



Math Festival inspires local students

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“Math is about problem-solving: looking at numbers and seeing that they really mean something,” says Lina Germann, organizer of the second annual New Mexico Julia Robinson Math Festival which took place at Santa Fe Community College February 23.

More than 140 middle-schoolers from six schools across the region took part in a morning of challenging and fun math activities, exploring 15 puzzles in a creative and non-competitive way.

[Julia Robinson Mathematics Festivals](#) take place all over the world in honor of the famous mathematician, and in Santa Fe nearly 50 volunteers helped to man the tables containing the puzzles.

“I wanted to bring the festival to New Mexico because it plants the seed of what math should be about, and how it’s involved in our everyday life,” says Germann, founder and CEO of [STEM Santa Fe](#). “This is the exciting type of math students would see if they majored in math at college.”

One of the puzzles was inspired by the modernist artist Mondrian. Students had to try and perfectly fill a square with different-sized rectangles, with as little size difference as possible between the rectangles used.

“It’s tricky, but it’s fun,” says Cris Moore from the Santa Fe Institute, who was helping with the Mondrian puzzle. “There’s no one right answer, but you can try lots of different solutions to see which one works the best.”

Another of the challenges was the game Pillage and Profit – a extended version of the classic Dots and Boxes game.

Kaila Dickey, who teaches seventh- and eighth-grade math and science at Anansi Charter School in Taos was impressed with the morning’s activities. “My students were genuinely challenged and engaged,” she says. “One of my students stayed with one problem for the whole two hours we were there. I told him he could move on, but he was very clear: ‘This is my goal!’ he said, and he stuck with it.”

Los Alamos National Laboratory and Los Alamos National Security, LLC were proud to be among the supporters of the event.

“Math belongs to everyone, and everyone can do it,” says Moore. “I think that’s what this festival is about.”

“There were no bells or whistles to these activities, but the students were engaged and they genuinely wanted to problem-solve,” says teacher Kaila Dickey.

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