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Wizard Entertainment Founder Gareb Shamus Talks About Childhood, Pop Stars and Wizard World Chicago Comic Con

Wizard World Chicago Comic Con is Coming Aug. 19 to Aug. 22

By Shamontiel

Chicago comic book fans will be surrounding the Donald E. Stephens Rosemont Convention Center at 5555 N. River Road in Rosemont, IL for the [Wizard World Chicago Comic Con event](#) from Aug. 19 to Aug. 22. Five hundred celebrities, pop stars and [comic book](#) artists will be greeting Comic Con supporters, including "Star Trek" and "Batman" actors. But who's the man who put this multi-city tour event together? Meet Gareb Shamus, the founder of Wizard Entertainment.

Shamontiel: For those unfamiliar with [Comic Con](#), they may think that it's just about comic strips. How did music and video games come into play with this event?

Gareb Shamus: Whether it's Batman or "Star Wars" or "Star Trek" or Spiderman, these characters become famous globally in many different medias. It's not only movies. It's television. It's video games. It's toys. It's comic books. So when you're a fan of Batman, for example, you have tens of millions of people that went to see the movie, tens of millions of people that watch the animated show, tens of millions of people that bought the action figures and tons of people that read the comic books so when you look at the fan today, the fan is not just interested in one facet of pop culture. They're interested in many facets of pop culture.

S: Other guests like *America's Next Top Model (ANTM)* Adrienne Curry and Christopher Knight will be on hand. Was there a relationship that they have to comic books or did they just want to come out to be a part of the event?

GS: Number one, Adrienne is from Chicago. (*Editor's note: Adrienne grew up in Joliet, Illinois.*) Number two, she's like a super geek. She's notoriously online for playing "Worlds of Warcraft," she's a comic book fan and what she also does is she lets the fans pick what she's going to wear at the show. She comes in costume and people love taking pictures with her and meeting her and getting stuff autographed.

(Adrienne Curry and Christopher Knight) have become pop culture icons between "America's Next Top Model" and "The Brady Bunch." And then they were on ("My Fair Brady") together. They've become famous as a couple, and people want to come out to meet them. We've created a really great forum for that to happen.

S: There are two rare appearances going on—Patrick Stewart and William Shatner from "Star Trek" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation" and then Adam West, Burt Ward and Julie Newmar from "Batman." Do you expect more guests to come because they're coming? How did that come about?

GS: Absolutely. We created a whole "Star Trek" celebration. We also have quite a number of additional members from "Star Trek," but what we did was we worked really closely with William Shatner (and) Patrick Stewart. We thought, "Oh my god. Wouldn't it be great to coordinate their schedules to get them in one room together at the same time?" It's a lot easier said than done, but we were able to do it and coordinate it. The "Star Trek" fans are going nuts for it.

We had Adam West, Burt Ward and Julie Newmar before at our Anaheim show, and it was so popular that we wanted to bring it to Chicago.

But what that also did was we have the last Five Cylons from "Battlestar Galactica," so if you're a fan of the "Battlestar Galactica" show, these Five Cylons made a huge impact. For the first time we were able to get all five of them at the same time.

S: How important were comic strips to you as a child growing up?

GS: I lived on comic books growing up. I have three brothers so we grew up with sports cards and comic books and toys. That was our whole life to the point where before I went to college, my mom opened up a sports card and comic book shop. It's been in my family for a long time. I'm like Tom Hanks in the movie "Big." I get to be a kid in a grown-up body forever.

S: Who was your favorite comic book character?

GS: I'd say Batman. He always stood for the right thing, and he always took justice into his own hands but never really crossed the line.

S: Who was your favorite comic strip character who wasn't a superhero?

GS: There's two. There's Archie and Richie Rich. Also, Alfred E. Neuman from *Mad* magazine. Those were the characters that I grew up...Archie was the first comic book that I ever had put in my hand. Then, Richie Rich, those were fun also as a kid. I had a subscription to *Mad* magazine so I couldn't go without that magazine. It was the humor magazine of generations, and it was such an iconic magazine. He was just always funny.

S: The convention is in Rosemont but it's called the Wizard World's Chicago Comic Con? What made you choose Rosemont as opposed to the metropolitan area of Chicago?

GS: I bought the show almost 15 years ago in Rosemont, and it's just a great center. (Donald E. Stephens Rosemont Convention Center) is a great location. It's right near the (O'Hare) airport. There's hotels and restaurants right next door. You've got arenas, movie theaters, you've got so much culture there. It's a great center, and the people there are really great to work with.

S: Why do you think the Wizard World event is so successful in the Illinois area?

GS: We create a very compelling event that people are excited about, that they look forward to. We've also published (*Wizard*, *ToyFare*, *FunFare*) magazines for the last 20 years. We have a great fan following. People come out with their boyfriend or their girlfriend or their kids. Kids under 10 get in free so we really encourage people to bring their family. Our industry is generational where you have a lot of guys that grew up reading comic books and now they have kids. This is a great way for their kids to enjoy what they did when they were kids.

S: You created Wizard Entertainment in 1991. Did you expect it to be as big as it is today?

GS: Whenever you do these things, you really just want to do it and make sure it works and it's successful. For me it's always looking ahead in terms of what we can do with it so when I first got it, I didn't imagine that it was going to be this big. I did imagine it was going to be bigger but not to the extent that it is today. We've become the largest tour in North America. We own 14 events.

S: For someone who's never been to a Comic Con event and doesn't know if he or she wants to come, why should this person come?

GS: They're going to have a lot of fun. For the cost of admission, whether you're going to spend a day or the whole weekend, it's going to be the most enjoyment you're going to get for the money. You're going to be able to meet celebrities, get autographs, get pictures and play in gaming tournaments. Buy comic books, toys, get sketches done, meet the artists and meet the writers. There's so much great stuff to do. You're not even going to have enough time to do it.

If you're not in the Chicago area, there will be additional tours in New York, New England, Austin, Atlanta, Toronto, Anaheim, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Connecticut and Nashville. Click WizardWorld.com to find a location near you. Click here to read more about the [Wizard World Comic Con Chicago event](#).

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