



Trends Update: Giant Games are BIG!

By John Rainey

If you haven't heard, giant (oversized) games are turning up in parks and plazas all across the country.

On a windy Wednesday at Spokane's Farmers Market, two giant Connect Four boards were among a variety of games available during the Spokane Sidewalk Games at Kendall Yards. Other games include giant versions of checkers, chess, chutes and ladders and Jenga.

Founder Ryan Oelrich said it's a dual-purpose venture to promote community and public interactions while employing homeless and formerly homeless young people. The games are left in public places during designated hours with young people on hand to help clean up, explain rules and invite people to participate.

"We're asking them to step up, step out and invite the community to play," Oelrich said. So far, more than 86,000 people have played the games.

According to Nicole Javorsky in an article on citylab.com, these scenes illustrate a trend in urban public spaces in the United States: life-size games. A giant Jenga tower entertains two women during the Bryant Park picnic program in New York City. From super-sized chess and checkers in Buffalo or giant Scrabble at The Wharf in Washington, D.C., the games appeal to children and young adults who have flooded into cities in recent years. "They're part of a larger push for 'playable' cities, and for urban public spaces to be active rather than contemplative," the article notes.

"We see the increase in giant games as one of the ways cities are being creative about cost-effective ways to activate and enliven plazas," said Erin Lonoff, a director at the real estate and economic development consulting firm HR&A Advisors, which has worked on major public spaces like Brooklyn Bridge Park and CityCenter in D.C.

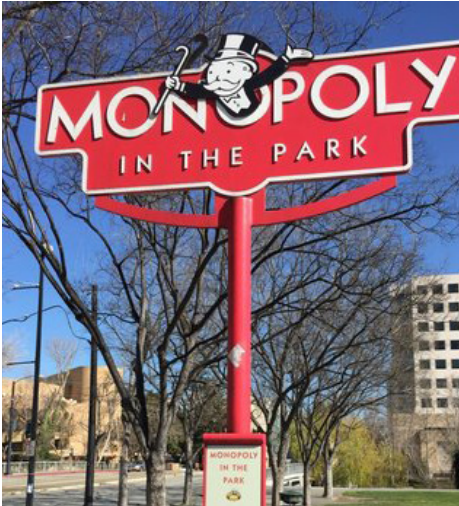
Giant chess, giant Jenga, cornhole, bocce and shuffleboard are just a few of the free outdoor games now available at Play in the Park at Acacia Park in Colorado Springs, CO. To kick off a summer of games in the park, Mayor John Suthers and Boyd Williams, CEO of the YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region, scheduled a battle of cornhole. "LeBron James is truly a gifted athlete," said Suthers. "But I would challenge him any day to a game of cornhole. That's a



game where I can compete with the finest athletes in the world.” Unfortunately, LeBron wasn’t available to take on the challenge, so Williams stepped up to the plate. “I’ve heard rumor of the Mayor’s skill at cornhole” said Williams. He continued, “But I’m not intimidated, I have a strong strategy in place. I feel confident in my ability to win.”

In San Jose, CA, a park friendly foundation called Friends of San Jose built Monopoly in the Park, a giant, granite Monopoly board, which is the only officially licensed Monopoly game board of its kind in the world. In addition to the board itself, the wearable game tokens (car, thimble, boot, etc), the scale replicas of houses and hotels, and the scale 3’x3’x3’ game dice combine to make

playing the game a larger-than-life game experience. The game located in Discovery Meadow has attracted a variety of groups including wedding parties, school groups, family outings and corporations for team-building activities.



Parks and recreation departments along with developers and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) involved in managing public spaces seem to have contributed to the rise of giant games, which are easily movable—and, of course, highly “Instagram-friendly.” More game-players means more people who will shop or eat (or potentially live) in the neighborhood.

In Arlington, VA, the Rosslyn Business Improvement District (BID) hosts movie screenings in Gateway Park, and recently decided to lay out giant games beforehand. “It just encourages [people] to put down their phones and meet their neighbors or colleagues,” Mary-Claire Burick, the BID’s president, said.



Property owner JBG Smith installed life-sized games, including Jenga and chess, in Crystal City, another part of Arlington, earlier this year. These are available for 24/7 play. Kara Milkovich Alter, a JBG Smith Vice President, said they haven't had any trouble leaving the games unattended: "People are taking great care of the games."

But it turns out that it takes a little work to get people to play—it's not as simple as plunking games down on a lawn. "Patience is an important aspect. It takes the public a while to learn how to trust the space," said Maureen Devenny, deputy director of operations at Bryant Park. "Sometimes it takes a couple of years [for park staff] to figure out how to execute it better, how to get people aware of it and build it into their routines."

There are, also, "human" variations of games like human foosball, human bowling, human pool table, human shuffle board, to name a few. From New York City to Jackson Hole, WY, to Eugene, OR, communities are building or buying giant table-top games. In Brownton, MN, community organizers built their own human foosball table. It involves a side of seven players each: one goalie, three defenders, and three attackers. The players all stand in a small enclosure, holding onto a series of rotatable poles while they try to shoot a soccer ball through a goal. It's a fun sport which is gaining popularity around the country for family outings, building teamwork, or just kicking back with friends and neighbors. It can be pretty competitive, too, with organized teams and tournaments.

SOURCES:

<https://www.monopolyinthepark.com>

"What's the Deal With Giant Games in Parks and Plazas?"
By Nicole Javorsky, Aug. 10, 2018

<https://www.citylab.com/life/2018/08/giant-games-in-city-plazas/566447/>

"Roll out the giant chess set: Spokane Sidewalk Games back for the third year." By Rachel Alexander, The Spokesman-Review, June 14, 2018

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2018/jun/14/roll-out-the-giant-chess-set-spokane-sidewalk-game/>

"Play in the Park: Giant chess, giant Jenga, cornhole, bocce and more summer games at Acacia Park" By: Alexa Mae Asperin, Fox21 News

<https://www.fox21news.com/news/play-in-the-park-giant-chess-giant...ga-cornhole-bocce-and-more-summer-games-at-acacia-park/837448395>

Human Foosball video: <https://youtu.be/KdacMmtvAs4/>

Other links on human foosball: http://humanfoosball.com/#_about/

<https://tetonvalleyfoundation.org/event/wyda-ho-human-foosball-classic/>

<https://fringepursuits.com/human-foosball/>