
March 9, 1999

A 14-Year-Old Wins Top Prize In Intel Contest

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

Natalia Toro, a 14-year-old senior at Fairview High School in Boulder, Colo., was the youngest of the 40 finalists in the 1999 Intel Science Talent Search. But talent rather than age determined the outcome.

Last night, Miss Toro won a \$50,000 scholarship prize as the top winner of the contest, the nation's oldest and most prestigious science competition for high school seniors.

Sometimes referred to as the Junior Nobel Prize, the contest, with \$330,000 in prizes, was formerly sponsored by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. The Intel Corporation assumed sponsorship last year.

Because of her youth, Miss Toro stood out among the finalists when they assembled in Washington last week for a series of activities and interviews with leading scientists.

"People were curious about my age," Miss Toro said in an interview a few hours before she learned she was the top winner. "After they asked how old I am, and I told them, they wanted to know which grades I had skipped. I told them -- fifth, seventh and eighth."

Miss Toro said that even her parents could not keep up with her when she talked about her winning project, a study of the oscillations of neutrinos that may have a significant impact on high-energy physics.

Miss Toro performed her research and analysis last summer at the Research Science Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and expressed her thanks to Prof. Edmund Bertschinger of M.I.T., who served as her mentor.

The other nine major prize winners, who range in age from 16 to 18, include David Moore, 18, a senior at Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, Md., who won the second prize of \$40,000; and Keith Winstein, 17, a senior at Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora, Ill., who won the third prize of \$30,000.

The fourth, fifth and sixth prizes of \$20,000 each were won by Carol Anne Fassbinder, 18, a senior at Valley Community High School in Elgin, Iowa; Rio Gabriel Bennin, 17, a home-schooled senior from Berkeley, Calif., and Lisa Beth Schwartz, 17, a senior at Roslyn High School in Roslyn Heights, N.Y.

The 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th prizes of \$15,000 each were won by Scott Alexander Fruhan, 17, a senior at Roxbury Latin School in West Roxbury, Mass.; Kurt Elliott Mitman, 16, a senior at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Va.; Diana Barnard Townsend-Butterworth, 17, a senior at the Chapin School in Manhattan, and Alexander David Wissner-Gross, 17, a senior at Great Neck High School in Great Neck, N.Y.

The 30 other finalists each received a \$3,000 award.

More than 1,400 students from 49 states entered the competition by submitting reports on their individual research projects. These were judged on the basis of research ability, scientific originality and creative thinking. The finalists were judged by leading scientists in a variety of disciplines.

The 300 semifinalists were announced on Jan. 11. Forty finalists were chosen on Jan. 29, and last week they participated in final judging, which determined the 10 top winners.

Last year, Westinghouse severed its ties to the awards program, having decided to concentrate on its media businesses. Intel is the leading maker of computer processing chips.