

COMMENTARY

ROBERT L. BRYANT

In September 1982 the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkeley, California, opened its doors for its first scientific programs, in its original location at the end of Fulton Street, near the southwest corner of the UC Berkeley campus. Its founders, Shiing-Shen Chern, Calvin Moore, and Isadore Singer, had an idea for a place where research mathematicians from all over the world in a particular field could gather for intense periods of communication, collaboration, and contemplation. With major funding from the National Science Foundation and support from UC Berkeley and several U.S. mathematics departments (the original academic sponsors), they turned this vision into a reality. Under their leadership, assisted by a distinguished committee of mathematicians, the scientific advisory committee, MSRI rapidly established itself as a leading research center in mathematics, its chosen scientific programs and workshops ranging widely over the most current and active topics of the day.

Over the intervening quarter of a century since then, MSRI has evolved into an essential constituent of the U.S. mathematical community. After moving to its permanent home, 17 Gauss Way, at the top of the Berkeley hills, it expanded its services, welcoming an ever larger number of researchers for its programs and workshops. Nowadays, MSRI hosts around 2000 visitors a year for periods ranging from a few days to an academic year. Moreover, MSRI has expanded its research mission, now supporting around 30 postdoctoral fellows each year who come to take advantage of the concentration of leading experts in their chosen fields of study and to deepen ties with their research communities at the beginning of their careers. Its past directors, Shiing-Shen Chern, Irving Kaplansky, William Thurston, and David Eisenbud, have led MSRI in new directions, supporting mathematics education, public outreach, and interdisciplinary collaborations in fields such as biology, climate change, and finance, just to name a few, while maintaining MSRI's focus on its core mission—service to the mathematical research community. The response of the mathematical community has been wonderful. With continual funding from the NSF and other government organizations and private foundations, a family currently numbering more than 90 academic sponsoring institutions, as well as generous contributions from private individuals, MSRI has been able to initiate new activities, such as graduate summer schools, providing unique training in rapidly developing areas of mathematics, and expanding its facilities, including a new auditorium and expanded library.

In January 2008 MSRI officially celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a week-long scientific conference, featuring a series of sixteen talks by distinguished mathematicians covering a range of currently active topics that had received significant attention in MSRI's scientific programs in the years since its founding. The articles

in this issue of the *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society* represent a selection of these talks and will give the reader a sense of the excitement and energy of the occasion. The reader is encouraged to visit MSRI's website to hear and see more of the talks, as well as a pair of interesting panels on education and the past, present, and future of MSRI.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the speakers, authors, and participants in this 25th Anniversary celebration on the behalf of myself and the other two organizers of the event, Alejandro Adem and Isadore Singer.

MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES RESEARCH INSTITUTE, 17 GAUSS WAY, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
94720-5070

URL: www.msri.org

E-mail address: bryant@msri.org