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Teen Tops Supercomputing Challenge Again

▪ *St. Pius sophomore, La Cueva student design program that simulates space shuttle shockwaves*

BY RAAM WONG
Journal Northern Bureau

LOS ALAMOS — A Christmas present helped an Albuquerque teen take top honors for the second consecutive year at the New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge.

Erika DeBenedictis, 16, used the gift — a suped-up desktop computer — to develop a program that could accurately and efficiently simulate the supersonic shockwaves created by space shuttles and other objects in the upper atmosphere.

DeBenedictis and her partner Tony Huang, 17, of La Cueva High

The winners

For a list of all winners in the New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge, see the **Journal's** Schools section on Tuesday.

School, collaborated for much of the school year on the project.

"I programmed all through my spring break," said DeBenedictis, a sophomore at St. Pius X High School and returning champ.

Hundreds of budding scientists from across the state packed the Church of Christ in Los Alamos on Tuesday morning for the awards ceremony for the 18th annual competition, open to sixth through 12th grade students.

Students used high-performance supercomputers and worked with mentors from the state's national laboratories to complete the computing projects. Their work was

presented to volunteer judges from across the field of computer science at Los Alamos National Laboratory on Monday.

The competition is sponsored by Los Alamos and Sandia National laboratories and the state of New Mexico. Each winner received $1,000.

Rachel Robey and Jessie Bohn of Los Alamos Middle School won second place for developing a program that can test the energy efficiency of wall designs.

Albuquerque Academy students Michael Wang and Ari Shaw-Faber won third place for "Nanoscale Self-Assembly."

Daniel Pedro and Vanessa Keetso of Santa Fe Indian School won a creativity and innovation award for developing a process to identify the ethnicity of skeletal remains of Native Americans.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SANDRA VALDEZ

Erika DeBenedictis and Tony Huang of Albuquerque won this year's New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge at Los Alamos.