

# Virtual Reality: the Fun and Practicality of New Technology - WBOC-TV 16, Delmarvas News Leader, FOX 21 -

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## Virtual Reality: the Fun and Practicality of New Technology

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*If you had your TV turned on this past holiday season, it was tough to avoid all of those virtual reality commercials. The families sitting around and enjoying themselves with special goggles on their heads. And while virtual reality can make for great entertainment, it also has very practical uses, as WBOC's Bill Mich discovered when he set out to uncover what this latest craze is all about.*

Virtual reality provides the perfect escape. Whether you want to walk with dinosaurs or maybe want to tip toe around a haunted house or relive your favorite childhood arcade game Pacman - but this time - from Pacman's point of view: they are all available in virtual reality.

But how does it work?

We've seen the goggles in the store or in the commercials. But if you put on virtual reality goggles, what are you seeing?

"Virtual reality - the idea of it is that it is something that you're kind of immersed into," said Nicholas Ayd, a Best Buy associate. "It's an environment where you can walk around, your motions interact with what you're seeing. So if you're moving around and you turn 180 degrees, you're going to see what is actually directly behind you in that kind of virtual environment."

If you go to the store and buy a pair of virtual reality goggles, a majority of them work directly with your smartphone.

A lot of virtual reality goggles require specific phones but Ayd said those phones that are compatible plug directly into the goggles "so you actually have something to look at and you're actually going to be wearing it so you can actually see the content that's going to be showing up on your phone."

And there all types of content: from movies - to games - to experiences like riding a roller coaster.

But through these headsets and smart phones - this new emerging technology has really become available to just about everyone with many headsets under \$100.

"It's become more popular," said Angelo Mills, another Best Buy associate. "The more people know about it, the more people are going to buy it, especially with the price on it. Its a good stocking stuffer. I know that the season is over but even just for the price, it's a really good gift."

While the entertainment value of virtual reality is obvious, this new technology is getting a lot more real world applications. Those applications are now being taught in the classroom, including on Delmarva. So we paid a visit to the [University of Maryland Eastern Shore](#) in Princess Anne to meet with one professor and one senior who said that virtual reality is a huge part of their curriculum.

The headset and hardware at UMES Assistant Professor Dr. Lei Zhang's classroom are more advanced: no

smartphones needed. And the work being done goes beyond riding a roller coaster and is broken down into two parts.

Zhang said they are using virtual reality to see how it can help the learning experience and then developing virtual reality activities and modes for the classroom to mold it into the curriculum.

"So we are making games so the student can learn by playing these games," Zhang said.

UMES senior Benjamin Whiteley has been hands-on with this virtual reality technology in the classroom and has developed his own virtual reality game that he can then mold into different uses, like for another department at the school.

"So the idea of the game is to sort of get lab safety into the minds of the students," Whiteley said. "Always wear goggles if required, closed toe shoes, what fire extinguishers to use and that sort of thing."

So after Whiteley gave us a demo, we put it to the test. The virtual reality set comes with the goggles, controllers and sensors in the corners of the room, so you can physically move around in the virtual world.

And Whiteley - who will be developing for virtual reality after college - believes the sky is the limit for the technology.

"Future houses you have have an empty room with just the two sensors on the side and that will be the virtual reality room and you can watch a virtual reality movie, learn something in virtual reality and also just play games in there," he said.

With many different uses, virtual reality really lets you escape reality, even for just a few minutes.