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Homeschooled boy wins national science contest

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- A 16-year-old, homeschooled California boy won a premier high school science competition Monday for his innovative approach to an old math problem that could help in the design of airplane wings.

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Michael Viscardi, a senior from San Diego, won a \$100,000 college scholarship, the top individual prize in the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology.

Viscardi tackled a 19th century math problem and his new method of solving it has potential applications in the fields of engineering and physics.

"He is a super-duper mathematics student," said lead judge Constance Atwell, a consultant and former research director at the National Institutes of Health. "It was almost impossible for our judges to figure out the limits of his understanding during our questioning. And he's only 16 years old," she said.

Anne Lee, 17, a senior at Phoenix Country Day School in Paradise Valley, Arizona and Albert Shieh, 16, a junior at Chaparral High School in Scottsdale, Arizona, shared the \$100,000 top prize in the team category. They improved computer technology that could help locate the genetic roots of some inherited diseases like Alzheimer's, autism and bipolar disorder.

“ It was almost impossible for our judges to figure out the limits of his understanding during our questioning. And he's only 16 years old. ”

-- Constance Atwell, Siemens Westinghouse Competition lead judge

The Siemens Foundation, founded in 1998, aims to increase access to higher education among gifted students studying math, science and technology. The foundation distributes nearly \$2 million annually in scholarships and awards.

Nineteen students competed in the national finals -- six individuals and six teams. All won scholarships ranging from \$50,000 to \$10,000. Team members share awards.

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