

INTERNATIONAL
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American and Frenchman accept the 2008 Abel mathematics prize in Norway

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OSLO, Norway: An American and a French citizen accepted the 6 million kroner (US\$1.2 million, euro756,000) Abel Prize for mathematics on Tuesday at a ceremony praising their achievements.

Norway's King Harald V gave the awards to John Griggs Thompson 75, who teaches at the University of Florida, and Belgian-born Jacques Tits, 77, a professor emeritus at College de France in Paris who became a French citizen in 1974.

Abel Committee Chairman Kristian Seip said they shared the prize "for their outstanding achievements in algebra and especially for their shaping of modern group theory."

The theory also called the science of symmetries can solve such everyday challenges such as a Rubik's Cube, or be used in physics, computer science and geometry.

"It is emotion and gratefulness I feel," said Tits as he accepted the award. He said the announcement of the award in March had come "as a complete surprise."

The two mathematicians each made a contribution while working separately.

In his own brief comments, Thompson thanked the committee because it had "mentioned explicitly a large number of people who were involved in the work."

The prize winners were to give lectures about their work in Oslo on Wednesday.

The Abel Prize was created by the Norwegian government and named after 19th-century Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel. It was first awarded in 2003.

The awards citation said Thompson and Tits each invented important new concepts in group theory, during which the mathematicians studied the relation between reflections and rotations of a geometric object with 20 faces.

For example, the theory could be used to solve the famous Rubik's Cube, a mechanical puzzle with six sides, each divided into smaller cubes of differing colors. Group theory would allow a mathematician to

calculate the number and order of rotations needed to get each of the six sides to be a specific solid color.

Thomas, a native of Ottawa, Kansas, graduated from Yale University in 1955, and received his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1959. He taught at Harvard University and then at the University of Chicago, before moving to Britain, where he spent 23 years teaching at the University of Cambridge. He now lives in Florida.

Tits was born on near Brussels, Belgium. He was admitted to the Free University of Brussels at age 14, and received his doctorate at the age of 20. He also taught there, and at the University of Bonn in 1964, before he accepted the chair of group theory in the College de France 1973, a post he held until he retired in 2000.

Last year's prize went to Indian-born New York University professor Srinivasa S.R. Varadhan.

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On the Net:

<http://www.abelprisen.no>

Notes: