

Math, Science Honorees

Top Students Boast Impressive Credentials

By Symone C. Skrzycki

In a high school gymnasium, bleachers rapidly fill with teenagers. Scattered conversations fill the air. But as Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels begins to address the crowd, students at Terre Haute South Vigo High School (known simply as South) realize this is not a typical assembly.

For the second consecutive year, the governor made a surprise visit to present the Hoosier High School Math and Science Awards. Since the program's inception, three of the four recipients have attended South. The 2009 winners, announced in May, were junior Sachin Dilip Shinde (Indiana Mr. Math) and senior Raj Anand Bhuptani (Indiana Mr. Science). In 2008, Swara Kopparty was named Indiana Miss Science.

More than 300 entries from across the state were evaluated based on criteria ranging from college entrance exam scores, performance on advancement placement tests, participation in math or science competitions, and grades earned in math and science courses. McGraw-Hill Education awarded each honoree with a \$2,000 academic scholarship.

While both Shinde and Bhuptani boast an impressive array of academic achievements, they also possess an equally important, intangible quality: a passion for learning and challenging themselves.

Indiana Mr. Math

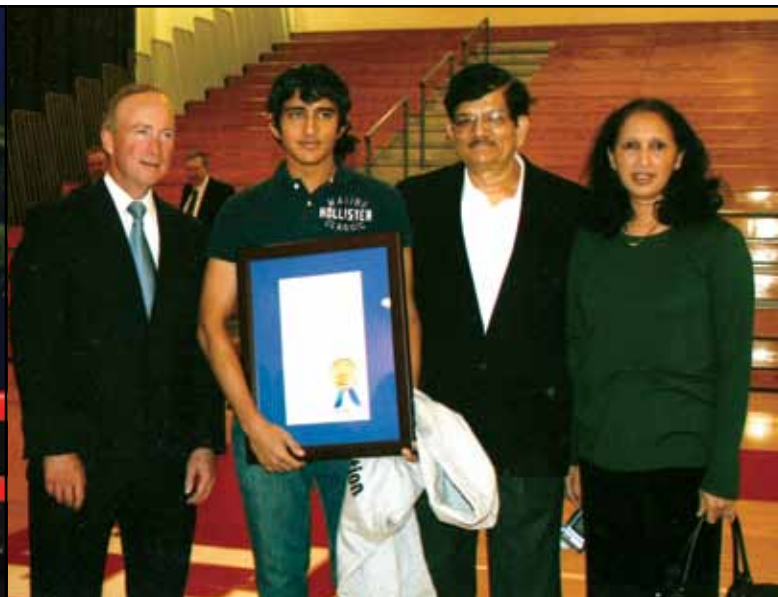
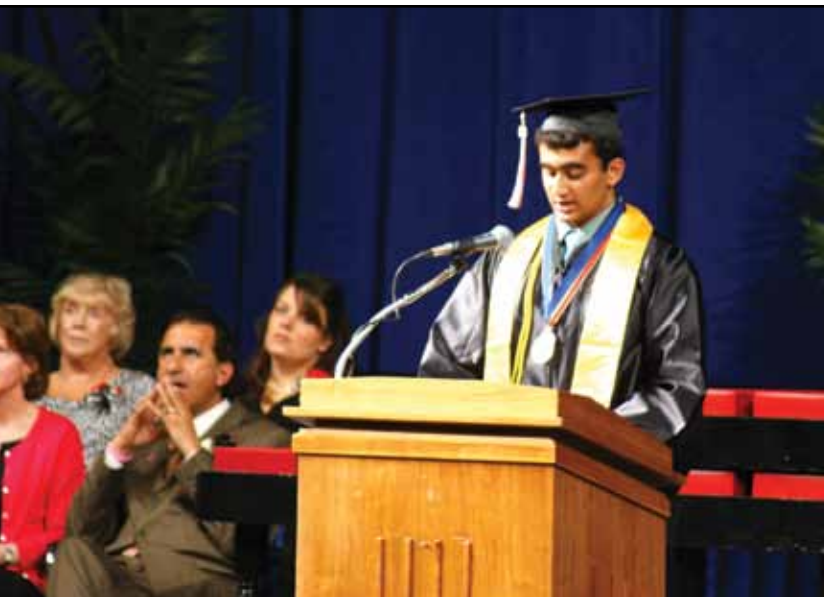
What's a typical school day in the life of Indiana's Mr. Math? Shinde, now a high school senior, divides his time between South and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, where he is enrolled in three math courses (two sophomore level and one senior level). Evenings often include tennis matches (he's a member of the school team), building computers (one of his hobbies), and practicing for math and science competitions.

