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## Fullerton youth finds winner's circle in state geography bee

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The questions at Friday's state qualifier for the National Geographic Bee made queries like "What is the capital of North Dakota?" seem ridiculously easy.

Case in point – the final question of the championship round: "The largest city in Siberia, with approximately 1.4 million people, is located on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Name this city."

Give up? The answer is Novosibirsk.

Five local students competed Friday in the state geography bee at Cosumnes River College. They studied complicated geography trivia, took quizzes and competed against 95 other fourth-through eighth-graders for a shot at a spot in the National Geographic Bee, to be held in Washington, D.C.

A seventh-grader from Fullerton nabbed first prize after a heated championship round.

Nezar Jamal, 11, of Carmichael, placed 14th during a tiebreaker round. The sixth-grader admitted the competition was a little nerve-racking.

"In the preliminary rounds you get nervous ... because there's a lot of people watching you," he said.

Nezar spent his spring break studying atlases and poring over study guides. "It's interesting, and you learn a lot of stuff about world affairs," he said.

The bee is organized by the National Geographic Society, which has been running the competition for 20 years in an effort to boost geographical knowledge among young people in the United States.

Jasper Gebhardt, 9, of Ione, was one of the youngest competitors Friday, and missed getting into the tiebreaker round by one question.

His father, Mark Gebhardt, said Jasper – who skipped three grade levels and is in sixth grade – would set his alarm for 7 a.m. and read geography books until breakfast.

When asked the following geography question – "Murmansk, the city with the largest population north of the Arctic Circle, is located on the Kola Peninsula in what country?" – Mark Gebhardt immediately answered "Russia."

"It's the only port that doesn't freeze up in the winter," he said. "I learned that from my son."

Other local students competing Friday were Daniel Mackay of Carmichael, Jackson Vose of Roseville and Joshua Lourence of Elk Grove. Lourence, who made it to the final round, came in sixth.

Snagging first prize, however, was Samuel Bressler, 12, of Fullerton, who will compete in the national bee in May. First prize is a \$25,000 college scholarship and a trip to the Galapagos Islands with "Jeopardy" host and bee moderator Alex Trebek.

Debra Sharkey, a geography professor at Cosumnes River College and moderator of the final round of Friday's competition, said the questions were tough and that participants should be proud of their efforts.

"If I were being quizzed on some of these questions, I wouldn't get it right," Sharkey said. "There's not an adult in this audience that can answer all these questions."

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