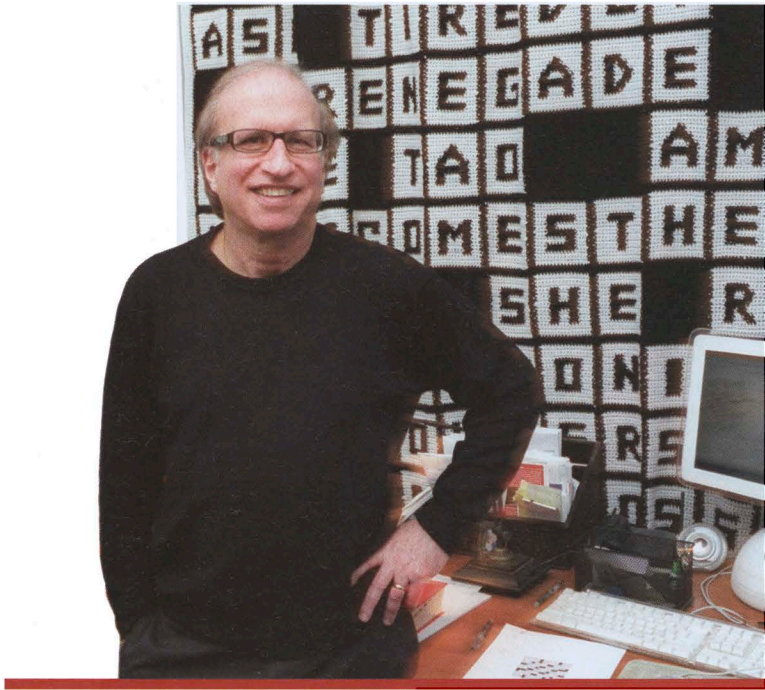


No Loss for WORDS



David J. Kahn '63 creates quirky crosswords known to exasperate even the best puzzle solvers

By Carol Boll

Want to take a stab at one of David J. Kahn's challenging crosswords? Pick up your pencil and give "SUMMER Crossword" on the facing page a try. He created the puzzle with an SU theme exclusively for Syracuse University Magazine.

IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM *WORDPLAY*, CONTESTANTS in the 2005 American Crossword Puzzle Tournament are midway through the eight-puzzle ordeal that will determine the champion. Will Shortz, crossword editor for *The New York Times* and the tournament's founder and director, introduces the fifth challenge—a puzzle by David J. Kahn '63. At the mention of Kahn's name, contestants groan, and Shortz gives voice to their worst fears: "This is a puzzle that's gonna rip your heart out," he announces cheerfully. And the fun begins.

For Kahn, life is just one puzzle after another. He's been solving crosswords since he was 11 and constructing them for the past 12 years. His puzzles have appeared in the *Times* and other newspapers, and he serves as a judge for Shortz's annual tournament. Kahn credits Shortz, who rejected his first few submissions, with helping him develop his puzzle-making skills. And his "quirky, creative" style suits the *Times*, which favors challenging puzzle-within-a-puzzle crosswords over the conventional brainteasers of the past. "Before Will came to the *Times*, you would see words you would never use in conversation—real esoteric stuff that you might find in Webster's third-edition dictionary, but nowhere else," Kahn says. Today's top puzzle mak-

ers, he says, rely on common words and phrases for answers. The difficult part is interpreting the clues. Take, for example, "Technophobe's Delight," a puzzle based on an idea that struck him during a lecture by former TV anchor Tom Brokaw. "He was talking about how some people are technologically challenged," Kahn recalls, "and he said, 'Some people think "hard drive" means a difficult commute into Manhattan.' Everyone laughed. And I turned to my wife and said, 'Bull's-eye. That's a puzzle right there.'" A few months later, "Technophobe's Delight" appeared in the *Times*. The themed clues were computer terms, and the answers were common words or phrases. Among the clues: hard drive (answer: Tiger's tee shot); floppy disk (Frisbee); and digital monitor (manicurist). The puzzle was such a hit that then-President Clinton, a crossword fan, read excerpts during a technology conference. "That was really a kick," Kahn says.

