Mathematics prize goes to University of Chicago's Hannah Alpert

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The Association for Women in Mathematics has named Hannah Alpert, a third-year mathematics major at the University of Chicago, a co-winner of the 2010 Alice T. Schafer Prize for excellence in mathematics by an undergraduate woman. Alpert will receive the award in January at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in San Francisco.

The Schafer Prize is the latest of Alpert's mounting collection of accolades. Earlier this year, she received a Barry M. Goldwater scholarship for her achievements and potential in mathematics. And her paper, "Obstacle Numbers of Graphs," co-authored with Christina Koch of St. Olaf College, received a 2009 Undergraduate Poster Session Prize from the Mathematical Association of America.

"Alpert's mentors paint a consistent picture of a remarkably mature, young mathematician, one who is a creative problem-solver with a 'formidable talent,'" noted her Schafer Prize citation. "Over and over, she has solved challenging open problems in elegant and fully original ways."

Alpert co-authored a paper on topological graph theory even before entering UChicago. During her first two summers as an undergraduate, she attended the Willamette Valley Research Experience for Undergraduates and the Duluth REU.

This quarter she is participating in the Budapest Semesters in

Mathematics program in Hungary. The Budapest program enables North American undergraduate students to take advantage of Hungary's long tradition of excellence in mathematics education. Instructors are affiliated with Eotvos University and the Mathematical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Alpert will be the third UChicago recipient of the Schafer Prize since it was established in 1990. Previous UChicago recipients were Linda Green, BS/MS'90, in 1990, and Kate Gruher, BS'03, in 2003.

"The award represents the efforts of many advisers who have advocated for me and insisted that all the best opportunities be open to me," Alpert said. These advisers include sarah-marie belcastro (lowercase is the proper spelling of her name), research associate at Smith College; Joe Gallian, professor of mathematics and statistics at the University of Minnesota, Duluth; Josh Laison, assistant professor of mathematics, Willamette University; and Paul Sally, professor in mathematics, UChicago.

"I am glad their efforts are being recognized in this prize, and I am confident that they will continue to render mathematics careers more and more accessible to young women," Alpert said.

Schafer, MS'40, PhD'42, came to UChicago to study mathematics in 1939. She was a founding member and the second president of the Association for Women in Mathematics, which later named the Schafer award in her honor.

Schafer taught at a variety of colleges and universities, retiring from the mathematics faculty at Wellesley College in 1980. She continued to teach at Simmons College and Marymount University until she was 81.

Known as a champion of women in mathematics, Schafer received the

Mathematical Association of America's 1998 award for distinguished service to mathematics. In 1985, she was elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She died Sept. 27, 2009, at the age of 94.

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