

COMMENTARY

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This issue of the *Bulletin* is devoted to written versions of the presentations given at the Current Events session during the 2004 Joint Meetings. I am sure you will enjoy them as much as I did. As with the summer 2004 issue of the *Bulletin*,¹ which featured articles commemorating René Thom, the articles in this current issue nicely capture the traditional intent and purpose of the *Bulletin*. Starting with its predecessor, the *Bulletin of the New York Mathematical Society*, the goal of the *Bulletin* has been, and is, to publish expository articles intended to inform the general mathematical community about new advances, directions, and ideas in mathematics.

Notice how the *Bulletin* theme coincides with that of the Current Events sessions. The first session was held in January 2003, the second last January, and the third will be held during the January 2005 meetings. These sessions, which were conceived and organized by David Eisenbud, are modeled after the famous Bourbaki Seminars, where mathematicians with especially strong expository skills speak on work that is not their own, and written versions of the talks are prepared beforehand. The experiment has proved to be successful: the Current Events sessions draw a large audience and have become one of the more popular activities at the Joint Meetings.

During the January 2004 session, talks were given by Andrew Granville, John Morgan, Thomas Hales, and Margaret Wright. Extended written versions of three of these talks appear in this issue; the article by Hales will appear in the next issue. At the next Joint Meetings, on Friday, January 7, 2005, presentations will be given by Bryna Kra, László Lovász, Jerrold E. Marsden and David Ross, Dusa McDuff, and Robert McEliece.

I had intended and, indeed, scheduled this issue of the *Bulletin* to be my last one after serving two enjoyable terms as the chief editor. I agreed, however, to edit two more issues in order to provide for a smooth transition for my successor, who will be appointed during the January 2005 meetings. What made this position so enjoyable was the strong support the *Bulletin* received from excellent expositors who accurately viewed a *Bulletin* article as a valued opportunity to inform the general mathematical community about the fascinating advances that have been made in their particular branch of mathematics. I hope and expect that such support will be extended to the next chief editor. After all, the *Bulletin* is an important international outlet to let the rest of us know what is going on in your area.

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¹My thanks to Barry Mazur, who served as co-editor for the René Thom issue.