

JustUs Geeks

Four friends ‘geek out’ on podcast in iconic building

BY ZACK STEEN

zsteen@dailycorinthian.com

Four geeky guys have brought a new sound to an iconic downtown Corinth building.

The former Top Shelf Records location is now “The JustUs Geeks Podcast” studio where locals Josh Steen and Brandon Smith gather every Thursday night with Jared Wallin and Marty Estes.

“The JustUs Geeks Podcast” is an internet radio show dedicated to all things geek and pop culture.

“People who grew up in the 80s and 90s are part of this huge pop culture movement,” said Steen. “We’re just trying to provide a voice for folks who love the same stuff we do.”

That “stuff” includes a little bit of everything from technology, movies, video games, comics and even sports.

“Everyone geeks out about something whether they realize it or not,” Smith added. “It’s cool to be a geek these days and I hope we are able to help people understand that with this podcast.”

The meaning of life

“I’m kinda the glue that holds the four of us together,” said a proud Wallin, as he addressed his three friends. “You all met each other through me.”

Wallin and Steen first met while working on the Corinth Theatre-Arts’ production of “Bye Bye Birdie” in 2003.

“It didn’t take long for us to realize we liked the same kind of things,” Steen said.

Several years later Wallin asked Steen to be a groomsman at his wedding where Estes was a last minute replacement groomsman.

“We stood there and cut up the whole time,” said a smiling Estes. “I started thinking, hey this guy is pretty cool.”

Around the same time, Wallin had befriended Smith while working at a video game store.

“We didn’t realize it until later, but we actually knew each other before we met,” said Smith. “We all kinda hung out online and read each others’ blogs.”

Meet the geeks

“It’s rare that you can have true friends who have the same interests,” noted Steen. “Even though we each ‘geek out’ a little more about one thing, we all enjoy the same stuff.”

Estes, 32, loves Transformers and toy collecting.

“I was four-years-old when I started collecting,” said Estes, who lives in Lexington, Tenn., with his wife, Erin, and two children, Isaac, 6, and Annaliese, 5. “At the height of my collecting, I had 1,200 Transformers.”

Estes sold over half of his collection in 2007 and now only buys toys he truly loves.

Smith, who is 27 and the youngest geek in the group, is a hard core video gamer.

“I grew up playing video games,” he said. “If you came over to my house, it’s what we did.”

Smith, who along with his wife, Christina, live in downtown Corinth, spends some of his time during podcasts actually buying retro video games.

“I brought two Super NES games during last week’s podcast,” he joked.

Wallin is the technology geek.

“I have a home electronics setup that’d blow your mind,” said Wallin. “And the best thing is I didn’t pay retail for most of it.”

Wallin, who lives with his wife, Cassie, in Florence, Ala., is a bloodhound when it comes to finding a good deal on something.



Brandon Smith, Jared Wallin, Marty Estes and Josh Steen record “The JustUs Geeks Podcast” every Thursday night at the former Top Shelf Records building in downtown Corinth. Staff photos

Host and Executive Producer is Steen, who runs the show much like it is his own business.

“I have a day job, but this is my true passion,” he said. “I never realized how much I loved this kind of thing until I started doing these podcasts.”

Steen, who lives in Corinth with his wife, Emily, and three children, Max, 11, Ava, 9, and Lucy, 3, “geeks out” about podcasting these days, but admits to loving all things geek.

We shall podcast

It all started over chicken wings.

“We were meeting about once a week for wings and talking about geeky stuff,” said Wallin. “We’d sit around and talk about the latest tech and video games and toys ... I wondered, how cool would it be if we could record our conversations for other people to hear.”

Enter the idea for “The JustUs Geeks Podcast”.

“A lot of the fun of this has been figuring out how to do it,” said Steen. “There is more than one way to do a podcast.”

Wallin takes credit for coming up with the show name.

“It’s us ... just us,” said Wallin, laughing. “I also liked it, because it sounded like we were super heroes ... The Justice Geeks.”

After doing research



Marty Estes



Brandon Smith



Josh Steen



Jared Wallin

online, buying some equipment and coming up with a few ideas, the group recorded their first official podcast in March 2012.

Almost two years and 94 consecutive episodes later, the podcast is going strong.

During that span, the

gang recorded over half of their shows at another downtown Corinth staple, KC’s Espresso coffee shop.

The guests

The geeks have hosted a wide range of guests on the show.

Steen said after writing emails to agents and managers, he was able to form partnerships with a few TV networks. This has helped him score some well known guest interviews.

“I got to interview Marc Summers (best known for hosting the 90s Nickelodeon game show “Double Dare”) and I was like a kid in a candy store,” said Steen with a gleam in his eye. “I loved that show.”

Steen attributes some of his talents today to the impressions Summers made on him during his childhood.

“We have been fortunate to be able to interview some big names,” said Smith. “Tom Kenny (voice of SpongeBob Squarepants) and (TV sitcom star) Melissa Patterman were both big ones.”

The numbers

“We try to get better every week, but it’s a learning process,” Steen said. “Around episode 6, CJ LeMaster joined us and really improved the production quality.”

LeMaster, a former WTVB news anchor, added his audio and technical knowledge to the show, helping jump start the small town podcast into a world wide web phenomenon.

“Our download numbers slowly started to increase from a couple of hundred per week to averaging over 250,000 downloads per week,”

boosted Steen.

Their web presence also grew.

“Twitter and Facebook has been very important to our growth,” noted Estes. “Just a few months ago, Bill Cosby retweeted one of our posts ... that was epic.”

The group’s web site averages over 75,000 hits per month.

Steen owes a huge amount of the show’s success to Stitcher Radio, an on-demand internet radio service that focuses on news and information podcasts. Stitcher Radio is a free app on iPhone and Android devices.

“We got like 40,000 downloads after being on Stitcher one week,” said Smith. “We were like ... wow.”

Giving back

When choosing where to record, the crew favored Corinth, because of its central location.

“We love Corinth,” said Wallin. “It’s been a great location for us ... plus there’s better places to eat here.”

The four are passionate about trying to give something back to the community where three of the geeks grew up.

“We would love to team up with an organization in town to host some kind of geeky or pop culture centered event,” Steen said. “We want to help those kids around Corinth who read comics, collect Transformers or play Minecraft who feel like they don’t fit in with this community.”

(The JustUs Geeks Podcast can be downloaded on Stitcher Radio, iTunes or via justusgeeks.com. A new show is available each Monday. Connect with the geeks on Twitter @JustUsGeeks and on Facebook at facebook.com/JustUsGeeks.)

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