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'Dukes of Hazzard Institute' VP hired

Office temp wins \$100,000 job to watch reruns of Bo, Luke, Daisy and write blog.

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By Peter Valdes-Dapena, CNN/Money staff writer

NEW YORK (CNN/Money) - Country Music Television has selected its first "vice president" for the Dukes of Hazzard Institute. The first task for the New York-based executive: Upgrade the Institute's new facilities (i.e. get cable and a new TV set for his apartment).

Yes, Christopher Nelson's new job, which comes with a \$100,000 salary and a one-year contract, will be to watch reruns of "The Dukes of Hazzard" weeknights on the Country Music Television cable channel and write blog posts for the network's Website.

The contract does not include vacation time.

"For \$100,000 he'd better watch that show every night," said James Hitchcock, CMT's vice president for marketing.

Nelson's appointment will be officially announced June 4 at DukesFest in Bristol, Tenn. Having moved to New York from Austin, Tex., about eight months ago, Nelson was most recently working as a part-time temporary administrative assistant while trying to advance a career as a writer and musician.

"This job will change my life," said Nelson.

Nelson applied for the job along with almost 2,000 others in late February, shortly after an advertisement for the position was placed in several communication-industry publications.

A printable job application was made available on Country Music Television's Website. The application asked no questions about prior work experience or education.

But it did ask, "If you, Bo, Luke and Daisy took off in the General Lee, what would happen next?"

(Bo, Luke and Daisy Duke, played by John Schneider, Tom Wopat and Catherine Bach, were the show's human stars. The General Lee, an orange 1969 Dodge Charger -- actually many 1969 Dodge Chargers -- with non-working doors and a



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Christopher Nelson, vice president. CMT Dukes of Hazzard Institute

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confederate battle flag painted on its roof, was, arguably, the show's main attraction.)

Another question was, "If Waylon Jennings wrote your theme song, what would the title chorus be?" Waylon Jennings sang the show's theme song and, as "The Balladeer," provided narration that helped paper over the occasional plot flaw.

"The Dukes of Hazzard," which ran from 1979 to 1985, followed the heroic efforts of the two brothers, Bo and Luke Duke who, with the help of their cousin, Daisy and the guidance of their uncle, Jesse Duke, did their best to thwart the plans of the greedy J.D. "Boss" Hogg. Hogg directly controlled most government functions and, seemingly, all of the crime in Hazzard County, Ga.

Many applicants for the Vice President position went much further than simply answering the one-page questionnaire.

Some sent packages in cardboard boxes cut and painted to look like the General Lee. Several applications included recorded audio and video performances and three-ring binders showing off their life long devotion to the show. One leading contender created a full restaurant menu for the "Boar's Nest," the show's restaurant. Another sent in a sample of his hair.

For his application, Nelson created a fictional character, called Slick, and a Website to support Slick's candidacy for the position, slickforvp.org.

The site featured the mustachioed Slick (the clean-shaven Nelson dressed in a black Western-style outfit) standing in front of private jet digitally "painted" to resemble the General Lee.

Slickforvp.org also laid out Slick's positions, on a number of social issues. Most of the planks in Slick's "campaign platform" could be considered offensive to a significant number of people, so we'll just share one... "Legalize prostitution as long as it's in an RV..." and leave it at that.

"Slick just got me in the door," said Nelson. "Then I had to close the door."

Nelson was one of three applicants flown to CMT headquarters for an in-person interview with a seven-member "executive search team," including Ben Jones, the actor who played the mechanic Cooter Davenport on the show. (Although he participated in the interviews and is pleased with the new hire, Jones took no part in the actual selection, he said in an interview with CNN/Money.)

Nelson professes life-long admiration for the show. He said he especially appreciates its "depth and character development" -- attributes a casual viewer might not attribute to the program. But he does not own a car painted like the General Lee, as some fans do. (One applicant sent photos of his "General Lee" Charger and two accurately reproduced Hazzard County police cars.)

He can, however, refer to specific episodes while discussing the "complex character arc" of Cooter, who started out in the show's first season as an addle-brained maniac and changed gradually into a respectable small business owner.

More important than rabid fanaticism, said Hitchcock, was an ability to bring enjoyment and understanding of "Dukes" to those who were not, themselves, fans of the show.

"Once we got to know who he (Nelson) really was," Hitchcock said, " he was able to really bring out some extraordinary ideas."

Nelson's application included some seriously intended ideas for promoting the show. For example, the network could sponsor a "General Lee Iditarod Dog Sled" to participate in the Alaskan race. They could also do cross-promotional "Duke My Ride" program with MTV, CMT's sibling-network (Both are owned by Viacom) that currently airs "Pimp my ride," a car make-over show.

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Before spending the \$100,000 in salary, plus various other related costs, the most expensive promotion CMT had ever done for any show was the \$5,000 "Wizmark" talking urinal cake promotion for the network's "Outlaws" series, Hitchcock said.

"Don't miss Outlaws on CMT. You seem to miss everything else," the chemical-infused cakes said when moistened.

While Nelson's services will cost much more than several boxes of urinal cakes, the network plans to get plenty of use out of him. In addition to watching the show and writing the blog posts, he will be expected to travel about once a month to promote the show.

"Talk to him in a year or so," said Jones who, after two terms representing a non-fictional Georgia district in the U.S. House of Representatives in the early 1990s, now runs a Dukes of Hazzard Museum and makes about 100 personal appearances a year at Dukes-related events. "He might be completely bonkers."

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