

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Academic Achievement

A TRIVIA QUESTION: What is the longest-running television quiz show in the world?

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, that honor belongs to Washington's own "It's Academic," which begins its 45th season this week.

Thousands of high school students have competed on-air — including plenty who've gone on to fame and fortune — and still more students have taken part in the increasingly popular school-hosted tournaments modeled on the show. Some competitors are even following in the footsteps of their parents, who appeared on the show decades ago.

Little has changed over the years. Mac McGarry has hosted the show since its first airing in 1961. The creator of "It's Academic," Sophie Altman, still serves as executive producer, one of the five members of a close-knit team that puts each show together. The show has spread to other cities over the years; Ms. Altman and her colleagues also write the questions for the

Baltimore, Charlottesville, Pittsburgh and Cleveland competitions. Each three-school match requires about 100 questions, meaning that many weeks, these five staffers must come up with 500 or more unique questions on subjects ranging from current events to physics. The tireless work of its staff has been fundamental to the show's success.

Giant Food, now entering its 38th year sponsoring the show (and its 35th year as sole sponsor), deserves credit, too. Giant has donated more than \$3 million for scholarships to participating schools in the Washington, Baltimore and central Virginia "It's Academic" competitions, and it pays hundreds of thousands of dollars each season to underwrite production costs for the three programs.

"It's Academic" has established itself as a Washington institution. Amid all the disturbing news about declining test scores and failing schools, this homegrown Saturday morning staple serves as a welcome reminder of what is right with education.