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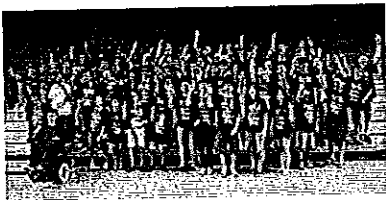
## Schools

# Valley Math Team Wins Third Straight National Title

The "Fire," coached by Lehigh U. Prof. Davis, features two numbers wizards from Liberty.

By [Daryl Nerl](#) | [Email the author](#) | 6:00am

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The Lehigh Valley Fire, a regional team of high school math wizards, won its third consecutive national title at the American Regions Mathematics League, which held its annual finals competition on Saturday.

The Fire is one of five regional teams of 15 students coached by Lehigh University mathematics Professor Don Davis. The Fire featured two Liberty High School students, Shonak Patel and recent Patch Whiz Kid Ben Kraft, who will both be graduating tonight.

Also, Matt Kilgore of West Allentown, a member of the Lehigh Valley Ice, the B-team in Davis's stable, won the Douglas Cameron Baker Memorial Award, which is presented to the student who best demonstrates "an enthusiasm for the competition, an enjoyment of the social interaction with other students, and a love for mathematics."

In all, 133 teams from across the country competed at four venues – the University of Georgia, the University of Iowa, the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and Penn State, which is where the Lehigh Valley teams went to participate.

The Fire trailed the team from Phillips Exeter Academy, a prestigious New Hampshire boarding school, by eight points going into the last round, Davis said. But the Lehigh Valley A-team pulled out a win on the strength of its performance in the relays, a part of the competition in which the teams are divided into five groups of three

students who must solve a series of three math problems in a prescribed amount of time.

The catch to the relays is that the second and third answers are dependent upon the answer the teammate got in the preceding question. If the first answer is wrong, all three answers will be wrong. Missing an answer might be likened to dropping the baton at a running relay.

Davis coaches five 15-student teams of top mathematics students from southeastern Pennsylvania, including all of the Lehigh Valley, Philadelphia and its suburbs. The teams have been given the names Fire, Ice, Lightning, Thunder and Storm.

The students can be as young as 6<sup>th</sup> graders and go up through high school senior. Five of the members of the three-time championship team, including the two Liberty stars, are graduating this year.

Two of them will be attending Harvard University in the fall. Kraft is going to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Patel is going to Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

The teams celebrated the victory on Sunday at a picnic in Coopersburg, which Davis said was "really very emotional."

Some of these students have worked with Davis for six years, attending weekly practices every Sunday to prepare. "We have a very close relationship," he said.

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**James A Cowan**

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10:57am on Monday, June 6, 2011

Congratulations to the Lehigh Valley Fire and to Professor Davis. This is an accomplishment that really means something! Kids like this are the future of the US - what we need to keep ahead of China, India and the rest. Celebrities and athletes and politicians that fill the front pages - who cares? But the skills to do math and science, to create new things and then the jobs that go with them - that's what counts. California's great public education system played a big role in getting Silicon Valley started. So it's very sad to note that Bethlehem is laying off 60+ teachers at the same time that two kids from Liberty were on a team that beat the rich kids from the prep school. Just goes to show that we need more public education, not less.

Again, congrats to the Fire, and to Prof Davis.

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