

# For 10 Points ... What is the Capital of Zimbabwe?

For the past nine years, geography professor Richard Walasek has been assuming a different identity – at least for a few weeks in the spring. As the director of the Kenosha Academic Skills Challenge, Walasek serves as moderator for the event which is video taped and shown on the Kenosha Unified cable access channel. Walasek has been dubbed the Alex Trebek of Kenosha.

“I must like it,” Walasek said of his involvement with the event, “because I keep doing it.”

Walasek estimates that he spends more than 300 hours of his personal time organizing the event, scheduling judges, and creating the myriad of questions on a variety of topics. “I can easily write 500 questions on geography or even history,” he said. “But coming up with questions on English literature – that’s a different story.”

The education committee of the Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) originally developed the concept for the Academic Skills Challenge. KABA asked the three institutions of higher education in the county – Gateway Technical College, Carthage College, and UW-Parkside – to sponsor the competition. The Kenosha Academic Skills Challenge is for all high school students in Kenosha County; Shoreland Lutheran won the first challenge back in 1997.

In addition to Walasek’s time and effort, other members of the UW-Parkside faculty and UW-Parkside students serve as staff



members and judges. Geography major Jessica Kilgore is the event coordinator.

This year, 12 teams from eight Kenosha County high schools competed in the challenge. The preliminary rounds were held March 14-16 at Carthage College. The top four teams advanced to the semi-finals, April 4. In the finals, April 11, Wilmot defeated Kenosha Bradford to earn the championship.

The competition includes a rapid-fire section where teams are asked questions from a variety of disciplines. The teams accumulate points for the fastest, correct response. The teams also accumulate points in the problem-solving portion of the competition.

Each team is asked an in-depth question and team members have 45 minutes to develop a solution and prepare a three-minute presentation. The teams are judged on how well team members work together to create the solution and on the quality of the team’s presentation.

“Students get a chance to work as a team and they get to show off some of their academic skills,” Walasek said.

The Skills Challenge is similar to athletic events where students are recognized for a certain talent. In the case of the Kenosha Academic Skills Challenge, it happens to be their talent in the classroom.

