Atari hits gamers with blasts from past
LOS ANGELES, California (AP)
CNN

Atari wants to take video game fans back in time by reviving some of its classic titles from yesteryear such as "Centipede," "Asteroid," and "Pong" with its pixilated paddles. The video game company told The Associated Press on Tuesday it plans to reissue scores of its classic titles from yesteryear on a single disc that can be played on the game consoles Xbox and PlayStation 2. "Atari Anthology" will feature 85 games and is scheduled to go on sale in November at a cost of about $20. But it's only one of the nostalgia projects Atari will push into the market then. The second is Atari Flashback, a slightly miniaturized version of the old Atari 7800 from the mid-'80s. It will have 20 games built into it, including "Breakout," "Solaris," "Crystal Castles" and "Battlezone." Flashback will sell for $45 and include a pair of old-school joysticks. Atari isn't expecting its decades-old games to compete on a technical level, like "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," "Halo" and "Madden NFL 2005" that feature colorful realistic graphics, fast-moving 3-D action and the freedom to roam at will. Instead, the company is aiming at the nostalgia market. "It's a time machine. You go back to your childhood and you play," Atari chief executive Bruno Bonnell said. And for gamers who weren't even born when the first PlayStation appeared? "The kids will think this is quick, this is fast to understand, and we don't need a manual to understand it," he added. "We're going after two generations." Even "Pong," perhaps the most primitive of the games with its simple white square bouncing across the screen, may still have some appeal. "The more primitive the better. It shows that video games are not just about high-end graphics or sophisticated representation. It's about the game-play, the challenge to the player," Bonnell said. The "Atari Anthology" disc will offer new twists on the games, too: "trippy mode," which renders the graphics in psychedelic colors, and "time warp" and "double speed," which can alter the pace of on-screen action. Besides its array of classic Atari 2600 and 7800 titles, the Atari Flashback console will include one previously unreleased game: "Saboteur." Reissuing classic games in the modern consoles has become common over the years. "Sonic the Hedgehog" and its sequels from the early 1990s turned up on Nintendo's GameCube, and the old martial-arts challenge "Street Fighter" series returned on PlayStation 2. But those titles still look like science-fiction dreaming compared to the jumping dots and boxes of the old Atari games. Still, there is a market for even those old games, and the Internet proves it: Countless sites offer free downloads of the programs for playing on PCs -- leading to rampant bootlegging. But Bonnell downplayed the impact bootlegging could have on sales for "Atari Anthology" and the Atari Flashback console. "You're right to say that a lot of them are bootlegged, and the code is not the right code, and the color is not the right color. But here we're offering them ... and you don't go through collecting the games on the Internet and being scared of the viruses that are going to pollute your computer at some point." Despite their simple appearance, the games can be very difficult, he added -- especially for people who are two decades out of practice. "They are not easy to master," Bonnell said. "Some people believe that because they are old games they will finish them very soon. But I think people will be sweating to finish."