One of Doctor Who’s biggest American fans, Alfred Snider, poses with a police box reminiscent of the TARDIS space machine on a visit to London.

Photo courtesy Alfred Snider

The long-running campy BBC TV series Doctor Who is back on the airwaves after a 15-year absence, and the U.S. fan base is growing rapidly. This weekend, hundreds of fans will gather in Los Angeles for Gallifrey One, the biggest Doctor Who convention in the country.
"The Time Meddlers [fan club] has gotten a lot of new fans coming to our doors since the new show came on," says Aaron Cistrelli, president of the 20-year-old Los Angeles-based Time Meddlers.

*Doctor Who* is one of the U.K.'s longest-running television shows, and is currently enjoying a huge surge in popularity. The most-recent Christmas special, "Voyage of the Damned," was viewed by 12.2 million people, or 50 percent of the British viewing audience.

*Doctor Who* chronicles the adventures of a gadget-loving alien known as "the Doctor," who travels through space and time in the TARDIS, an unreliable space and time machine that looks like a 1950s British police box.

The show returned to U.K. TVs in 2005, and several PBS stations in 2006, but because *Doctor Who* never enjoyed the massive syndication that *Star Trek* did, the U.S. fan base is smaller. It might be smaller, but it is perhaps far geekier.

No fewer than 40 local fan clubs across the nation give Whovians a chance to socialize offline. The Time Meddlers maintains a library of *Doctor Who* movies and episodes, and meets once a month to watch the show.

Today, DoctorWhoForum.com claims more than 18,000 active members who congregate online to debate the relative merits of recent episodes, compose Who-related poetry, and exchange images of *Doctor Who* actor David Tennant's backside.

Alfred Snider, who might be the biggest fan in the Whoniverse, has been hosting a weekly *Doctor Who* theater event in his Vermont home for more than 15 years. In this way, classic fans have kept the series alive for a new generation of fans.

"I knew [the show] would come back, but I never thought it would be this good or this popular," says the 57-year-old professor of forensics.

Snider named his 28-year-old daughter after Sarah Jane Smith, one of the Doctor's longtime companions. He sometimes carries one of the Doctor's gadgets, a sonic screwdriver, and has attended Chicago TARDIS, the "other" *Doctor Who* convention, four times.

When I reach him, he is in a cellphone store upgrading to a new BlackBerry. "It's funny you should call right now because I was just expressing concern about getting my ring tone on the new phone. It's the theme song from *Doctor Who.*"

While many fans also appreciate *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Battlestar Galactica*, many find simple space travel a bit boring. After all, their beloved blue TARDIS can travel to any time and any place, from the Big Bang to the end of the universe.

"I've been a fan since I was growing up," says Matt Abbott, a 35-year-old software engineer from San Francisco, who plans to attend the Gallifrey Convention for the first time this year.

At the convention, fans will get a chance to look inside the TARDIS, meet actors and writers from the show, participate in panel discussions, purchase *Doctor Who* toys and memorabilia, and dress as their favorite *Doctor Who* characters for Friday night's masquerade ball.