

Serious Fun Annual university trivia competition is anything but trivial to participants

When the average temperature is 17 degrees Fahrenheit and there's 10 to 30-plus inches of snow on the ground, even the heartiest of Minnesota dwellers may experience cabin fever, especially when their living quarters are less-than-spacious dorm rooms.

Or so went the thinking in February 1980 when St. Cloud State University's Residence Hall Association and campus radio station KVSC started Trivia Weekend, a 50-hour-long battle of wits and obscure knowledge.

What originally began as a marathon contest among 25 dorm teams supported by 14 staff members and four phone lines has snowballed into an annual themed event with more than 65 teams made up of students, community members, and alumni (some participating from different states and countries); more than 200 volunteers (also students, community members, and traveling alumni); and 30-plus phone lines to take up to 90,000 calls. The winning team's prize: bragging rights and the team's name on the traveling trophy.

This Feb. 10–12, players from across the country will participate in the 33rd annual contest, appropriately named “33 1/3: Trivia Long Play” and featuring questions related to vinyl records and the times in which that format ruled.

“These are not questions that people can answer off the top of their heads,” says Jo McMullen-Boyer, KVSC's station manager, a St. Cloud State alumna, and former trivia volunteer. “We want it to be a challenge, a game about how to find the answer.”

The Internet has made coming up with questions more challenging for the

writers, who rely strictly on primary sources and are careful to “Google-proof” each of the nine to 18 questions that are asked per hour.

While putting on this yearly competition involves months of preparation (but not much money, as the station often makes more than \$1,000 on the event), it's become part of the station's brand and something that people look forward to all year, according to McMullen-Boyer.

“It's a real community connection,” she says. “It's great to see how much this means to the people who help or participate every year. Alumni can come back to this weird but fun little event and see friends that they may only see once a year and cut loose in this comfortable, welcoming place.”—TW



WESLEY BESKAR and DERRICK SILVESTRI

Not Afraid to Ask University creates young alumni giving society

When University of Notre Dame young alumni get the annual fund call, the first ask is for \$500. A gift at that level is a stretch for some of the barely-out-of-college set, but one that many are willing to make if they are asked, and asked the right way.

“Universities make a mistake by asking for too little,” says Carol Phillips, a marketing instructor whose research led to the creation of the William Corby Society at the Indiana institution, a giving society for ND graduates from within the last 10 years. Those who graduated less than a year ago can join for a \$250 gift, but everyone else gives \$500 annually.

Phillips, who owns a marketing agency, conducted interviews with and focus groups of young

ND alumni about their connection to the university and their motivations to give. “The young alumni really do want to support the university, and what they needed was something that focused on them and was special to them,” says Phillips.

“One of the key insights we got is it matters how you ask. They want to know that their money isn't going into some pool,” she continues, noting that young alumni are motivated to give for student scholarships or to support student clubs.

The society, named for a priest who served two terms as Notre Dame president during the 19th century, launched in September 2010, and by the end of the fiscal year had exceeded its membership goal of 400. There are more than 500 members today.

Timothy Ponisciak, assistant director of the annual fund and director of the Corby Society, says that the minimum giving level of \$500 is a good stepping stone for alumni who thought the \$1,500 level to join the existing Edward Frederick Sorin Society was too high.

Among the perks of membership is the opportunity to apply for Fighting Irish football tickets, invitations to on-campus and Corby Society events in New York or Chicago, and a monthly newsletter. Officials were concerned that they'd have to offer “some awesome, over-the-top benefit” to attract donors to the society, but the focus groups revealed that young alumni donors didn't require that. Says Ponisciak, “They realize it's a donation.”—TC