MATH AND THE MEDIA

GARY GORDON AND ELIZABETH MCMAHON

Through careful and painstaking research, we present the following examples of important stories involving mathematics in a fundamental way.

Stolen from various websites.
New Platonic Solid Discovered

A new Platonic solid has been discovered, according to mathematicians at The Metropolitan University. The solid, tentatively named the *Docentahedron*, has 2000 identical faces, each of which is a regular byegon. According to Metropolitan officials, "We found the solid by accident. We had models of the five Platonic solids in a classroom when Prof. Siddhartha "Sidd" Finch, one of our older faculty members, tripped over a cube. He landed on the other four solids, destroying them. When he looked up, he noticed the new solid somehow had been created from the various broken pieces of the old models." He modestly rejected the initial name of the solid, the "siddfinchahedron."

The solid has some special, 'magical' properties, the spokesman continued. "Our chemists were able to sustain a cold fusion reaction in the interior of the Docentahedron. This reaction cannot take place in any of the five, previously known Platonic solids. Somehow, all laws of physics are suspended inside this solid. We think this significant achievement will have far-reaching consequences for our world's energy needs for the future."

Reprinted without permission from the Allentown Morning Call
Equal Time for Alternate Solutions, President Bush declares

In a major policy address at Lehigh University, President Bush declared that alternate solutions in mathematics should be taught in our nation's public schools, even if those solutions give different answers from the ones in the back of the book. "We've been listening to those math teachers too long. I mean, math isn't exactly nucular science." The shift in policy is intelligently designed to augment his highly acclaimed 'Left Behind' education program. In his speech, the President cited the following examples which may now be used by students:

$$\sqrt{x^2 + y^2} = x + y,$$
$$\frac{1}{x + y} = \frac{1}{x} + \frac{1}{y}$$
$$(f(x)g(x))' = f'(x)g'(x).$$

"It just makes good sense," he continued. The new program will reclassify an extensive list of what mathematicians jokingly call 'stupid mistakes' as 'alternate solutions.' Michael Behe, Lehigh's well-known biologist, introduced the president, who was interrupted repeatedly by laughter and applause from Lehigh students and faculty. "If this program was in effect when I was in school, I might of been a math major [sic^2]," Mr. Bush added. The speech was marred briefly by picketing

mathematicians from nearby Lafayette College. Bush improvised a joke to dismiss the picketers: "I guess they couldn't get jobs at Lehigh!" to a thunderous ovation.

Summarized from highly placed sources.
NBC announces new TV show: ∃QUATIONS

In an effort to compete with CBS's highly rated *NUMB3RS*, NBC announced a new mathematics themed show. The show will center around the criminal exploits of Quinn Tick, a mathematical genius who uses her abilities to perpetrate a series of crimes as a professor at fictional 'New York University.' According to a press release, Quinn will use "wavelets, chaos theory, representation theory, game theory, genetic algorithms and other buzzwords to defraud the National Science Foundation. She does this by writing enormous grants claiming to solve famous open problems in mathematics, when she actually intends to settle more obscure conjectures. As a public service, 40 minutes of the pilot episode are devoted to the intricacies of NSF regulations governing grant-writing." Surprisingly, 80% of the test market fell asleep during the pilot.

The director's first choice for the lead was the actress Danica McKellar (*The Wonder Years*), but unfortunately, she was busy doing mathematics. Instead, in an effort to appeal to older viewers, the network decided to cast Judy Garland in the lead. Although Garland died in 1969, the network has pieced together scenes from *The Wizard of Oz, Meet Me In St. Louis* and several other movies in which she appeared to create a seamless production. In future shows, look for Quinn to find a proof of the Riemann hypothesis by visiting a wizard, a counterexample to Goldbach's Conjecture by following a yellow brick road, and an entirely new result to be called "The Trolley Theorem."

Reprinted from the Svensborg Newsliche Zeittimes; permission not needed
2007 Nobel Peace Prize goes to little-known mathematician

In a stunning surprise, the first Nobel Peace Prize ever given to a mathematician was awarded today to Dr. Robin Smythe for his/her work on greedoids. In the award announcement, the committee stated, "There are several important reasons for granting this year's prize to Dr. Smythe. The first is mathematical: combinatorics has worked in the service of all other branches of mathematics for too long; it is high time that this service be recognized in a way that will make the whole world sit up and listen. The second is also mathematical: any field that calls an important object a 'greedoid' must be on to a way to solve the problems of the world that have been caused over the years by greed. The third is that we wanted to recognize the important work that has been done over the years by adjuncts, and the fourth is that we wanted to acknowledge the difficulties that people of ambiguous gender have faced."

