

Rising to the Challenge

Granite State Challenge Premieres April 3 at 6 PM on NHPBS



Co-Producer Susan Adams & Host Jon Cannon

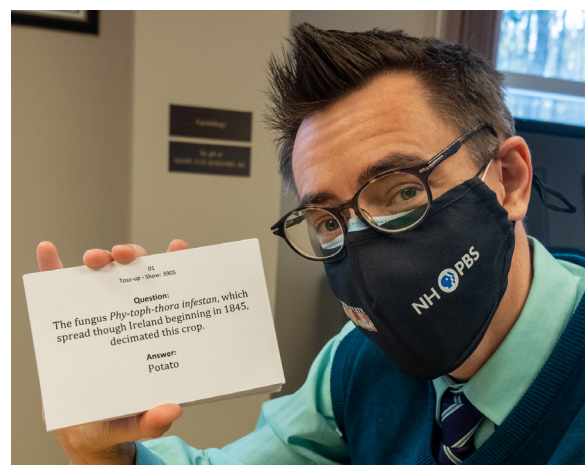
"I don't think anybody, anywhere, in any scenario, could have ever thought that they would have to face the challenges we all had to face with COVID-19," says Susan Adams, education manager and co-producer of GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE. "We had to figure out how to do something we've been doing for decades in a brand new way -- and to do it safely." The 39th season of GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE kicks off on Saturday, April 3 at 6 PM on New Hampshire PBS.

GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE co-producers Susan Adams and Ben Sparling spent months trying to figure out if they could green-light this beloved local high school quiz show amidst a worldwide pandemic. Everything, from the qualifying meet,

which usually gathers at least 500 students in one day, right down to how the host, Jon Cannon, reviews every single question, was examined.

"The process was completely different this year. Some of it happened via Zoom, and in some cases, we were able to discuss the questions while being socially distant between episode tapings. But we had to find creative ways to have those conversations," says Cannon.

The New Hampshire PBS team was committed to putting on the show. They discussed remote taping via Zoom and also what it would look like if they decided to bring the teams into the studio. "We went through all kinds of mental gymnastics to try to determine how we could deliver the show for our kids," says Ben Sparling. Sometimes that meant having several different plans that kept changing with state guidelines and CDC protocols.



GSC Host Jon Cannon



NHPBS Facilities Manager Shawn Roche

NHPBS facilities coordinator Shawn Roche went right to work. "I was asked to come up with a way to build separators which would allow the kids to be at the podium but not be in close proximity to each other. We had to keep safety in mind at all times," says Roche. Through trial and error, Roche spent over a week and a half coming up with a solution that eventually secured the idea that the show could go on. "The design I came up with was to use Plexiglass. It's clear so you can see everything around it, but I also had to build a small frame so it would be secure but not interfere with the televised picture," says Roche.



Portsmouth High School team members



Bow High School captain Justin Murphy



Lin-Wood team members

For a lot of the students, GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE was the first time in over a year that they would see their fellow teammates in person. “Shawn’s creative solution for keeping the kids on each team in a safe environment was brilliant, and it allowed us to bring the kids, the crew and our host into the studio and play the game,” says Adams.

Viewers from home will also see that all teams are wearing masks during the game. “What you won’t see is the usual studio audience and that the crew was all masked and distanced. I was the only one who didn’t wear a mask while we were taping the show,” says Cannon, who stood at least 15 feet away from everyone.

But nothing about the student competitors changed on this season of GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE. “The kids were all bright and well-rounded, and everybody was thrilled to be able to play the game. The enthusiasm was as high as, if not higher than, it has been during a normal GSC season. I think it was a positive experience for everybody and perhaps a bright spot in their school year,” says Adams.

Bow High School captain Justin Murphy says the teams made adjustments of their own while preparing for the games. “It was hard going between being online and in person. One week we would have in person practice with buzzers, and the next we would have a virtual meeting reading questions. The back and forth made it hard to form consistency, but leading up to the show our team really put in the work and showed up.”

“I think everyone at NHPBS worked hard to try to make the 39th season of GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE as normal as possible during a pandemic when nothing is normal,” says Cannon.

“It was difficult to adapt to some of the changes, but I think that we were all just so grateful for the opportunity to compete in GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE this year,” says Merrimack High School coach Sara Campbell. “It’s been hard for these students, who have lost so much, but this was one thing that they got to do.

And New Hampshire PBS did such a fantastic job of making the experience a good one for the students, in spite of the obstacles we all faced both at the studio and within our school communities to make sure that everyone was safe.”

“I’m proud of everybody involved - staff, crew, teams, coaches and the schools. They all thought of new ways to do what they have been doing for a very long time,” says Adams.

“From remote practice, to socially distanced practice, reading/listening/answering with masks on, the changes to the set, the adaptation of the 60-second round; in spite of all these challenges, and more, once again, GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE and New Hampshire PBS provided students with a safe outlet to show off just how brilliant they can be,” says Campbell.

For more information about GRANITE STATE CHALLENGE go to nhpbs.org/gsc.

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Merrimack High School Coach Sara Campbell



Floor Director Melissa Sweatt



Camera Operator Jocelyn Garcia