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JAGDEEP SINGH BHATIA AWARDED SECOND PLACE IN REGENERON SCIENCE TALENT SEARCH

Submitted by Denis Kelly

Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS) Class of 2020 graduate Jagdeep Bhatia has won the second place prize in the 79th Regeneron Science Talent Search, and in so doing, he has been awarded \$175,000 in prize money.

Bhatia plans to continue his education at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Mass., and he plans to apply the prize money toward his continuing education.

He has said he plans to study Computer Science in college, and perhaps later pursue a Ph.D or a more entrepreneurial tract.

"We are tremendously proud of all of Jagdeep's accomplishments, including this latest well-deserved recognition," said WHRHS Superintendent Dr. Elizabeth Jewett. "He has left an indelible mark on the WHRHS school community. I eagerly anticipate learning about his continued achievement throughout his future educational and professional journey."

The Talent Search winners were announced as part of a virtual awards ceremony in July, where more than \$1.8 million was awarded to 40 finalists across the country. They were "evaluated based on the scientific rigor of their projects, their exceptional problem-solving abilities and their potential to become scientific leaders," according to the announcement from the talent search organizers. Bhatia says that "the three days of virtual judging were nerve-racking but fun. The best part was getting to know the other finalists. It feels amazing to receive recognition for my work, and I'd like to thank all the people who inspired me and guided me in my research."

The Regeneron Science Talent Search is a science and mathematics competition for high school seniors. Regeneron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. is an American biotechnology company headquartered in Tarrytown, N.Y.

According to the Regeneron press release, Bhatia, 18, of Green Brook Township, earned this honor for solving an open problem and "developing two fast and simple machine learning algorithms for computer programs that are attempting to learn new concepts under the tutelage of an instructor, either a computer or human. His Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithms do not only ask random questions but, like a savvy detective, ask just the right ones. His AI algorithms could help train robots and other automated devices faster and easier." Bhatia's research has the potential to solve some of the most pressing problems in machine learning.

Earlier this year, Bhatia provided a more detailed description of his project. Its title is: "Simple and Fast Algorithms for Interactive Machine Learning with Random Counter-Examples."

Bhatia explained that the current processes of training machines – what is generally thought of as "Artificial Intelligence" – tend to be slow, requiring a lot of data.

"This is why robots still seem so primitive in their thinking and



(above) WHRHS Class of 2020 graduate Jagdeep Bhatia of Green Brook, won second place prize in the nation's oldest and most prestigious science fair competition.

Photo by WHRHS

understanding, and my project tries to solve that," he said, "tries to make the whole process more data efficient. My research asserts that there is a more data efficient way to train machines, which I prove using mathematics." A future application of these algorithms may be robotics, "where a surgical robot adapts to an individual's anatomy, or where a factory robot learns a human's habits and patterns so that the two can work effectively together."

While at WHRHS, Bhatia was President of the Computer Science Club, which has included, among other things, helping to organize and stage the WHRHS "HillsHacks" Hackathons the last two years. He and the Class of 2020 Salutatorian Mayur Sharma, gave leadership to that program. The day-long program, held this year on Sunday, February 23, just weeks before the COVID

(continued on page 2)



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ALYSSA KRUTIS AND KELLY SAUM AWARDED

Submitted by Denis Kelly

Watchung Hills Regional High School (WHRHS) Class of 2020 graduating seniors Alyssa Krutis and Kelly Saum have been named the recipients of Watchung Hills Regional Education Association (WHREA) Scholarship for Future Educators.

“Congratulations to Alyssa Krutis and Kelly Saum for being selected as this year’s recipients of the WHREA Scholarship for Future Educators,” said WHRHS Social Studies Teacher Greg O’Reilly, the WHREA association president. “Since 2007, the WHREA has granted more than \$24,000 to future educators from our school. The scholarship is funded by members through an annual WHREA event in addition to individual contributions.”

Alyssa Krutis plans to attend Kutztown University, Kutztown, Pa., west of Allentown, Pa., to major in Elementary and Special Education.

Krutis’ said her experiences at WHRHS have been influential and have nurtured her dream to someday work as a teacher in an elementary school.

Krutis started babysitting when she was just 12-years-old, and it was then that she realized

that she loved being around kids. Looking back to her elementary school years, Krutis remembers the significance and influence a reading teacher had on her development.

