

# Windsor Star

## Urban fun: Pillow fights and light-sabre battles; Group promotes mass fun in public spaces

Sat Jun 16 2012

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Section: Life

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Source: Postmedia News

Illustrations: Les Bazso, Postmedia / The feathers fly as hundreds participate during International Pillow Fight Day at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Vancouver on April 7.;

This year, people in 150 cities around the world participated in International Pillow Fight Day.

In 2005, there was no special day, just two people with one goal: to invent new ways of having fun.

Newmindspace was created by Kevin Bracken and Lori Kufner, then two students at the University of Toronto.

"We've accomplished a lot in seven years," says Bracken.

They started with an urban Easter egg hunt in Toronto, before hosting pillow fights in Toronto and New York. There have been street parades, subway parties and capture-the-flag.

This past year has been a transition for Newmindspace; with Bracken now living in New York year-round, and Kufner in Toronto, it's been hard to organize as many events.

But Bracken says he's still focused on making what they do bigger and better.

In May, Bracken started a software company called Speakeasy. Once it's up and running, Speakeasy's platform will give people the ability to host, promote and

find events based on geolocation.

"I want to make it easy for anyone to become an event promoter," he says.

Bracken and his business partner - whom he met at a 2010 Newmindspace event in Times Square - are flying to San Francisco this month, and they don't plan to leave until they raise enough money to launch Speakeasy.

Bracken also wants to start something called the Urban Playground Fund under the Newmindspace umbrella.

The emphasis of Newmindspace is mass participation in public, urban spaces. With this in mind, Bracken and Kufner have helped turn traditionally smaller and exclusive events into parties full of strangers.

But big events cost big money.

"We understand the weakness of our (current) model," Bracken says. "Money limits how big an idea can be."

Up until now, Bracken and Kufner have been funding Newmindspace events out of their own pockets. Bracken says a game of capture-the-flag costs about \$2,500. That's excluding permits, insurance or paid

advertising. He's opposed to corporate sponsorship and paying to use public space.

Bracken hopes the Urban Playground Fund will solve the financial burden of hosting events. It's a twist on the crowdfunding model that's blossomed in the past few years.

Newmindspace will use its established brand to raise funds, and anyone will be able to apply for grants to implement their urban celebration ideas.

This summer Bracken and Kufner will embark on their first crowd-funded tour. They'll be holding light-sabre battles in six cities, including Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.