Tenth Anniversary Issue

With the January 1995 issue, the *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* entered a new era. The *Notices* had begun to include some expository mathematical articles, as well as articles about the profession, and some opinion and commentary, along with the meetings programs, reports, and other material that it carried as the journal of record of the Society, for several years prior to that date. Society leadership of the early 1990s, especially in the 1993 report of the Committee to Review Member Publications, envisioned an enhanced *Notices* that would "serve all mathematicians by providing a lively and informative magazine, which contains news about mathematics and mathematicians, as well as information about the Society and the profession". The Committee was chaired by Hugo Rossi, who became the first editor of these enhanced *Notices*; for an account of the origins of the enhanced *Notices*, see "The Start of the New *Notices*" by Anthony Knapp (Rossi's successor) in the January 2000 *Notices*.

With this issue, then, the "new" *Notices* celebrates its tenth anniversary. The *Notices* cover itself has become a recognized "lively and informative" mathematical graphic; this tenth-anniversary cover is a collection of some of the striking mathematical images that have appeared in that space over the past decade. Inside, articles by Allyn Jackson and Annette Emerson recount some of the *Notices* history during the decade and of the editors and editorial staff who have produced the *Notices*.

A glance at the rest of the table of contents shows how the vision of a magazine serving (and entertaining) mathematicians has been realized: articles include an exposition by Boris Khesin of topological methods in fluid dynamics and their applications, including weather forecasting. Alice Artzt and Alan Sultan recount their experiences, and lessons learned, as a mathematics education specialist and a mathematician team teaching. Jerrold Grossman explores the *Mathematical Reviews* database and discovers some interesting and surprising statistics and linkages in publication patterns. And noted folklorist Alan Dundes, assisted by physicist Paul Renteln, classifies and analyzes the archetypes of mathematical humor. Also Emmanuel Giroux explains WHAT IS an open book, in the latest entry in that popular ongoing series, and Frank Morgan reviews George Szpiro's book on Kepler's Conjecture. This month also marks the debut of a column about *Mathematical Reviews*, which is going to be a regularly occurring feature of the *Notices*. And we also have our first crossword puzzle.

I referred above to the "new" *Notices*: the quotation marks are intended to suggest that after ten years we now have simply the *Notices*. For many *Notices* readers, this is just an artifact of having joined the profession in the past decade. All graduate students at all Society institutional members are recipients of the *Notices* and form a significant component of the readership. If they continue their membership in the Society upon receiving their doctorates, and most do, then we can figure that an additional third of the *Notices* readers earned the Ph.D. during the past decade. For the rest, whose membership in the Society predates 1995, a decade is certainly adequate to adapt to what the *Notices* has become.

In any event, although I hope the above review of the table of contents shows that the *Notices* remains innovative, I also hope that readers know what to expect when they open their *Notices* issues each month and that they open them eagerly and with positive expectations. And although by now mathematicians have a pretty good idea of what constitutes a *Notices* article, especially an expository mathematics feature article, that doesn't make them any easier to write. Obviously the *Notices* couldn't function without editors and staff. But the key to the *Notices'* success, and I believe it has been very successful, has been the willingness of mathematicians to explain their mathematics to the nonspecialist. As those who have attempted it know, to provide good exposition of mathematics is a difficult task. I am grateful to the *Notices* authors: it is their hard work that has realized the vision of making the *Notices* a lively and informative mathematics magazine. And I invite those who would like to join them to review the *Notices* "Editor's Note on *Notices* Submissions" (`http://www.ams.org/notices/submissions-info.html`) and see how to do so.

—*Andy Magid*

Letters to the Editor

Memories of Grothendieck

I found Allyn Jackson's account of Grothendieck's life most interesting. It brought back memories of a year (1951–52) I spent at Nancy. There were many high-powered lectures, as well as short introductory courses given by research students, which did not give the impression of being a weaker form of the Paris courses. One of the introductory lectures was on topological vector spaces; I was weighing up whether to attend it, as I had just been to a one-year course on Hilbert space at Cambridge. When I did go, I found that the first lecture summarized all I had learnt in the whole year of the Cambridge course; after that the lecturer started throwing around strong and weak topologies, and one really had to work hard to follow. The student who gave this course was Alexander Grothendieck. That reminds me, he always insisted on spelling his first name…er, never…re.

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Discrete Math Course

It is seen that books in computer science begin with a chapter consisting of a section of mathematical topics that a reader is assumed to know. These topics include logic, set theory, algebraic structures (semigroups, monoids, groups), lattices and Boolean algebras, graph theory, computation, etc. These topics are not exposed in detail as it is perhaps assumed that a reader knows these topics to some extent.

These topics have applications in two-state devices, programming languages, formal language theory, syntactic analysis, automata, error detecting and correcting codes, switching theory, sequential machines, minimal path problems, and many more.

Now the prerequisite for these topics is nothing but the mathematical maturity of a high school student. So why not introduce a course "Introduction to Discrete Mathematics" at the beginning postsecondary level (after high school) where the above topics are exposed in detail. The contents may include counting techniques, permutations and combinations, probability, in addition to the topics mentioned above.

In India this course has not been introduced even at the undergraduate level except for some institutions. I hope for its introduction in other countries. I appeal to course designers, mathematicians, and others concerned to give a thought to my opinion. This course, if introduced at the beginning postsecondary level, will benefit upcoming scientists.

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Reply to Gale

In his letter to the editor in the December *Notices*, David Gale responds to my August 2004 article by expressing his opinion that equitable representation of underrepresented groups in mathematics (whether it's women or U.S. ethnic minorities) should not be pursued. His main argument appears to be that equitable representation will decrease the overrepresentation that certain groups now enjoy. (He cites Asian Americans as an example.) In the same letter he states that he is in favor of increasing the representation of underrepresented groups. It is clear that an increase of representation of underrepresented groups cannot take place without a decrease in representation of overrepresented groups. It appears that he is therefore arguing in favor of no action to correct any underrepresentation. I did not address Gale's concern because I do not feel it is of much importance to the main point of the article: *tapping the mathematical talent of our entire American society is desirable because it will lead to a stronger American mathematical community*. That is, cultivating the mathematical talent of historically underrepresented groups will enhance the talent pool of American mathematicians.

In his letter, Gale also writes, "The fact is, some groups in our society—whether cultural, ethnic, or even religious—have put more emphasis on mathematical achievement than others." A statement like this, which should not be termed a "fact", places blame on individuals within the underrepresented populations for the underrepresentation. Blame for past and current situations is divisive and should not be the main point of the discussion. Again, the focus should be on present and future actions that will lead to greater participation in mathematics of all groups within our society because this can only lead to a stronger American mathematics community.

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Oberwolfach and Eastern Europe

Concerning the article "Oberwolfach Celebrates Its Sixtieth Anniversary" in the October 2004 *Notices*, we want to point out that Martin Barner, the director of the Oberwolfach Institute in the years 1963–1994, was very efficient in breaking out of the "iron curtain". Indeed, each of us has been more than 10 times in Oberwolfach. We also met there, at conferences, colleagues from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and even the Soviet Union, as well as other Polish mathematicians.

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