The other recipient of the WHREA Scholarship for Future Educators, Kelly Saum, plans to attend Shippensburg University in Shippensburg, Pa, just west of Harrisburg, to study Early Education, Special Education.

Like Krutis, Saum said she has also been greatly influenced by her high school experience at Watchung Hills. Saum’s strong academic achievement, along with her meaningful connection to several school and community groups, have been key in guiding her to decide to study education in college. She too has completed courses in the Child Development program and Saum has built a strong foundation for her future studies.

Growing and maturing as a student at WHRHS, Saum believes that the “classroom has provided me with great learning opportunities and the chance to increase my leadership skills.” This has also happened outside of the classroom because Saum is an active member of student government as well as several service organizations.

“As a member of The Red Cross Club and the BELIEV club at school, I’ve had the chance to give back to people in need,” Saum said.

Outside of school, Saum has a connection with a local Lion’s Club. Saum was elected president of the Lion’s Club youth group.

Additionally, her employment record is deep and significant. This is her third year working as a teaching assistant with a local childcare learning center. The part-time job has helped Saum earn a little money but, as importantly, gain first-hand experience working with younger kids. Saum said, “Witnessing how I can influence a student’s success has been enjoyable and enlightening for me. In a way, it has helped me realize what is in my future.”

There is one other very important connection Saum has with WHRHS and that is her position with the wrestling team. Throughout high school, Saum has been the statistician and team manager for the program. And, as many locals will note, the Warrior Wrestling Program has always been regarded as one of the more successful programs in New Jersey, winning County, District and even State Sectional championships. Saum has been a part of that achievement.



(above, l-r) ‘Future Educators’ Scholarship winners Alyssa Krutis and Kelly Saum.

Photos by WHRHS

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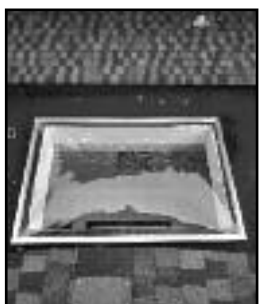
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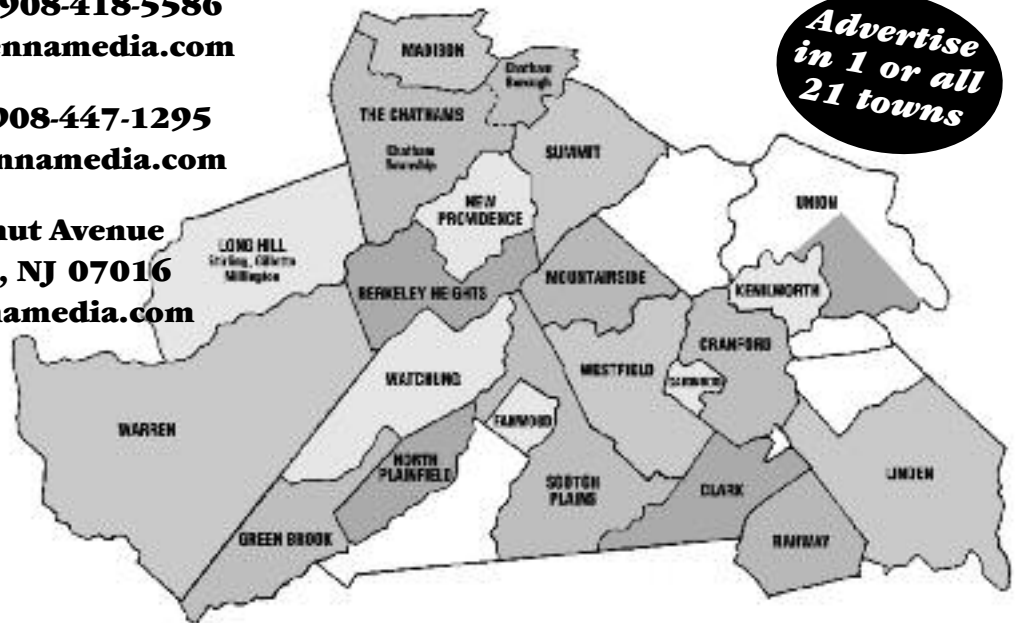
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