Who killed Sly Vox?

June 30 2011, By Cyndi Moritz

Who killed rock 'n' roll star Sly Vox? Was it his ex-bandmate and ex-fiancée, Ivory Keyz? Fired security chief Hound Dawg? South American singer A. Capella, who accused Vox of stealing music and lyrics? Or was it one of the other numerous suspects whom Vox had angered over the years?

That is the question that teams of high school forensics students were charged to answer during the 11th annual CSI Challenge, put on by Forensics World at Stony Brook University on June 6. The winning team, from Riverhead High School, was composed of students in Kelly Evers' SU Forensic Science class, offered through Project Advance, as were five other teams in the competition's top 20.

"This is the fourth time we've participated in the challenge," Evers said. "But it's our first time winning."

"We are very proud of the Project Advance sections of the SU Forensic Science classes that participate in the CSI challenge," said John Fiset, Project Advance associate director. "The challenge requires a great deal of extra out-of-class work in order to prepare for the competition. Students are willing to make the commitment because they really do enjoy the course and the competition."

In the scenario given to teams ahead of the competition, Vox, lead singer of fictional rock group Vanish, was found dead in his dressing room after a concert to celebrate the band being declared one of the top bands of the decade 2000-2010. Many people had motives to kill him, but it

was up to the student teams to figure out the actual culprit by examining the clues.

An identical crime scene was set up for each team. Students first documented the scene, then moved on to testing the evidence. They had to be proficient in lifting and processing fingerprints; analyzing hairs and fibers; casting impressions of shoes, tire tracks and tools; and blood typing, among many other skills. Some of those skills were covered in the SU's forensics course, while some were learned from online tutorials provided by Forensics World.

Each team also got to interview and interrogate a "suspect." Actors in costume portrayed the suspects, and answered questions while trying to mislead and distract their questioners.

"The teams are graded on everything," Evers said, from the plan for investigating the crime to their handling of evidence to their interviewing skills. They were also rated on their professionalism, including how they dressed and how they acted.

It is possible to come up with the wrong solution for the crime, Evers said, adding that she wasn't sure how many teams solved it correctly. Her team did, but the answer was not obvious from the start. "My kids were disappointed that their interview subject was Hound Dawg, since he was one of the less obvious suspects, but he did it," she said. "There were a lot of red herrings."

Evers observed that some teams broke down under the stress of the competition. "It never happened to my team," she said. She gave much credit to a very organized team leader.

The competition took an entire day. Was it worth it? Evers thinks it was. "Before we found out who won, we [she and her team members] were

talking about it, and many of the kids thought it was the best thing they did in high school," she said. It gave the students hands-on experience at using the tools they had learned about in the forensics class.

"To me, the most valuable aspect was the teamwork," she said.

Forensics World aims to expand the CSI Challenge each year so that more students have the chance to learn and demonstrate forensic skills.

Provided by Syracuse University