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3-D television hitting area stores, but prices are high

GRAB YOUR GLASSES | New televisions hitting stores, but programs limited

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BY SANDRA GUY Sun-Times Columnist

Tech enthusiasts are welcoming the latest 3-D televisions -- spurred by the popularity of the hit 3-D movie "Avatar" -- that started hitting stores last week for \$2,500 and up at Chicago area retailers.

The TVs work by sending electronic signals back and forth with 3-D glasses that are nothing like the color-tinted lens paper versions many remember from the 1950s or the 1970s.

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Lloyd Metcalfe, an employee at Best Buy at 555 W. Roosevelt, wears special glasses to watch a movie on a new 3-D television.

(Keith Hale/Sun-Times)

BUYING A 3-D TV

Here's a sampling of what you can get -- and what you'd spend:

PANASONIC

- 50-inch, 3-D plasma TV: \$2,500
- 3-D Blu-ray player: \$399

One pair of 3-D glasses is included. Extra pairs are \$150 each.

SAMSUNG

- 46-inch, 3-D LED TV: \$2,600
- 55-inch, 3-D LED TV: \$3,300

Samsung's 3-D glasses are \$150.

These glasses -- which cost \$150 a pair from one manufacturer and will be bundled into the total TV price from others -- are equipped with liquid crystal LCD shutters. They block each eye in sequence so that the video appears to be three-dimensional. The 3-D video moves at up to 240 times a second vs. today's technology of 30 frames a second.

The 3-D glasses operate on batteries. They fit over regular prescription glasses.

They're expected to gradually come down in price to about \$50 to \$75 each.

The major manufacturers of the new crop of 3-D TVs are LG, Mitsubishi, Panasonic, Samsung, Sony and Toshiba.

In most cases, consumers will need to buy new 3-D-capable Blu-ray players to go with their new 3-D TVs.

The new Blu-ray players are expected to sell for more than \$200.

The exception appears to be Sony, which says its PS3 evideo-game console will receive two new features via firmware update later this year,

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Samsung will offer a free 3-D copy of the movie "Monsters vs. Aliens" on Blu-ray discs with its packages.

MITSUBISHI

- The current models are:
- 60-inch 3-D TV: \$1,399
 - 65-inch 3-D TV: \$1,699
 - 73-inch 3-D TV: \$2,299
 - 82-inch 3-D TV: \$4,199

Mitsubishi does not make a 3-D Blu-ray player or 3-D glasses.

one for gaming and another to allow display of 3-D Blu-rays.

An estimated 5 percent to 10 percent of people have "stereo blindness" -- they can't see 3-D video as three-dimensional -- and up to 56 percent of people 18 to 38 have problems with binocular vision and have difficulty seeing 3-D, according to the College of Optometrists in Vision Development.

People who rush out to buy a 3-D TV will be able to watch the same 2-D programming as they do today on the new sets.

At first, they'll find their 3-D viewing choices limited to a handful of movies, some sporting events, three channels from DirecTV and the Discovery Channel 3-D, said David Wertheimer, executive director and CEO of the Entertainment Technology Center at the University of Southern California, which acts as a forum on 3-D technology and consumer attitudes.

"As with any other kind of electronics, the cost will get driven down very quickly, and the amount of programming will increase," Wertheimer said.

Research has found that consumers are clamoring for 3-D. For instance, 25 percent of those surveyed by the Consumer Electronics Association and the Entertainment Technology Center said they expect to buy a 3-D TV in the next three years.

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