

Alton team wins second straight National Flagway Tournament

May 9 2018 10:46 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - An Alton team won the National Flagway Tournament sponsored by the Young People's Project (YPP) for the second straight year Saturday, April 28 at

the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Student Fitness Center. The SIUE College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) hosted the second annual mathematics competition.

The Alton Alge-bruhs had to go to sudden death overtime to defeat the Alton Taco Cats 25-24 for the title. The seven-team field included two Chicago entries along with teams from Boston, Idaho and Virginia. The Virginia State University Divide & Conquer team placed third.

“The tournament allows kids to enjoy, engage, be energetic and learn something important in the process,” said CAS Dean Greg Budzban, PhD.

SIUE math graduate students Amanda Davis and Courtney Vahle served as the “athletic directors” for the two Alton squads. Levi Davis and Rachel Held coached the Alge-bruhs, which consisted of Aaron Preston Humm, Nadja Kapetanovich, Zandrea Moore and Launa Schwank.

Vahle noted that the students’ experiences with math varied. “Some of them love math, some of them did not like math very much before they started here,” she said. “We did pre-tests and post-tests and saw tremendous growth in their math abilities over the course of our programming. It gives the kids a good thing to do after school. They have fun with their peers, they do games, we practice our math, and it’s all in an environment where they’re learning from high schoolers older than they are. It’s not like they’re going to another class after school.

“These kids come from diverse backgrounds, so it’s rewarding to win. They’ve got a big spot in their trophy case, and we hope that it can be recognized as much as an achievement as any of the sports in their school.”

The Alton Mathletes won the 2017 event in Washington, D.C. The event will return to the nation’s capitol in 2019 on May 4 as part of the National Math Festival, and Vahle said Alton would most definitely be there.

This success story began through a grant from the Mathematical Association of America’s (MAA) Tensor-SUMMA Program and contributions from the John Simmons Family Foundation. With that support, Budzban spearheaded the Alton Math Games League in 2017 in cooperation with the Alton School District. Funding continued in 2018 through another grant from the MAA Tensor-SUMMA Program, and additional funding from the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities spearheaded by Executive Director Ed Hightower, PhD.

“It was very rewarding and gratifying to see young people enjoying solving math equations, and having fun at the same time,” Hightower said. “The teamwork and

sharing was incredible. The Mannie Jackson Center looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Young People's Project and SIUE. It is our goal to involve more local school districts in this exciting initiative."

The national league has emerged from a collaboration of local school districts and universities with two national nonprofit organizations: The Algebra Project and The Young People's Project. [YPP](#) uses math literacy work to develop the abilities of elementary through high school students to succeed in school and in life, and in doing so involves them in efforts to eliminate institutional obstacles to their success.

Maisha Moses, YPP executive director, loves the tournament because she sees how much fun kids have in playing the game. "It's fast-moving in a team environment based on math. Kids get to learn through movement, and there are few opportunities to do that. Parents get behind it, so at the grassroots level, people come together around math."

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