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## Creating 'Mayhem' for a good cause

First came the idea for a game. Then came the plan for a cause.

When Bill Solboe originally envisioned Music Mayhem, it was as a board game in the late '90s -- the result of a long car ride with college buddies, during which they passed the time by guessing the title and artist of songs playing on the radio.

That morphed into a live version for college campuses and NBA crowds. Then came the Music Mayhem app for the iPhone and iPod Touch, and another live version for bars and smaller venues. A Facebook app and an online game are in the works.

Connecting them all is Solboe's deep-seated desire to create awareness about Alzheimer's and other brain disorders.

"I want to use the game as a vehicle for raising money for Alzheimer's research," said Solboe, 48, a disability specialist at the University of Minnesota. "That's my goal. I really see the potential for this to raise a lot of money."

Solboe's family has been hit hard by a genetic brain disorder called frontotemporal

dementia, in which the parts of the brain that largely govern personality, behavior and language shrink.

"Some people with frontotemporal dementia undergo dramatic changes in their personality and become socially inappropriate, impulsive or emotionally blunted, while others lose the ability to use and understand language," according to the Mayo Clinic's website.

They also die at an early age. Solboe's mother started having problems with dementia in her early 40s and died at 59 -- and she "truly lived that long only because of the exceptional care that my father provided for many years," Solboe said. A younger brother who had the disorder died at 41 in 2009. Two older brothers in their 50s have it and are in full-time care facilities. (Genetic tests related to a family study at Mayo show that Solboe doesn't have the disorder.)

Enter Music Mayhem.

"I like the idea of music and how it connects to memory," Solboe said.

So does the Alzheimer's Association, for which Solboe is creating a live version of the game that can be used as a fundraiser. In

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addition, he's donating 20 percent of the sales from the 99-cent iPhone app and a portion of company net profits to Alzheimer's and related dementia research.

"He's taken the game and figured out how it can benefit a nonprofit organization," said Carla Zbacnik, marketing manager of the Alzheimer's Association's Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter. "Combining music and memory is such a cool way to think about it."

The association's Maintain Your Brain initiative promotes mental exercises such as doing crossword puzzles or driving a different route home, and Music Mayhem fits right in with that, she said. Although such exercises might not prevent the disease, they can slow the progression of it, the association says.

"Alzheimer's affects everyone in a family," Zbacnik said. "Music Mayhem also reaches out to younger people in a fun way. It's a really unique opportunity to create public awareness with a hard-to-reach age group."

So on a recent night at Stub & Herb's near the University of Minnesota, Solboe oversaw the live version of Music Mayhem, which will be held again Tuesday night (March 16) at the venerable Minneapolis bar. Six teams of

up to five people quickly scrawled the title and artist of classic rock songs as short samples were played -- five rounds of 10 songs each, \$5 per team per round. A point was awarded for each correct entry, with the highest score winning. They competed for fun and prizes that included a \$100 bar tab, a skiing package and the board game.

Solboe is serious about Music Mayhem. He's just a few months away from earning an MBA degree, which he pursued to help market and promote the game. He estimates that he has spent "a couple hundred thousand dollars" on Music Mayhem to date, including self-publishing the board game using various suppliers to provide everything from timers to game pieces.

"It's expensive, but it was actually much cheaper in the long run," he said. "Because there are people who will do everything for you, kind of like a dream merchant. So they'll put it all together and sell you 10,000 copies of the game. And then you'll keep them in your garage for the rest of your life!"

Solboe returned last week from an advocacy forum in Washington, D.C., where he and 25 other Minnesotans met with movers and shakers to share their stories. One goal was to help people understand that Alzheimer's

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and related disorders affect more than just older people. Another was to seek funding.

"I'd like to believe that research money will be coming," Solboe said after returning, "but rather than wait, I'm happy that I have an opportunity with my business to make a real difference in generating significant research money. Billions of dollars may be a stretch for Music Mayhem, but I am very excited to see what really is possible.

"Our mantra is 'Making Alzheimer's a distant memory, one song at a time.'"

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An advertisement for Mystic Lake Casino Hotel. On the left, a large image of a penny is shown, with the words "WE TRUST" visible above the profile of Abraham Lincoln. To the right of the penny, the text reads: "PENNIES PAY BIG THE MOST PENNY SLOTS!". Further right, the "Mystic LAKE" logo is displayed in a stylized font, with "CASINO • HOTEL" and "mysticlake.com" underneath. At the bottom center, in small text, it says "Owned and Operated by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community".

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