

Inside the AMS

AMS Hosts Mathematical “Game Show”

At the Joint Mathematics Meetings in New Orleans in January 2001, the AMS hosted a mathematical contest called “Who Wants to Be a Mathematician?”. Based on the wildly popular television game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”, the AMS event brought in high school students from New Orleans area schools who competed for prizes by answering questions about mathematics.

In advance of the event, schools were sent a set of questions that students had to answer in five minutes. Ten students were chosen for the competition based on their performance on this set of questions. The emcee for the game was AMS public awareness officer Michael Breen, who organized the event and wrote all the questions.

The AMS donated \$2,000 in cash as the top prize. Other prizes included the software package Maple and Texas Instruments graphing calculators, as well as posters, T-shirts, books, and magazine subscriptions donated by the AMS and the Mathematical Association of America. As in the television game show, the contestants in “Who Wants to Be a Mathematician?” progressed toward the top prize by giving correct answers to questions that increased in difficulty. Once they gave a wrong answer they had to stop playing and collect one of the intermediate prizes. As it turned out, no one made it to the top prize.

The names of the students who participated and the names of their schools are: ZACK ANGELO and JOHVANNA DABNEY: New Orleans Center for Science and Math; SUHITHA REDDY: Academy of the Sacred Heart; PERRY POUSSARD, ALEX FINK, and BRANDON FONTENELLE: Archbishop Shaw; DEVON



Above, left: top-scoring contestant Suhitha Reddy. At right: AMS host Michael Breen with student contestant during contest play.

MAGEE, KASSEY MARIE GETHERS, and REBECCA COLA: McDonogh 35; and JESSICA ORDOYNE: Archbishop Blenk.

The students participating in the game were cheered on by an enthusiastic crowd that included their teachers and fellow classmates. As emcee, Breen kept the game moving at a lively pace with great timing and a quirky sense of humor. Conversations with the students who participated in the event revealed that they had plans to attend college and major in science and engineering subjects. The high-spirited event provided an excellent way to include these promising young people in the Joint Meetings.

—Allyn Jackson