

# The Appalachian Online

Feb. 18, 2003

Online Since 1996

Vol 77 No. 35

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## 'Simpsons' fans unite for 300th episode

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Over 125 students and staff gathered in Whitewater last Wednesday to participate in a live, interactive discussion with "The Simpsons" creators.

Only beer, doughnuts with pink icing and sprinkles and Matt Groening live via satellite could bring out last Wednesday night's crowd at Whitewater in W.H. Plemmons Student Union.

One hundred and twenty-five students came to participate in a live, interactive panel discussion with creator, writers and voices for the long-running animated comedy "The Simpsons."

Troy R. Tuttle, multimedia designer and photographer with the Instructional Technology Center, said that for college students with beer and free doughnuts, the crowd was surprisingly well behaved.

"It ended up being like one happy family sitting together watching TV," Tuttle said.

The over hour-long question-and-answer session was preceded by a montage of past "Simpsons" clips while the audience laughed and applauded at familiar favorite Homer hijinx.

"You can't miss 'The Simpson's.' They're just great," junior Michael T. Crawford of Charlotte said.

Some students went beyond laughing at the antics of Homer and Bart and straight to identification.

"Bart reminds me of myself as a kid. That's why I like it," junior Kyle M. Britton from Dallas said.

Not everybody can see themselves as Bart, but many people do see the cartoon as a nostalgic icon.

"We've watched them since we were kids," junior Andrea P. Rebhan from Charlotte said.

Out of the 260 participating colleges and universities, Appalachian was chosen to ask the panel one of the 12 – 15 questions.

Math professor and "Simpsons" fan Dr. Sarah J. Greenwald asked about the motives for the use of academic references in episodes.

"I thought I should ask something unique," Greenwald said.

"The writers of 'The Simpsons' are definitely a bunch of eggheads," Groening said in reply to Greenwald's question.

Greenwald said she was thrilled to discover executive producer and head writer Jean was a math major.

Greenwald, who has watched the show since the beginning, doesn't keep her "Simpsons" infatuation at home. She finds ways to relate the "Simpsons" to her math classes.

Greenwald said she uses math references made in "The Simpsons" when they relate to the content of her classes.

"It helps students overcome their fear of mathematics," said Greenwald, who keeps a Web site, [www.simpsonsmath.com](http://www.simpsonsmath.com), full of mathematical references found on "The Simpsons."

Other topics discussed by the panel were the cartoon's beginnings with "The Tracy Ullman Show," the show's writing process and the character and voice selection method.

The event came in celebration of Sunday's 300th episode of "The Simpsons" and was what Tuttle called "a wonderful success."

Tuttle said 200 students were turned away from the program because of fire codes in Whitewater.

Wednesday night's success may spur similar events at Appalachian State, but he does not know as of yet who or what will be next, Tuttle said.

"We will definitely jump on that opportunity," Tuttle said.

The panel also entertained questions on the chance of a movie (yes, it is being



considered) and favorite episodes.

Among the panel's favorite episodes were Bart selling his soul to Millhouse for \$5, Burns and his softball team and Homer's "psychedelic chili."

The writing process for the cartoon is as complex as its multi-layered satire.

"I find it difficult to remember which episode we're working on because we work on so many at once," Groening said.

The method for picking the names of main characters Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie may not have been so complicated

Groening described the characters' names as titles he conjured "on the spot." But perhaps not so ironically enough, Groening's own parents are named Homer and Marge, and his sisters are named Lisa and Maggie.

It seems that most people attribute the show's long-running success to the courage of the writers and the antics of the characters.

The series has left few issues un-tackled and undaunted. Even touchy issues such as religion and death are given unceremonious, sarcastic punches. Homer's latest sacrilegious antic (grabbing a cross for impromptu air-guitar) was cut short by eight seconds, Groening said.

"Some of the funniest stuff is what is censored," Groening said.

Running out of ideas is not an option just yet since the show has signed on for two more seasons, which will make it the longest running television sitcom. It is currently tied with "Ozzie and Harriett."

Senior Robert L. Dawson called the cartoon "the biggest farce of society."

To keep such a reputation as a comedy of satiric genius, the idea bucket must be kept full.

So coming up short on story ideas would mean certain disaster for "America's original dysfunctional family."

Dawson said he is far from worried.

"They won't run out of ideas. They can make Homer do anything except stop drinking beer and eating doughnuts."

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