

Games Done Quick founder steps down after completing 13-year any% speedrun

Games Done Quick (GDQ) started 13 years ago in Mike Uyama's mother's basement. It wasn't supposed to. Uyama, the founder of the speedrunning charity event, had a nice venue all picked out and ready to go before coming to the horrific realization that forced him to decamp: the internet was too slow.

"The original intent was to have it at MAGFest," Uyama told *The Verge* over Zoom. "But their internet wasn't good enough and my mom's was, so that's why we had it in my mom's basement."

Since those less than auspicious beginnings, Games Done Quick has evolved into a biannual event that enthusiasts look forward to, clearing schedules, taking off work, and making special trips to its live events. It's also raised over \$41 million for charity, breaking its donation records almost every year. And after 13 years shepherding what's thought of as a kind of gamer Christmas, Uyama is stepping back.

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The Verge had the exclusive opportunity to speak to Uyama and his successor, Matt Merkle, about the challenges and rewards of working on the event that's one of the most heartening and wholesome examples of gaming achievement and charity.

Uyama cites his health as the reason he's stepping away.

"So AGDQ 2023 marks my 13th year of GDQ. I've been at it for a long time, and I decided it's time for me to take a break," he said. "I realized that I need to take care of my health and

kind of focus on different activities.”

It’s easy to understand why Uyama needs a break. In 13 years, he and his team at Games Done Quick have done a lot. In addition to the marquee Games Done Quick events in January and July, the organization also hosts a slew of regular programming focused on building up the speedrunning community, highlighting beginners and speedrunners from marginalized backgrounds. For women and nonbinary speedrunners, there’s Frame Fatales, and for Black speedrunners, there’s Unapologetically Black and Fast.

All of these events spun out of Uyama’s initial goal of creating a charity streaming event unlike the ones that were around in 2009.

“The two main charity events were The Speed Gamers and Desert Bus For Hope,” Uyama said. “And one day we had a thread in our forum – because that’s what we did back in the aughts – about having a charity event.”

Since Speed Demos Archive, the speedrunning forum he was a part of at the time, was centered on running older games, Uyama focused his desire for a charity event into Classic Games Done Quick – a desire that manifested as the now infamous mother’s basement event.

That first year taught Uyama the biggest lesson he’s carried forward into future events.

“Lesson number one was make sure the internet works,” he said.

Lesson number two, according to Merkle, who’ll be taking over as the head of GDQ: no more basements.

“Lesson number one was make sure the internet works.”

“When it was growing from 15 people to 50 people, that was a big wake-up call to move it out of there,” Merkle said.

Merkle attributes the growth of GDQ, from a basement of 15 to hundreds of thousands of viewers on Twitch, to the simple desire of folks wanting to belong in a community doing good work.

“A lot of it is just a community vibe and people want to be a part of that,” Merkle said. And that needs to be a part of something bigger extended to the people watching from home.



[Photo: Games Done Quick](#)

Uyama told *The Verge* that even though he’s stepping down, he doesn’t plan to step away for good. “The community is so welcoming and supportive, and I made a lot of friends. So I definitely don’t want to just abandon them. I still want to be part of it. But I just need to take a break and reset myself.”

With Uyama stepping away, GDQ’s community will step up. At the center of GDQ – more than any one person – is the community

and its desire to do charitable works. For years, GDQ has raised millions of dollars in support of organizations including the Prevent Cancer Foundation, Doctors Without Borders, the Malala Fund, and more. Merkle and Uyama speak with pride when they talk about the good their often silly but always special event has done.

“When Hurricane Harvey hit, we did a donation drive for the Houston Food Bank, which was really off-the-cuff at the last second thrown together,” Uyama said.

Merkle shared that they went from concept to streaming in just four days and that it wouldn’t have been possible at all without the support of strangers from around the country tied together by their love of games going fast.

In the last handful of years, GDQ events have included interviews and little featurettes from Prevent Cancer and Doctors Without Borders so donators can see where their money is going. Thirteen years and \$41 million later, Games Done Quick has had a real and marked impact on the charities it supports.

“I remember when we did our first fundraiser for Prevent Cancer back in 2011,” Uyama said. “I got an email from someone at Prevent Cancer right when we hit the \$40,000 mark that said, ‘We funded half of our research study!’”

“I remember people telling me that [Prevent Cancer Foundation] didn’t really have much of an international reach before we came along,” Uyama continued. “But with our international community and with our urging, they’ve been able to conduct studies around the world. I don’t remember what country it was, but there was an African country where they were using smartphone technology for early detection of cervical cancer. So it’s really going towards a good cause.”

Awesome Games Done Quick starts Sunday, January 8th, at 11:30AM ET. Looking at the schedule, there are so many things

I can't wait to watch.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/1/6/23542796/games-done-quick-2023-mike-uyama-interview>