Coming up with a good theme is the hardest part of creating a puzzle, Kahn says, and inspiration can come from anywhere—billboards, TV, random conversation. Of his 100-plus *Times* puzzles, favorites include "Green Eggs and Hamlet," a bit of Shakespearean silliness à la Dr. Seuss; and "Drawing Power," a crossword tribute to the late caricaturist Al Hirschfeld. In a bonus feature on the *Wordplay* DVD, "Drawing Power" is included in "Five Unforgettable Puzzles," and Shortz talks about its creator. "What I love about David's work is, first of all, the brilliance of his themes. He takes these clever, unusual ideas, and he carries them to their extreme. He comes up with things you don't think could possibly be done, and then he pulls it off with panache."

In recent years, Kahn, a consulting actuary who majored in math at the College of Arts and Sciences, has expanded his hobby into new directions, creating a puzzle for the opening of the Clinton Presidential Library and two for Disneyland's 50th anniversary. His third book, *Sit and Solve Movie Crosswords*, is due out this fall.

What's behind this fascination with crosswords? "I like math," he says. "I like words. I like letters. I like putting things together. And I like the fact that you can solve the puzzle and, once you're done, know definitely that it's correct."

Summer Crossword

By David J. Kahn '63

ACROSS

- 1 Zodiac sign
- 6 SU students, by year
- 11 "Wheel of Fortune" request
- 14 "___ Mial"
- 19 Zodiac sign
- 20 Singer Mann
- 21 Place for discussions at SU
- 23 Big sports venue at SU
- 25 What the SU men's basketball team won in 2003
- 26 Had as its result
- 27 Creation from a French noodle?
- 29 Expands, as eye pupils
- 30 Trojan hero of a Virgil epic
- 33 Ben Cartwright, on TV
- 35 SU's ___ Hall
- 38 Longwinded talker
- 41 Obligation
- 42 Noise
- 45 Some savings plans, briefly
- 46 Small firearm
- 47 Girl in a Thomas Hardy title
- 48 All there
- 49 Relatives
- 50 "I didn't know that!"
- 51 Crown wearer
- 53 Land of Yeats and O'Casey
- 54 Third-party account
- 56 Captivate
- 58 Rang
- 60 Mets shortstop José ___
- 61 Designer of SU's Newhouse I building
- 62 ___ de plume
- 63 Bagel alternative
- 64 SU's mission, articulated by 37-Down
- 69 Was sick
- 70 Jiffy
- 71 X
- 72 Investor-philanthropist George ___
- 74 Madison's successor
- 76 Ready to go
- 78 Its national holiday is July 1
- 79 Poker pot
- 80 Excessive
- 81 Army bed
- 82 Boys Town locale: Abbr.
- 83 Top execs
- 84 Shambles
- 86 "Love Me Tender," for one
- 89 Gel used as a food thickener
- 90 Listen here
- 91 Gets ready to shoot
- 92 Regard highly
- 93 End of ___
- 94 Soviet spy agcy. in 007 novels
- 96 Pierce
- 98 Voter, e.g.
- 102 Movie canine
- 105 Not performed
- 109 SU attribute
- 111 SU's official online site
- 114 SU diploma receivers
- 115 "10 Things ___ About You" (1999 movie)
- 116 Stable females
- 117 Lessened, as pain

118 Promising words?

119 Theater awards

120 Move furtively

DOWN

- 1 Frilly material
- 2 Mashhad's country
- 3 SU's main library
- 4 Double-checks copy
- 5 Comments from the stage
- 6 Noted SU donor of the past
- 7 Cover
- 8 Latin 101 word
- 9 Big rig
- 10 Tournament ranking
- 11 Actor with seven Emmys
- 12 Where SU's Lubin House is: Abbr.
- 13 Best Picture of 1984
- 14 Rock's ___ Crüe
- 15 Home of some SU students
- 16 Catcher's glove
- 17 Symbol of stubbornness
- 18 Iowa State U. site
- 22 Works on canvas
- 24 "Ich bin ___ Berliner" (JFK)
- 28 Omelette ingredient
- 31 Common batteries
- 32 The Concorde was one: Abbr.
- 34 "Jekyll & Hyde" star Linda ___
- 35 Outdoorsy type
- 36 Famous van Gogh oil
- 37 SU's 11th Chancellor
- 39 When repeated, an island near Tahiti
- 40 They keep you connected to SU
- 42 SU publication since 1903 (with "The")
- 43 About, on a memo
- 44 What many SU scholarships are based on
- 46 Bench with a back
- 47 House pest
- 48 Aquarium attraction
- 50 Split off from the band
- 52 Skating maneuver
- 55 Takes on again
- 56 Suffix with auction
- 57 Altima and Sentra, for two
- 58 Photo
- 59 Patronizes, as a restaurant
- 61 Where a mouse rests?
- 63 Prohibit
- 65 SU hoopsters of the '70s, Jim and Mike ___
- 66 Didn't give way
- 67 After taxes
- 68 Polite refusal
- 73 Native-born Israeli
- 74 Clublike weapon
- 75 Fit for the military

