

Trivia storm is approaching; contest starts Friday

Vicki Ikeogu, vikeogu@stcloudtimes.com

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(Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

When Jim Huston first heard about trivia weekend in his introduction to radio course at St. Cloud State University last year, he was less than thrilled that the class required him to work the phone banks.

"I came in for my three hours," Huston said. "I wasn't planning on sticking around."

But six hours after his shift ended, Huston — known to trivia players as Nova — was struggling to tear himself away from the excitement.

It's the excitement, the anticipation and of course the success of finding the right answer in time that has drawn worldwide attention to KVSC-FM at St. Cloud State University every February.

"It started in 1980 as a partnership between KVSC and the residential hall association," said Jim Gray, KVSC's operations director. "It was meant for the dorms. It was a hall activity. And eventually (the residential halls) got tired of it, handed it off to the radio station. And the radio station picked it up and ran."

Now in its 38th year, the annual trivia weekend has grown to include people from as far away as New Zealand, all eager to answer approximately 450 questions spread over 50 consecutive hours starting at 5 p.m. Friday and running through 7 p.m. Sunday.

"People have satellite players from all over," said Jo McMullen-Boyer, KVSC's station manager. "One woman is still playing from Cairo (Egypt) and another is playing from Sweden. And they kind of acknowledged each other on Twitter."

This year's theme, Trivia Storm: 50-hours of Torrential Trivia, is forecast to bring in more participants and even larger teams than in years past.

"What's happening is that all of these teams are joining forces," McMullen-Boyer said. "So we have teams that are like three or four teams combined. But we are still reaching out. We've got a couple of high school teams this year."

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KVSC-FM Station Manager Jo McMullen-Boyer and Operations Director Jim Gray hold a poster promoting this year's trivia contest Friday, Feb. 10, at the station's St. Cloud State University studios. (Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

Preparation for the annual trivia contest begins in June as staffers and volunteers start narrowing down theme suggestions.

"We have the unspoken moratorium of 'thou shall not speak of trivia until June, at least,' " Gray said.

Once a theme is decided upon and announced in August, question writers are given free rein to start developing Google-proof questions.

"This year's theme has been more challenging than most," Gray said. "My wife is one of the question writers. She teaches meteorology. You would think that she would have a wealth of things to ask. But the problem that she has found is that meteorology is by definition a science, meaning it is very well-documented."

McMullen-Boyer said to expect about 25 to 30 percent of questions to be directly related to the theme.

"There will be a theme hour where they will try and sprinkle them in every hour, you know, but you're still going to get a lot of questions not theme related," she said.

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A promotional poster highlights the theme for KVSC-FM's trivia contest this year. (Photo: Dave Schwarz, dschwarz@stcloudtimes.com)

Organization of the event kicks into high gear at the studio in October, when staffers begin coordinating sponsorships and working with students on a marketing plan.

"The trivia machine cranks up in October and is pumping pretty hard right on through the contest," Gray said.

A good portion of the back-end was completed by Dec. 15, the first day when teams could register.

In addition to KVSC, St. Cloud State's television station UTVS coordinates a 50-hour live broadcast to run in conjunction with trivia weekend. This year, Gray said, students at UTVS have organized a food drive to help decorate the TV studio.

"It grew organically out of what they needed as a background for their set," Gray said. "And they decided to do a food drive and get all of the stuff they can and use it for the set and donate it at the end."

At any given moment between 40 and 50 people involved in the contest occupy the classrooms, radio station and TV studio in Stewart Hall throughout the weekend. But during peak hours as many as 100 people can be seen around the building.

But as crazy as it can get — especially in the final hours — there is something special about spending 50 hours engaged in camaraderie that brings people like Huston coming back for more.

This year, Huston, a senior at St. Cloud State, is the KVSC program director. He will be responsible for opening the 38th annual trivia weekend with McMullen-Boyer.

"I'm stoked," he said. "I'm honored to be able to open up the contest. I know it's an experience I won't forget."

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Tips for trivia teams

Whether you have your team's game plan in place or not (remember, you can register your teams up until 4:30 p.m. Friday) KVSC Station Manager Jo McMullen-Boyer and KVSC Operations Director Jim Gray have provided these helpful tips for new (and existing) teams participating in the 38th annual trivia weekend contest.

1. Find friends.
2. Create your own fun. McMullen-Boyer suggested creating a special theme hour for your team like an inappropriate shirt or a President Trump hour.
3. Eat quality food. Junk food is great, but do try to squeeze in a few good meals at least.
4. Plan sleeping. Not only will you feel refreshed, but no one wants a useless sleep-deprived zombie trying to answer questions.
5. Have a leader. Designate someone to make the final decision during intense situations.
6. Know how to use the phone bank. You can call in and make two guesses on two questions per call. Use the phone bank to help you narrow your guesses and keep you on track.
7. No guess is a bad guess.

For more information on how to register a team or volunteer at the phone banks, visit www.kvsc.org (http://kvsc.org/trivia_news.php).

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