

Do You Know Your Rights?

Joe Fowler, Staff Writer

Non-partisanship reigned supreme on Oct. 5 as Radio IQ host Doug Smith, vice president of the Montpelier Foundation, and Professor Stuart Harris celebrated a belated Constitution Day with students and faculty of PVCC. Smith and Harris gave a highly informative and interactive presentation while addressing everything from freedom of expression during the Vietnam War to the power the Supreme Court currently possesses to pass laws with only five votes during times of congressional gridlock.

In an interview several days before the event, Assistant Professor Connie Jorgensen spoke about the event and its importance to the student body. “How many people have actually read the Constitution?” she asked, emphasizing the need for greater awareness of the Constitution and its role in American life. About 28 percent of Americans have read the Constitution according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Center for the Constitution in 2010.

Enter Constitution Day, a holiday celebrated on Sept. 17 of each year to commemorate the creation of the Constitution on the same day in 1787. Federal law mandates that all public education systems acknowledge Constitution Day. However, given the often-humorous approach of Smith and Harris, the event hardly felt like a requirement.

Students, faculty and the speakers shared in several moments of laughter even while discussing various academic points. The first of such points explained why James Madison, often called the Father of the Constitution, saw the need for the Constitution over the pre-existing Articles of Confederation, something often taught in a more mundane fashion in American History classes.

Perhaps the best part of the Constitution Day celebration was audience participation.

Smith and Harris invited audience members to participate in various quizzes involving the Constitution and the case law behind it. The



speakers awarded participants prizes ranging from pocket versions of the Constitution to key chains and t-shirts related to their radio show, The Weekly Constitutional, which airs on Radio IQ at 5 p.m. on Sundays.

None other than Frank Friedman, the PVCC president, took part in one of the quizzes. Given three possible answers to choose from in a scenario where constitutional law was in question, President Friedman gave what Stuart and Smith called the best possible answer.

After calling for a round of applause for President Friedman, the speakers revealed the correct answer to the audience.

The answer was, “I don’t know.”

Stuart then explained that sometimes a hard and fast rule proves elusive. Several of these cases still float through various levels of the judicial system.

The Constitution Day speakers event demonstrated the importance of the Constitution to all Americans, which fulfilled a desire that Jorgensen emphasized in her interview. “It’s great for students to learn about what the Constitution means and what it means to them.”

Students who want to learn more can access the Constitution for free with apps on both Android and Apple operating systems.