
A f t e r m a t h

Conference Reports

A conference in honor of Paul Roberts' 60th birthday

by Anurag Singh

A conference was held at Snowbird last May in honor of Paul Roberts' 60th birthday. It was organized by Jean Chan, Mel Hochster, Sean Sather-Wagstaff, and Sandy Spiroff, and included talks by researchers in commutative algebra and algebraic geometry.



The conference featured thirteen lectures spread over two days. In an opening speech, our chair, Aaron Bertram, spoke about Paul's service to the department. During his thirty years at Utah, Paul has supervised seven students and mentored six postdocs. Aaron was followed by Mel Hochster from the University of Michigan, who spoke on the history and current status of the *Homological Conjectures* and *Intersection Theorems* in commutative algebra, and of Paul's huge contributions to these areas. Peter Russell, Paul's advisor at McGill University, started by observing that it isn't often you get invited to a 60th birthday conference for your student! The other speakers were Sankar Dutta, Hans-Bjørn Foxby, Bill Fulton, Kazuhiko Kurano, Christian Peskine, V. Srinivas, Lucien Szpiro, and also Paul's former students, Jean Chan and Sean Sather-Wagstaff, and his former postdocs, Florian Enescu and Anurag Singh. The participation of several other colleagues, friends, and students, made for an enjoyable and productive conference.

Anne and Paul hosted a reception on the first evening of the conference. It was a lively evening, with many long-time friends getting together after several years: people had traveled from Canada, Denmark, France, India, and Japan to join us at *PaulFest*. There was a banquet on the second evening, where Paul thanked the organizers and all who participated in the conference.

WAGS Fall 2006

by Tommaso de Fernex

Tracing back its origin to the Utah–UCLA Algebraic Geometry Seminar started in 1989, the Western Algebraic Geometry Seminar (WAGS) meets twice a year. Participating institutions are currently Colorado State University, Stanford University, the University of British Columbia, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Utah, and the University of Washington. The location of the conference alternates among these. In view of the special visitors we had in our department last semester, namely János Kollár from Princeton University (formerly a member of our department for many years) and James McKernan from the University of California at Santa Barbara (a close collaborator of our Christopher Hacon), we decided to host the WAGS in Salt Lake City for the Fall 2006.

With about 50 participants from the various institutions aforementioned, the meeting was a success—as always, I assume (for me it was the first WAGS, as I am a new faculty member here). The main purpose of the conference is to gather everybody for a nice and social weekend and learn from each other about the latest developments in the field. When selecting the speakers, precedence was given to the new arrivals in the West, and we had communications by Patrick Brosnan from the University of British Columbia, Paul Hacking from the University of Washington, Sam Payne (Clay Fellow) from Stanford University, and me. Talks were also delivered by Max Lieblich from Princeton University, Paolo Cascini from the University of California at Santa Barbara, and János Kollár,

our senior speaker. Kollár's talk was the last one on Saturday, and he was very pleased to notice that his contribution to Mathematics had left such an imprint: indeed – he explained – his name not only had appeared in all the previous talks of the day, but it was always spelled correctly too.

Now that this WAGS is over, we are all excited waiting for the next one, which will take place in Seattle in April.

Utah Hosts AMS Meeting

On the 7th and 8th of October last semester, during our fall break, the University of Utah hosted a sectional meeting of the American Mathematical Society. Unlike several of the recent meetings, this one was held in the Math department and other nearby buildings rather than elsewhere on the campus.

Spurred on by some encouragement from our chair, many of the members of our department organized special sessions. I list the sessions and the organizers from the department:

Commutative Algebra – Paul Roberts, Anurag Singh, and Oana Veliche

Complex Geometry and Kaehler groups – Domingo Toledo

Stochastic Partial Differential Equations – Davar Khosnevisan and Eulalia Nualart

Low Dimensional Topology and Geometry – Mladen Bestvina and Ken Bromberg

Mathematics Motivated by Physics – Aaron Bertram, Y.-P. Lee, and Eric Sharpe

Nonconvex Variational Problems – Marian Bocea and Andrei Cherkhev

Random Motion in Random Media – Firas Rassoul-Agha

From the reactions I observed these sessions, as well as other parts of the meetings, went very well. In addition to the talks and discussions, several parties were held for the participants. Meanwhile, our staff did their usual great job of helping with the administrative arrangements.

While the department was very heavily involved with the special sessions, this was not the case

with the main invited talks, which were planned with no input from our university. I brought this up at a focus group at the AMS meeting in New Orleans in January and found that our Associate Secretary believes that this is the way it should be, while the Associate Secretary for the eastern region always consults the host institution and asks them for suggestions as to who should be invited. There does not appear to be a consistent policy on this issue.

Personality!



Hailong Dao joined our department as a post-doc in August 2006. His research interests lie in commutative algebra, in particular with a group of questions called the “homological conjectures.”

Long enjoys tennis, table tennis and soccer. If it is raining he is likely to read a book. His favorite topics are history, politics, society, science fiction and humor. He also enjoys cooking (if he has the time and space), playing bridge and watching movies. Something that might surprise you about Long is that he spent his grad school years living in a co-op with 30 undergraduates. He'll tell you that his life has been much richer since living there.

We'd like to welcome Long to our math department and hope that he enjoys his time here!

Congratulations

by Aaron Bertram

We just learned that Ken Golden has received a 2007 University of Utah Distinguished Teaching

Award. The award recognized Ken's outstanding contributions to the mathematical education of undergraduates at the University of Utah through his teaching (more than 6,000 Calculus students served) his advising of REU students (the lucky ones got to go to Alaska) and his leadership as Director of Undergraduate Studies. This is only the fourth such award won by a member of our department since it was instituted in 1965. The last award went to Ron Stern in 1987, and the only other active member of our faculty to hold this award is Don Tucker (1980 awardee). Congratulations, Ken!

In the News

Michael van Opstall was ordained a deacon of the Russian Orthodox Church on November 19 and priest on December 19. These were important milestones for the Salt Lake City church because Rev. van Opstall is the church's first priest.

Aftermath is published roughly monthly during the academic year. Issues of the newsletter will be archived on the web at:

www.math.utah.edu/newsletter

Editorial staff:

Paul Roberts, roberts@math.utah.edu

Angie Gardiner, gardiner@math.utah.edu

Please contact either of them if you have an idea or article to submit (gardiner@math.utah.edu).