

Gambell students win national academic honors

by Louise Donhauser

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When 10 students from Gambell boarded an airplane which would take them out of the state, they probably didn't realize they would return to Alaska as national champions and be able to see themselves on a television screen.

They left Anchorage May 12 and their first stop was the University of Washington where they studied genetics for up to 16 hours a day to prepare for the National Problem Solving Bowl.

The junior and senior high school students also visited a genetics laboratory in Seattle to prepare for the competition which included more than 30 other national teams.

Playing on the senior team were: Merle Apassingok, Lorena Koonooka, Joel James and Ron

Apangalook. The alternate senior was Dorene Kulukhon. Meridith Guthridge, Carolyn Apatiki, Alvin Aningayou and Rena Boolowon played in the intermediate division which included students in junior high school.

Romona Ungwiluk played as an alternate in the intermediate division.

Winning the National Problem Solving Bowl, in itself was enough, but the students also broke a national record by winning in the senior and intermediate divisions.

National Director Anne Crabble said, "The two first teams were clear winners. They obviously deserved first place. The two Gambell teams received standing ovations."

The students's advisor said in a limited amount of time the students were able to look at

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Gambell students are champs

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a genetic engineering problem in a 1991 scenario and they had to develop 20 subproblems which would tell what could go wrong with the vaccine.

One of the 20 subproblems had to be solved. The students had to use mathematical examples to solve the problem. The students completed the problems in two hours.

Guthridge summed up how the students did in the competition.

"No one has ever won two divisions except Gambell. What they did is phenomenal in the academic field."

It wasn't easy for the students to take first place in the state and in the nation because unlike other students they entered the competition with handicaps but they managed to overcome.

Guthridge didn't hide his pride in the students as he told about the events leading up to the victory.

"Yupik is spoken entirely outside of the school. There was a language problem we had to overcome. . . the boys. . . everytime they went hunting they missed homework.

They had to get permission to study. There was the sacrifice of the entire village. There was the lack of world experience. They were under tremendous handicaps. They worked smart. We tried to go in there and not make mistakes."

Four students were back in Anchorage before they returned to Gambell and each told how they felt about winning.

Alvin Aningayou felt "fantastic" about winning while Joel James added he was surprised and did not expect to win. James said, "I didn't like the research but it all paid off." Carolyn Apatiki was "very suprised" that her team did so well.

It was her first trip out of Alaska. Romona Ungwiluk who was an alternate in the intermediate division was happy her team had won and she felt the victory could be repeated next year.

The Alaska Problem Solving Bowl is funded by the Alaska State Legislature and in order to qualify each team that enters the national competition must first win in their home-state.