

Commons Room

A Slice of Campus Life



Puzzled

A loud *whoosh* fills the room as 83 people turn over sheets of paper at the same time. Then ... quiet. There's only the scratch of pencils as everyone works on the same crossword puzzle, racing to be the first person to finish it correctly. The players feverishly muster answers relating to the puzzle's theme of "monocles."

While they write "Mr. Peanut" and "satire" in their grids, a Pitt business student looks on, enjoying an unexpected moment of downtime. She leans against a wall, crossing her arms over her occasion-appropriate dress—black with a cascade of white letters. The student, Rachel Colangelo, is directing the first-ever Pittsburgh Crossword

Puzzle Tournament. After spending several months approaching businesses for sponsorships, publicizing the event, and securing space in the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall and Museum, she deserves a rest.

Colangelo, a sophomore marketing major, coordinated the tournament through an internship with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society in Pittsburgh. When a supervisor asked her to develop a fundraiser, she recalled the high turnout at crossword tournaments attended by her father. She suggested a similar tournament in Pittsburgh as a fun way to raise money. Her work began.

At the tournament, Colangelo's downtime doesn't last long. In fewer than five minutes, Pitt alumnus Roberta Strauss (A&S '77, BUS '81G) raises her hand. A volunteer "runner" darts for-

ward, grabbing Strauss's completed puzzle. Soon, other hands appear around the room. Runners ferry the sheets to judges, who tally the puzzles and announce who will advance to the next round.

Two rounds later, Strauss is one of three finalists. A budget manager with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, she has previously finished in the top 10 percent at national crossword tournaments. "I don't subscribe to any of the behavioral theories about why people do crossword puzzles," she says, "but I can't argue with the observation of one of my coworkers that I like filling in little blocks all day."

In the championship round, Strauss and her two competitors each fill in a giant puzzle on a whiteboard while the 80 eliminated players watch. The final puzzle, like others used at today's event, was created by Will Shortz,

The New York Times' puzzle editor. He donated puzzles to the tournament after Colangelo requested them for a good cause.

Strauss is stumped about a crossing of two clues: an "item sometimes having an elbow" and "targets of salicylic acid." She scrawls the first answer, "straw," on the whiteboard. Cracking the second clue, she's pleased that the solution, "warts," is "straw" backwards. The two words are joined at the "w."

Before long, Colangelo announces from a podium that Strauss is the champion. She also announces that the tournament has raised more than \$2,600, exceeding all expectations. There are many winners today.

—Adam Reger