STYLE

Solving equations no problem for David Zhu

Local 8th-grader is headed to D.C.

By KHALIDA SARWARI

Solving math problems comes easily to 14-year-old David Zhu. And these days, the middle school student from Saratoga spends most of his time doing just that as he prepares for a national math competition in Washington, D.C., next month.

David was the only student in the state to receive a perfect score at the Northern California State MathCounts competition, qualifying him to advance to the national contest, where he will represent his state along with three of his peers.
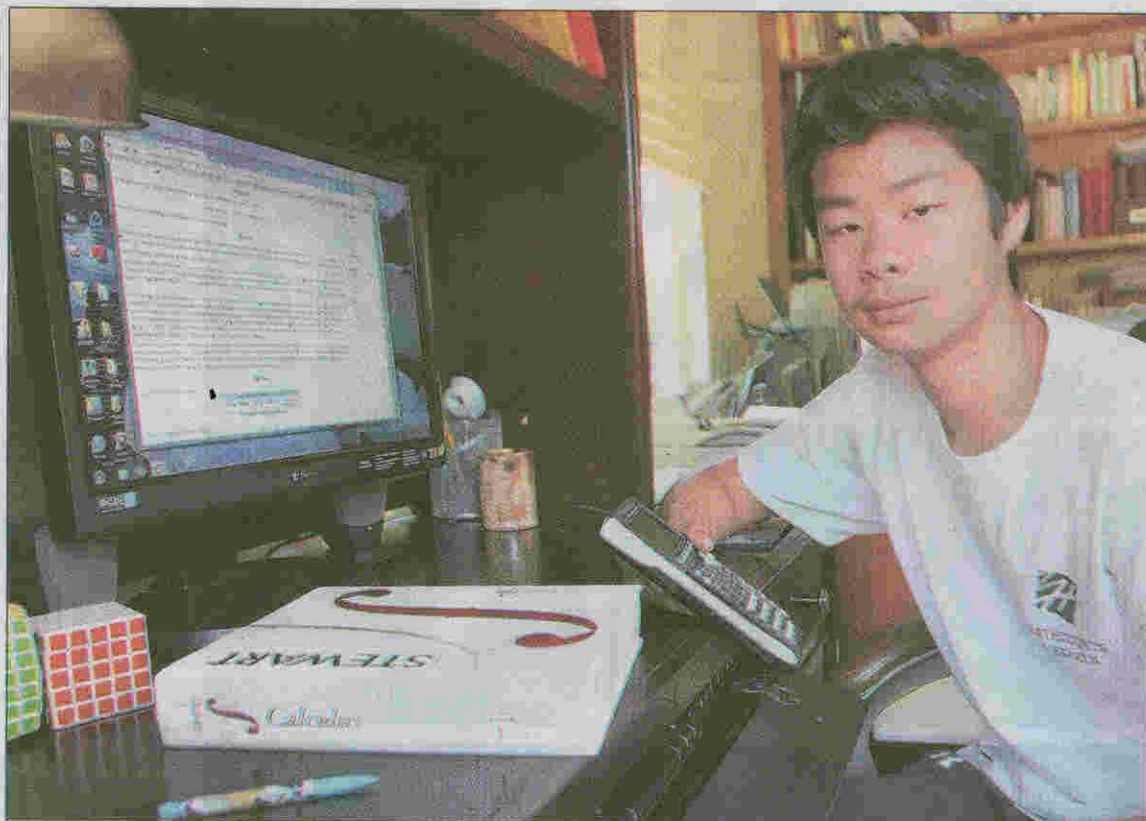
"Since elementary school, I've always had a special love for math, solving math puzzles," the Harker School eighth-grader said.

David's love of math extends outside his calculus classroom to his hobbies. When he's not playing basketball or tennis, he enjoys solving riddles, puzzles and the Rubik's Cube. And in his spare time, he likes creating computer programs.

Until the beginning of May, David will also devote a lot of his time to preparing for the MathCounts competition, which the website describes as a national middle school coaching and competitive mathematics program that emphasizes problem-solving skills through a series of fun and engaging "bee" style contests.

To get to this point, he and his team had to win the county chapter division, which was held at San Jose State University in February, and then the state competition held the following month at Stanford University.

The state competition was made

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE SAKKESTAD

Saratoga resident David Zhu, 14, won the grand prize at the Northern California State MathCounts competition at Stanford University on March 23 and will be going to Washington, D.C., May 7-10 to compete in the national competition as part of a team representing the state.

up of two rounds, one 40 minutes long with 30 word problems, and the second 24 minutes long and involving eight problems. Judges then took the top four individual scores from the northern and southern competitions and out of those four they created a team that will represent the state in the national event.

This year marks David's second time in the state competition. His achievements have won him an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C., May 7-10, where he and his fellow contestants will have a chance to tour the city and compete for the $8,000 grand prize and an opportunity to meet the president.

The difference with this final round, David said, is that the problems will be more difficult.

"There's not much you can do [to prepare] but solve the previous year's problems," he said. "Mostly you just have to prepare yourself for a really tough competition."

David said he's more excited than nervous about this next stage.

"My goal was to qualify for the national competition, and now that I've reached my goal

I'm just going to try my best to see how high I can place," he said.

In addition to the MathCounts competition, David also won the grand prize at the Bay Area Junior Math Olympiad in the seventh grade and qualified for the USA Junior Math Olympiad, the third round of a national math competition for high school students.

Beyond the competitions, he is aiming for acceptance at either the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University or Harvard University.