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### Obama Is First in Their Second Life

By SARAH WHEATON

The Second Life Obama for President Headquarters. PHOTO: Dann Sklarew

The Times regularly brings you reporting from Baghdad, Moscow and Des Moines. But can any of those datelines really compare to SILICON ISLAND, SECOND LIFE? Today, we plunged into the briny depths and even teleported to bring you today's preview of grassroots action going on this afternoon in support of Senator Barack Obama in Second Life, where the devotion is real even if the reality is only virtual.

Officially, today is Mr. Obama's "community kick-off" event. He's encouraging people who have joined groups on the Facebook-style social networking tool at [my.barackobama.com](http://my.barackobama.com) to meet in person. People can sign up to host a viewing of a webcast by Mr. Obama from Iowa. The event is an effort to translate online enthusiasm into something more tangible.

But one grassroots Obama for President group was already planning rally for this afternoon. Their goal is similar to that of the campaign.

"The main point is to get people to do some serious work," said Keith Mandell, the president and founder of Obama for President, who is known in Second Life by his avatar, Cubsfan Pugilist. That means contacting friends and family—both in real life and second life, as well as donating money.

The organizers will ask candidates to donate through Mr. Obama's Web site. "In the past we collected linden dollars totaling \$11.36," Odin Liam Wright, an organizer, typed to our avatar as his avatar, Liam Kanno. Linden dollars, the official currency of Second Life, can be exchanged for about 2.5 to 3 cents. "But we stopped to avoid any confusing situations regarding fundraising."

The Second Life Obama for President group, which has over 140 members, will first meet for a different event over at SoHo Island. That event, also unofficial, will feature audio of the Web cast (4 p.m. E.T.) and an avatar resembling Mr. Obama sitting in a virtual living room "talking" along, like an animation. Then they'll teleport over to a "virtual" Capitol Hill for the Obama for President rally. The Capitol, created by ClearInk with Sun Microsystems, is officially a nonpartisan space, and it made news in January when real-life Representative George Miller appeared there to mark the first day of the new Congress in avatar form.

These unofficial activists have done quite a bit of work with little acknowledgment by the campaign. As have some other candidates' Second Life supporters, Mr. Wright and Karen Ellen Shields (Kelly Emms in Second Life) built an unofficial campaign headquarters in on their Silicon Island. Avatars can come by to pick up free hats and tee-shirts, read up on Mr. Obama (with material from the website), and watch videos of his appearance on "The Tonight Show." And it's probably safe to say that with airy modern architecture, hardwood floors and ocean views, the unofficial headquarters would attract the envy of any member of the real-world Obama staff.

When asked about the unofficial Second Life efforts, an Obama campaign spokeswoman said, "We are excited about the grassroots energy surrounding Obama's candidacy online and in communities across the country."

But the question lingers: Until people can vote in Second Life, can campaigns and activists be confident that their efforts in the virtual world will have real world results?

"S.L. could be also considered, to me, an immersive blog sphere, or dynamic [instant messaging tool]," typed Mr. Wright's avatar. "And it also has the same functions of any Web site, so it, in my, view promotes community growth of some sort."

Dann Sklarew, an Obama advocate in the form of Baiji Daniels added: "Now the real trick is how does Obama (or anyone) consciously organize such a multi-media mass of empowered enthusiasm?"

"Community Kickoff" on SoHo by Forefront Media: 4 p.m. (Coordinates for those of you with Second Lives: 135, 147, 22)

Obama for President Rally at ClearInk's Capitol Hill: 5 p.m. (Coordinates: 96, 242, 30 or watch it [here live.](#))