

BIG MONEY! BIG MONEY! NO WHAMMIES!



From multi-vitamins to big bucks, students get the goodies from game shows

BY ROSS ALLEN

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"JANE STUDENT, COME ON DOWN!!!!" Jane — wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with a college crest or Greek letters — jumps up and runs down to the stage, her heart pumping with excitement. Cash and fabulous prizes await. The only question is whether she'll win the car she can't park on campus, the money to pay last semester's tuition or the bedroom set that won't fit in her dorm room.

Lots of students fantasize about striking it rich on a TV game show. And why not? Going to college

might not get you a job, but it can at least give you a chance to make megabucks from one roll o' the dice.

After all, if Jane can have access to those fabulous prizes, why can't you?

Jen Tipka, a senior at West Chester U. in Pennsylvania, tried her luck two summers ago as an aspiring game show contestant. Donning a big smile and a "pick me, pick me!" look, she joined the *Price is Right* studio audience in Los Angeles. Simply showing up for the taping — with no guarantee of a spot on the show — catapulted her into the aforementioned fabulous... (you know the rest).

"It was very exciting," Tipka says. "I was shaking when I went up there."

Although she didn't make it past contestants' row, she did win a bread maker, the game Scattergories and a \$25 gift certificate for Lifesavers candies as parting gifts.

The only bad part about her appearance on the show was that she was called late in the game, Tipka says. As a late-comer in the bidding war, she competed for only two items. But hey, thanks for playing.

I'd like to buy a vowel, Pat

Game show contestant Veronica Grey, a junior at UCLA, went to the bank with more than a bread maker and candy. She won \$23,000 on *Wheel of Fortune's* spring '94 college tournament.

But getting there wasn't easy. At UCLA, more than 150 word-wielding hopefuls tried out to share the stage with Pat and Vanna.

Those who passed the preliminary exam — 15 puzzles in five minutes — went on to the next level, a written exam consisting of five more minutes of white-knuckle, beat-the-clock *Wheel of Fortune*-style puzzles. Grey says most students can't handle the pressure and are eliminated during this round.

Before the final cut, contestants not only take a variety of written tests but also are judged on speech and voice quality, enthusiasm and presentation. Being bashful won't get you a spin of the *Wheel*.

After hours of dodging vowels and slaying consonants, four students from four different schools were crowned as finalists. Their royal mission: a trip to Orlando, Fla., for a week of sun and fun — and oh yeah, competition. For last year's "college week," the 16 college contestants were put up in a posh hotel at Disney World and ate at local restaurants — total tab for one night's dinner: \$2,000. Let's hope Pat didn't stiff on the tip.

"Those people on television have gone through a lot to get there," Grey says. "It's harder than it looks on TV."

But students say getting on *Wheel of Fortune* is a cakewalk compared with making it to the stage on *Jeopardy!* Wheel college tourney alum and two-time

Jeopardy! hopeful Edward Stash says the tests for *Wheel* don't hold a candle to the *Jeopardy!* exam.

"The written [test] for *Jeopardy!* was so hard," says Stash, who competed on *Wheel of Fortune* during his senior year at the U. of Pittsburgh. "Only four people out of 250 passed. The questions were that tough."

The *Wheel* experience earned Stash \$2,150 cash with a mail delivery time of four months. He also brought home some wonderful parting gifts, including Centrum Silver vitamins — for the "mature" consumer — and cases of that ubiquitous game show treat, Rice-a-Roni.

"I'm full of vim and vigor," Stash says. "But I'm sick of Rice-a-Roni."

The vitamins aren't the oddest parting gift contestants received, Stash says. "Other people got 'Hooked on Phonics.' You'd think that someone in college who's playing *Wheel of Fortune* would know how to read."

Things that start with "J"

Jeopardy! has a slightly different search method for its college tournament, says *Jeopardy!*'s contestant coordinator Suzanne Thurber.

By promoting the college tourney in September, *Jeopardy!* joins the back-to-school hype. So when you buy your new jeans, backpack and spiral notebooks, join the 10,000 to 20,000 students who send in postcards in hopes of getting on the show. But don't hold your breath, because Alex only draws about 1,200 names for the first cut.

Patrick Toft, a junior at the U. of Minnesota, got his chance after *Jeopardy!* drew one of the 11 postcards his mother sent in for him. Eleven wasn't necessarily his lucky number — his mom just got tired of sending them, Toft says.

After his name was drawn, Toft faced a grueling battery of tests, including a killer 50-question video exam. About 90 percent of applicants fail to make it to the next level: a mock game. But *Jeopardy!* is looking for something different from *Wheel of Fortune* in its oral auditions.

"If they're enthusiastic, that's great," Thurber says, "but we're mainly looking to see if they understand the structure of the game."

Toft got it — he won \$5,000. "It was nerve-racking but a lot of fun," Toft says. The only drawback, Toft says, is that it takes 120 days after the air date to get your money. Because of the lag time between taping and airing the show, Toft is actually waiting about five months for his prize. Talk about nerve-racking...

Taking a trip to California for the modern gold rush — only to walk away with empty pockets — could turn someone off to correct spelling and remembering to phrase responses in the form of a question. But it could prod a starving student to ask: What's one way to earn a year's supply of Rice-a-Roni?

Ross Allen is a '95 graduate of West Virginia U.



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EDWARD STASH,
U. OF PITTSBURGH