

Virtual mobility for disabled wins Second Life prize

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This handout picture shows a 41-year-old paralysed man enjoying a virtual walk in the online world of 'Second Life' with his character being controlled via sensors. An organization that lets people with disabilities virtually climb mountains and hike trails shared top honors in a first-ever Second Life prize for in-world projects improving real-world lives.

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Virtual Ability and Studio Wikitecture, which designs buildings in the [virtual world](#) launched by Linden Lab in 2003, were declared co-winners of what is to be an annual prize at [Second Life](#).

The honor comes with 10,000 dollars (US) each in prize money.

Virtual Ability helps people with disabilities use avatars to skydive, fish, mountain climb, hike and even fly in Second Life, the organization's vice president David Ludwig says in a message posted online at virtualability.org.

"We also do a lot of dancing," wrote Ludwig, whose animated character, or avatar, in Second Life goes by the name Pecos Kidd.

"It's an amazing experience helping someone who will never walk again in real life to jump on a virtual trampoline."

Virtual Ability will use Linden [prize](#) money to work expand services in Second Life, according to group president Alice Krueger.

"For many of us, Second Life is not a game -- it is a second chance at life," Krueger said.

Wikitecture uses collaboration and open-source technology for real and virtual world architecture and urban planning. Wikitecture's projects in Second Life include creating a "tele-medicine facility" for a village in Nepal.

"During the past two quarters, I completed assignments for organizations in Alabama, Britain, Germany, and Canada -- all within Second Life," said Wikitecture architect Jon Brouchoud of the US state of Wisconsin.

"The total sum of those contracts is at least quadruple what we secured for residential work."

A Second Life committee declared the tie for first place on Thursday after sifting through 230 applications from around the world.

Contenders included a Let There Be Night science experiment that demonstrates the effect of pollution on the night sky and a Space Between These Trees charity focused on caring for the Earth and ending hunger.

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