One of his favorite activities has been volunteering as a tutor at Charles T. Hyte Community Center.

"Students get together to help tutor other students or adults in any subject they want to be tutored in," he explains. "Some of it is more technology oriented. I do biology and sciences."

Shinde's mathematics prowess is evidenced in and beyond the classroom. On his SAT exam, for instance, he scored a perfect 800 on the math portion. And, on advanced placement calculus

Co-valedictorian Raj Anand Bhuptani reflects on past experiences and looks ahead during his high school graduation speech. The passion of Sachin Dilip Shinde (pictured with Gov. Mitch Daniels and his parents) for mathematics contests began in middle school, when a teacher inspired him to begin participating in competitions.



(BC) and statistics tests, he received the highest score of five. He's never earned anything but an "A" in his high school math classes.

In addition, Shinde has flourished at extracurricular activities such as the American Mathematics Competition and the Junior Engineering and Technical Society (JETS). In a JETS competition that took place earlier this year among 11 Indiana and Illinois schools, his team ranked first in the multiple choice portion of a competition revolving around the design and operation of theme park rides and attractions. Fellow award winner Bhuptani served as team captain.

"Being Mr. Math to me is not just necessarily a title in itself," Shinde emphasizes. "It's sort of meant to inspire people to be better at mathematics. I'm not so much interested in my own award. I feel more responsibility to help inspire people.

"I always like to be challenged," he reflects. "The best feeling I ever have is when I'm wrong because I feel like I've learned something."

Looking ahead, he plans to double major (at a college to be determined) in pre-medicine and biomedical engineering.

Indiana Mr. Science

During his sophomore year of high school, Bhuptani's desire to help others and his knack for computers helped revitalize Hye Community Center.

Bhuptani began volunteering there as a tutor, assisting elementary and middle school students with math and science homework. Aware that many of them were underprivileged and didn't have access to computers at home, he proposed the idea of building an on-site computer lab.

"I wrote letters to local businesses and received donations of computers, parts and money," he recalls. "I would salvage the parts that were still working and kind of assembled, mix and match, new computers out of those. Now, there's a computer facility there not only for students in the tutoring program, but also the general public.

"In the first summer after I built the computer lab, we taught computer classes for elderly citizens. I had maybe 10 students and taught them basic (tasks) such as typing documents, making an Excel spreadsheet and searching Google."

His academic accomplishments range from recognition in the Presidential Scholars program, which honors one male and one female in each state (he was a semifinalist); designation as an Indiana Academic All-Star (40 students in the state recognized for all-around academic achievement); and strong performance in U.S.A. Olympiad competitions in biology, physics, math and chemistry.

Not surprisingly, Bhuptani also excelled in the testing arena. He blended high school curriculum with courses at Rose-Hulman, with perfect 800 scores on the SAT II physics, chemistry and biology M tests and five out of five on the advanced placement biology, chemistry, physics B and physics C (mechanics) exams. Plus, he attained all "A's" in science courses at South.

The Harvard University freshman has set his sights on a career on Wall Street or in banking.

"This Wall Street financial crisis has kind of diminished the popularity of Wall Street careers, but I think it's on the

rebound and there's a budding generation of future workers. It's an exciting time because in this new era, the methods used in finance and economics are going to be such that this recession doesn't occur again."

Considering his role as Indiana's Mr. Science, he says, "The award means a lot to me, but the fact that the award exists means even more. For students like me who love to learn, learning and excelling is kind of a reward in its own."

Making the grade

You might say South operates like a well-oiled machine. There's the strong curriculum, emphasis on advanced placement classes and the high caliber of teachers and staff. Principal Chris Mauk says it's a combination of these factors that helps students garner the Hoosier math and science awards.

"We're very proud of the math and science programs we have at South," he declares. "We offer a number of AP classes all those students were involved in. We want to challenge students to do the best they can and achieve their goals.



Terre Haute South Vigo High School proudly recognizes this year's award winners. Principal Chris Mauk says that when students see their classmates earning the awards, it inspires them to ask themselves, "Why can't it be me next year?"

"This is an outstanding honor. Having both winners was more than we could have hoped for. Three out of four is amazing, and it's a true testament to what we're doing here."

When asked why the awards are so important to the community, his response is immediate – and passionate.

"Athletics a lot of time get the attention because they (athletes) have the stage to perform on Friday or Saturday night," Mauk notes, "so for the governor to start an initiative that recognizes the best math and science students in the state, it's huge. It's putting an emphasis on education. I think it sends the best possible message to students."