77 Candidate's goal

78 Cape ___

80 Cold War initials

81 South and Main, at SU

84 Brunch drink

85 Designations for some retired SU professors

87 Souvenir from Hawaii

88 Apollo spacecraft feature

89 Hearsay and not scientific, as evidence

91 "The Girl From Ipanema" singer Gilberto

92 Conversation fillers, in 78-Across

93 Sirens

95 Authority

97 "___ takers?"

98 Advantage

99 Italian currency, once

100 Longoria and others

101 Sign away

103 Taunt

104 "Horton Hears ___" (Dr. Seuss)

106 Actress Hatcher

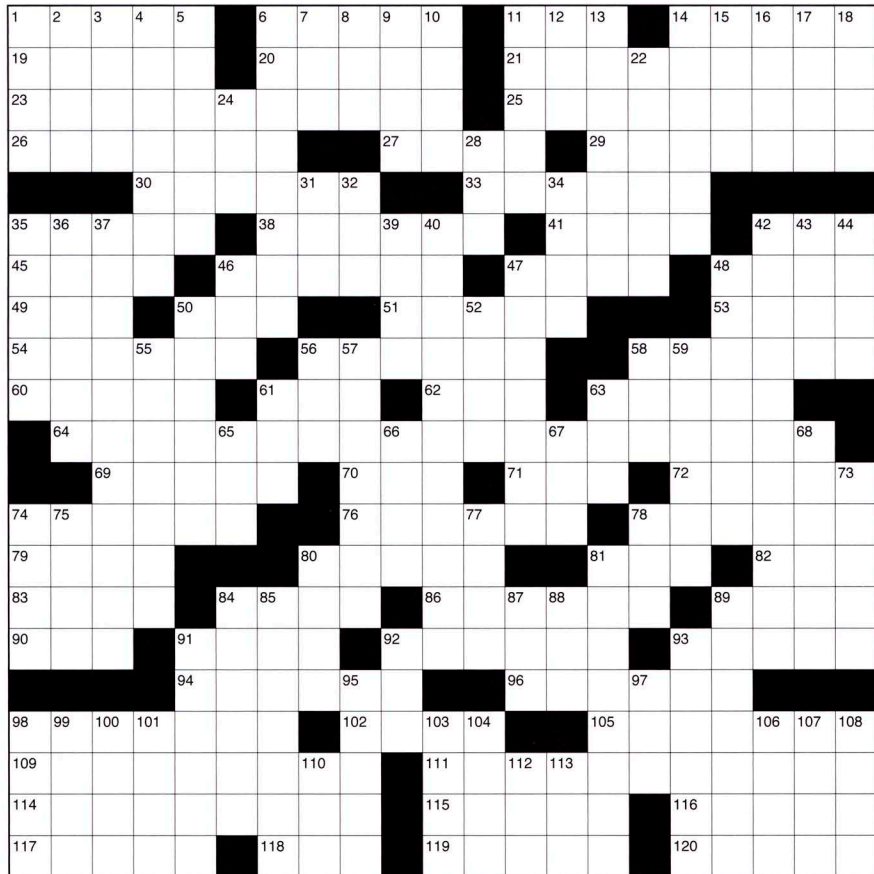
107 First place?

108 Partial darkness

110 Newsman Koppel '60, H'82, educated at SU

112 Pale

113 Eccentric



See page 62 for the answers.