

October 30, 2006 — Volume 101, Issue 8

Local high school students create popular podcast

NEWS | Patrick Pettibon

Two Pittsburgh high school students have been broadcasting the deepest truth of their hearts over the Internet. Their show, Acorns and Merlot, has grown in popularity as one of the only podcasts in the country produced entirely by high school students.

Lucian Baxter Wintrich IV, now a senior in high school, created his podcast about a year ago. According to Liberated Syndication, one of the largest podcast publishers that monitors downloads, 1000 to 2500 people listen to each episode of Acorns and Merlot.

“The show is really, really good,” said Becca Ridge, a sophomore at Schenley High School who has listened to the show since the summer. “It’s like a little treat at the beginning of the week.”

Wintrich began producing the show after leaving Taylor Allderdice High School amid accusations of assaulting a security guard. Due to legal threats from a fanatical listener, he was unable to disclose the name of the school he currently attends. He explains the entire story behind transferring high schools in episode six, “Ms. Thorn and the Assault Set-Up.”

“It started up as more of an outlet,” Wintrich said. “It was kind of therapeutic.”

A podcast is an Internet radio show that can be downloaded to iPods or other listening devices. Wintrich and co-host Marc Werner, a senior at Schenley High School, produce one podcast episode each week. After meeting through a mutual friend, Wintrich invited Werner to become a permanent fixture on the show.

The show covers many topics, from fashion and high school banter to politics and religion. The hosts also include stories from their personal lives and short news reports.

“I like to discuss everything from my love life to my experiences in school to my reaction to current events,” Werner wrote in an e-mail.



PATRICK PETTIBON

Lucian Baxter Wintrich IV has produced his own podcast since last year, one of the country's only podcasts by a high school student.

The show's target audience is from ages 12 to 18, but listeners of all ages tune in each week. The actual ages go from about nine to 55, Wintrich said. The podcast's audience has also spread overseas — in one episode, Wintrich interviewed Jamie, a listener in Scotland.

“As soon as it comes out, I listen to it,” said Mike Cravotta, a junior at Fox Chapel High School who has listened to the show for about a year. “The social commentary they have — I can really relate to it. It's a really fun program to listen to.”

Acorns and Merlot offers a look inside the minds of the hosts. The co-hosts bring with them a few topics they'd like to discuss and let the conversation develop naturally. The show is mostly improvised, Wintrich said.

“Frequently we won't tell each other certain stories until we are on the air so that our reactions are genuine,” Werner wrote.

In the first episodes, Acorns and Merlot was just recorded telephone conversations. Wintrich and Werner have since upgraded to a Tascam recorder, Audio Technica condenser microphones, pop filter, and microphone arms. The hosts have bought all of the equipment themselves.

The only podcast in Pittsburgh — and one of the only in the country — hosted by high school students, Acorns and Merlot may be in jeopardy over the next year, as Wintrich and Werner leave Pittsburgh for college.

“One idea is that we'll pass down the whole vision of Acorns and Merlot to younger students from Allderdice and Schenley,” Wintrich said. “They could keep it alive, and then it will be solely a high school show. [But] it does chronicle our lives — we could pack it up and take it to college.”

To listen to Acorns and Merlot, go to <http://acornsandmerlot.com>.