

## Wilton father creates 'Covidopoly19' board game

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Shahan Islam plays his new Covidopoly19 game with family members, Kari, Elizabeth, wife Teryl, and Elyssa.

**WILTON** — For families looking for something fun to do while being cooped up all day at home during the coronavirus pandemic, there's a new game in town.

Wilton resident Shahan Islam has created a board game called Covidopoly19. "A lot of thinking and brainstorming went into this game, and I hope people enjoy it," he said.

By trade, Islam works as a corporate attorney specializing in patents for pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. But like many others, he has been working from home the past several months, and expects to do so at least through December.

So, he decided to create a family-friendly game about the pandemic that he could play with his wife Teryl Eisenberg and stepdaughters Elyssa, Kari and Elizabeth.

The family has a little more time than usual to play Covidopoly19, because ironically, Islam and his family are currently in quarantine at their home, after being exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. "Everyone's fine with no symptoms at the present time," he said earlier this week.

Islam's goal was to create something that was not only fun, but was timely and had an educational component as well. Thus, was the birth of Covidopoly19.

"We think this game is a conversation starter about what people have been going through during the pandemic," he said.

While Covidopoly19 is played similarly to the old standby Monopoly board game, Islam's game is modern and takes players through different phases of the coronavirus pandemic.

Properties on the Covidopoly19 board aren't named after streets in Atlantic City like Monopoly. Instead, they reflect areas in the United States and around the world that have been strongly affected by the coronavirus, including New York, Detroit, Spain, South Korea, Navajo Nation, and even Rikers Island. "People can research places on the board to see why they are significant," Islam said.

Players still move around the board and purchase things with "bank money," like they do in Monopoly. But instead of houses and hotels, players can buy clinics and hospitals. There are no railroads, instead there are leading world hospital cards. Instead of going to jail, players can end up in ICU in quarantine.

Players may also land on spaces requiring them to choose a "Ventilator" or "Mask" card which contain facts about coronavirus and COVID, bringing an educational aspect to the game. One card for example, says you have to pay a fine for going to the grocery store without wearing a mask.

Game pieces also reflect the pandemic. There are no top hats or thimbles. Instead, players can choose objects such as thermometers, masks or toilet paper, or world figures such as Donald Trump, Angela Merkel, Andrew Cuomo, Tom Hanks, or Dr. Anthony Fauci.

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The game is geared for ages 8 and up, and represents a specific time in history, the likes this generation has never seen and experienced, making Covidopoly19 a collectible item as well, Islam said.

### Production

Coming up with an idea for a game is simple, but actually taking that idea and physically producing, marketing and selling a finished product in the space of several months wasn't quite as easy. "I pivoted when I came to road bumps," Islam said.

Islam created the company Category Ten to oversee production of the game, with his stepdaughter Kari Eisenberg named the company's chief operating officer. Another young woman, Sarah Nugent, is the company's marketing director.

Islam designed (in his head) the game board, cards, banner, and logo, and came up with information for the Ventilator and Mask cards with heavy input from his family.

Through eBay, he found a designer to take the graphic designs in his mind and bring them to life for the game. He then had to price out a production company to construct the game board and all its pieces.

He approached several companies in the U.S., Thailand, and India, and eventually chose a cost-effective company in China that specializes in paper products, to produce the first edition of Covidopoly19. If the game takes off, he plans to have subsequent editions produced in the United States.



Photo: Kari Eisenberg Photo

Islam faced a major cost issue with the price of the game pieces. "I wanted pieces that were solid, but the cost of plastic and other hard materials made it prohibitive, so I came up with small placeholders that could hold hard cardstock pieces," he said. One aspect of producing the game, that some people would have found challenging, was easy for him. As a patent attorney, Islam has submitted trademark registration for Covidopoly19 and Category Ten. The game is in patent-pending status.

Because Islam's game is similar in style to Monopoly, people ask him if there are any legal issues with Monopoly and its patent. "The Monopoly patent expired in 1952. So its concepts are usable by the public. The concept of going around a board and landing on spaces is in the public domain," he said.

### Global journey

Sporting an affable sense of humor, smiling when he talks, Islam, 60, has taken an interesting global journey to get to his current role as Wilton toymaker and entrepreneur.

Born in Bangladesh, where he was raised for several years by his grandmother, Islam moved to Ohio when he was 8, to join his father, a professor at Wright State University. He attended Culver Military Academy, followed by college at Columbia University, then law school at Tulane.

He then spent 17 years in a private legal practice followed by 17-plus years working for Pfizer.

The father of two children from a first marriage, Islam met his current wife Teryl Eisenberg, who also had children from a previous marriage. The family initially settled in Cheshire, but moved to Wilton nearly five years ago to be closer to Islam's work in New York.

Islam is very active in the Unitarian Church of Westport where he founded a youth exchange program.

"Normally, we have German exchange students over the summer. Unfortunately, not this year," he said.

Appreciating life in Wilton, about a month ago, Islam opened an office for Category Ten in Cannondale Village. "It's so charming there," he said.

Despite what sounds like living a serious life juggling a legal career with family, church, and inventing games, Islam has an outwardly humorous side. He recently studied stand-up comedy in a class at the Ridgefield Playhouse where [one of his routines](#) can be seen on YouTube.



Covidopoly19 game Box image

The first edition of Covidopoly19 is on sale for \$34.99 on the website [covidopoly19.com/](https://www.covidopoly19.com/). Islam said he plans to donate a portion of proceeds from the sales to local charities.

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