighting and war games to sports games, said Ingame Esports co-founder Angela Bernhard Thomas, who lives in Connecticut.

“It may sound odd to many of us, but thousands of people sit around and watch people play video games,” said CRDA Executive Director Matthew Doherty. “This may be the future of spectator sports.”

“It’s a big deal in colleges,” said Board Chairman Robert Mulcahy III.

Ingame has opened an Atlantic City office, and its co-founder L. Anthony Gaud lives in Linwood.

It formed earlier this year, but the company has recruited people with extensive experience, Thomas said. She said many on its team built, designed and programmed the Microsoft Esports and Gaming Studio in its flagship store in Manhattan.

Thomas said the first event, which the company will present to the board in January for an April or May date, is likely to be for the fighting game community. Other events planned are a collegiate summer event for college teams and an East Coast Athletic Conference esports event. The conference has 221 member schools, and the idea would be to bring teams here on an annual basis for college bowl-style events, she said.

Doherty said CRDA staff will determine which events to back with the funding, and board member Edward H. Gant asked to be updated regularly on which projects are chosen.

“There are communities building stadiums for this,” said Mayor Frank Gilliam, who is on the board. “These folks are paid as professional athletes just for pushing buttons. It’s something in my opinion that puts Atlantic City on the edge of something different and new.”

Doherty said people from Microsoft, Dell and Facebook attend such events to recruit.

“All the IT monsters out there,” said Doherty. “It brings other folks into town as well ... who may have no other draw to come here except esports.”

“It’s going to be an interesting experiment,” said Mulcahy.

A representative of the Attorney General's Office encouraged the esports companies to look into making it a gambling event, since esports qualify under New Jersey law for sports betting.

This weekend there is an esports competition from Dec. 21 to 23 at Ocean Resort Casino. N3rd Street Gamers of Philadelphia is holding the final CS:GO event of NSG's Eastern Conference Championship with a \$30,000 prize pool, according to the company website.