Those last two may require some explanation. It turns out that Dr. Smythe is not actually affiliated with any university or gender. "You see, I had some problems getting a tenure-track job; I cobbled together a career for a while on adjunct and visiting positions, but then, I just gave up. It's not easy being me." It also turns out that no member of the press (or even the Nobel Committee) has been able to ascertain whether Dr. Smythe is male or female. At first, everyone thought that "Robin" was female, but the tell-tale last name "Smythe" turns out to be of British extraction; when the awardee's parents were interviewed, they answered all queries with "We're just so proud of our little birdie!"

Completely made up.

American Mathematical Society Announces Corporate Sponsorships

The American Mathematical Society, the premier mathematics research organization in the United States, has decided to follow the lead of the NCAA and major sporting arenas by renaming several important theorems and axioms in the following way:

Old Name	New Name
Mean Value Theorem	Costco Value Theorem
Pythagorean Theorem	Dr. Pepper's Triangle Rule
Axiom of Choice	People's Bank Choice Axiom
Zorn's Lemma	Just Born's Hot Tamales Lemma
Banach-Tarskii Paradox	Sun Microsystems Oxymoron Paradox
Hilbert's Nullstellensatz	Mrs. Filbert's Zero-calorie Satz
Riemann-Roch Theorem	Rolling Rock Theorem

In addition, the AMS announced that the Fundamental Theorems of Arithmetic, Calculus, Algebra and Galois Theory will now be known as the Capital One, AFLAC, Halliburton and Nazareth National Bank Fundamental Theorems, resp. According to the AMS website, "this may make it difficult to remember what individual theorems say, but most students don't remember those theorems 15 minutes after the final exam, anyway!" The AMS proudly revealed that these corporate sponsorship deals have already raised over $100 for the society. The AMS asks authors and teachers to henceforth use the new, improved names. They also encourage all mathematicians to attend next year's Annual Joint-AMS-MAA-Enron Meetings.

Overheard at a bar.

Electronic Journal of Computational Mathematics Launched

The Atari Corporation announced a new research journal, exclusively devoted to articles written by computers, for computers. This journal fills a much-needed gap in what current research journals offer. According to a spokescomputer for the new journal, "Computers have made tremendous advances in all fields of mathematics in the past 40 years. Humans are no longer necessary for the most important new research." The spokescomputer offered a spectacular example: "We were able to prove the twin-primes conjecture simply by checking all positive integers. No human could possibly do that," it boasted.

The journal, which will be edited by computers which have been discarded, is referred to affectionately by its nickname: `.^(%:%2)+%:(*^.)^. %:y`. The editorial offices will be located beneath the Hackensack River bridge on the New Jersey Turnpike. The first volume, which occupies some 20,000 yottabytes, gives a 'new' proof of the four-color theorem, eliminating any step that could possibly be checked by human beings. In a subsequent issue, the computers plan to give a 'one-line solution' to the P vs NP problem (although the line will include an infinite loop).

Found in the trash.

Fermat's Proof of The Last Theorem Discovered!

All mathematicians are familiar with the story: Pierre de Fermat wished to prove that there are no solutions in positive integers to the equation $x^n + y^n = z^n$ when

$n > 2$. Fermat famously wrote *"I have discovered a truly remarkable proof which this margin is too small to contain."* While most mathematicians dismissed his claim, offering as evidence the fact that Fermat lived some 30 years after making his claim without ever mentioning it (but did offer proofs of the special cases $n = 3$ and $n = 4$), a small band of diehards held out hope that Fermat had a valid proof.

These crazy nuts were rewarded when the proof was found under a large pile on Fermat's desk. Evidently, Fermat kept extensive notes, and it has taken researchers more than 340 years to get through the material on his desk. Fermat carved his demonstration into the margin of his desk, which he found had more than enough room for his proof. Fermat made the researchers' task more difficult by writing the proof in an early version of COBOL. He used standard techniques of the day, and his proof included intimidating and provocative statements that were intended to distract the reader from gaps in the mathematical reasoning.

Found in a suburban bookstore.

The REAL DaVinci Code revealed!

It was recently announced that a hidden code in the work of Leonardo DaVinci has uncovered most of the digits of π. It turns out that the work of DaVinci was carefully written so that each word was the length of the next digit if π. Furthermore, his last work, only recently found hidden in an attic in Chapel Hill, N.C., contained an algorithm that would generate more digits. Excited mathematicians used the algorithm and compared the digits created with the known digits of π. So far, every one of the digits created is a digit that can be found somewhere in π! This amazing fact has some mathematicians convinced that we will soon know *all* the digits of π, and when that happens, the stock market will be perfectly predictable and the existence of God will be established. Thus, for the first time ever, both economists and religious leaders are joining forces to support this research.

Dept. of Mathematics, Lafayette College, Easton, PA 18042
E-mail address: `gordong@lafayette.edu`

Dept. of Mathematics, Lafayette College, Easton, PA 18042
E-mail address: `mcmahone@lafayette.edu`