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Luis Davidson, a mathematician who, after 100 years, continues to illuminate us

By: Nestor del Prado

In this article: Education , Entertainment , Intelligence , game , Mathematics , Thought

8 September 2021 | 39



Davidson was founder and emeritus member of the Cuban Society of Mathematics and Computing.

Photo: Courtesy of the family

On September 10, 2021, the 100th anniversary of the birth of an exceptional Cuban, Luis J. Davidson San Juan, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences and Physical-Mathematical Sciences, will be celebrated.

I am a lucky man. As happened to me with another hundred-year-old mathematician Raymundo Reguera Vilar, I had the happiness of being a student and later a collaborator of Dr. Davidson. Therefore, what I share with you will have my testimonials, two of them unpublished.

Davidson was founder and emeritus member of the Cuban Society of Mathematics and Computing, as well as an honorary member of the Association of Pedagogues of Cuba, Professor Davidson

dedicated more than 50 years to teaching, and a good part of this to preparing teachers who in turn train teachers of that subject.

In 1963, when he was working as the national inspector for the subject of Mathematics, Davidson proposed holding a national competition for that subject for pre-university students.

The experience was successful and was extended to other levels of education. **Then Cuba began to participate in the International Olympics of this subject, in which it has obtained important awards.**

Since then, Davidson has been an entertainer and organizer of these national events, as well as a jury and president of the International Committee for the Olympics in this area. He received the Paul Erdos Award, awarded by the World Federation of National Mathematics Competitions, for his work in favor of education and the search for young talents in this science.

Likewise, and during the celebration of the XIV Ibero-American Olympiad, he received the recognition of Founding Teacher of the Mathematics Competitions and Olympiads.

In his book Equations and Mathematics; On the history of mathematics, he travels through Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean, China, India, and also through the Mayan and Inca cultures.

It takes the reader into the history of algebraic equations and the development of the different methods and procedures that were found over time to solve problems that lead to them . It also highlights the development and role played by mathematical symbols in the acquisition of new knowledge.

Although he retired in 1987, Davidson did not stop working in favor of the study of Mathematics. He continued to write texts and provide advice to those who asked for it, until his death on November 9, 2011.

first testimony



Although he retired in 1987, Davidson did not stop working in favor of the study of Mathematics.

Photo: Courtesy of the family

I met Davidson in a difficult circumstance in my life as a teenager, when I finished Basic High School at the Ramón Campa Delgado School in my native Palma Soriano.

It turns out that at the end of 9th grade, in the so-called "level tests", mandatory to continue Pre-University studies; in Mathematics I got the highest grade, but in Spanish and Literature, I was about to fail. I requested a review of the qualification, and my father accompanied me to Santiago de Cuba, to try to get a MINED official from the Oriente Sur province to attend me and give me some conclusion.

That day a national inspector who was called Dr. Davidson was visiting the MINED provincial office. The deputy provincial director suggested to my father that we wait to see if Dr. Davidson himself could see us. That's how it was, when he called us, he had my two proofs in his hands. I remember that he asked me how it was possible that he had gotten the best in Mathematics and had done so badly in Spanish and Literature. He told me about his ideas for organizing Mathematics contests, both for knowledge and for monitors. I was a Mathematics monitor in my High School.

When he reviewed the disaster evidence with me, he gave me a class on José Martí. Since in the level test the main question was based on a fragment of the article Tres Héroes, in which Martí wrote: there are men who live content even though they live without decorum, there are others who suffer as if in agony when there are other men without decorum around them. around; in those men...; Elsewhere you could read: the sun burns with the same light it heats with, the sun has spots, the ungrateful speak of spots, the grateful speak of light.

There were two questions, the first was to answer what type of accessory was with what, in "with the same light with which it heats". The second was to interpret and give an example of what was expressed in the first part of the fragment.

I will not detail my errors in both questions, but I have not forgotten what Dr. Davidson proposed to me, it was a kind of pact. He told me "I want that when you go to pre-university, you will be the protagonist in the competitions for monitors and knowledge in Mathematics; and that you promise me that you will put more interest in the other subject and especially in studying the life and work of Martí in depth". I engaged with him, and he then indicated that there was no need to repeat the poor test.

In the second and third years of high school, I won provincial competitions for monitors and knowledge in Mathematics, competing at the national level. In 1965 he got first place, and in 1966 second place. **On both occasions I was able to share in Havana with Dr. Davidson, who told me that it was obvious that I had complied with his first proposal** from him; but that he did not know if he had also completed the second. I informed him that in addition to being a Mathematics instructor, I was a Spanish and Literature instructor with the illustrious teacher Zaida Martínez, who taught me to study and learn from the work of José Martí.

The second



He continued writing texts and providing advice to those who asked for it, until his death on November 9, 2011. Photo: Courtesy of the family

In 1977, when I was a teacher at the Lenin Vocational School, and a member of the National Team of Trainers for the National Contests and International Mathematics Olympiads, the National Contest of that year was held at La Lenin. **Students from all provinces were housed there and exams were held.**

Since I was also Head of the School's Calculation Center, Davidson gave me the task of making some posters, printed on the computer, with the names, surnames, and provinces of all the contestants, to put on the bunk that each one would occupy. . The night before the contestants' arrival, when trying to print said posters that I had already programmed in Basic for the CID-201-B, the RICOH printer got stuck; and in order not to breach the task assigned by Davidson, I spent a good part of the morning making those posters by hand.

When he arrived in the morning, he told me to accompany him to the shelters to check if everything was organized. Upon verifying that the posters were made by hand, he told me, I know that handwriting, and he asked me why he had not done it with the computer printer. What occurred to me to tell him was that he was more human that way. His response: "That's fine, Mathematics cannot be divorced from human feelings."

The third



Dr. Davidson and his wife Robertina Maquieira, also a prominent professor. Photo: Courtesy of the family

At the beginning of this century, in a Pedagogy Congress, organized by the MINED, Dr. Davidson was a guest of honor in a Panel of experts on the teaching of Mathematics. **His words had the usual brilliance of wisdom and eloquence to talk about the history of Mathematics, teaching methods and the recruitment and development of young talents.**

Suffering from an eye ailment, I remember that he was accompanied by a large magnifying glass, to be able to read. At the end of the meeting, a long line formed for those who wanted to shake his hand and congratulate him on his life's work. I got in line, almost at the end, when it was my turn to greet him, he looked at me and said, I see you blurry, but I have the impression that I know who you are; you can say a few words to me without revealing your name. I told him: "When I was a teenager, there in Santiago de Cuba, you motivated me to study the life and work of José Martí, and you won me over to the cause of Mathematics lovers. He told me, I already knew, you are my friend Néstor, give me a hug.

The Cuban Society of Mathematics and Computing (SCMC) instituted the NATIONAL COMPETITION for Mathematics teachers "Luis J. Davidson". Calling for the participation of Mathematics teachers who work in the national Education subsystem, in general, polytechnic and labor education, trained linked to higher education, student assistants who teach mathematical disciplines, as well as self-employed workers who work as reviewers of Mathematics.

There have been 8 editions of said Contest, which consists of solving a mathematical problem and teaching a class on a topic chosen by the contestant.

The SCMC proposes to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Dr. Davidson on Wednesday the 15th at 9:30 am at the University of Havana. Attendance will be by invitation.

In this activity, the prizes corresponding to the International Mathematics Olympiad for Universities 2019 and 2020 will be awarded; of the Luis J. Davidson Contest for Mathematics Teachers for the 2019-2020 academic year and recognition will also be given to the Mathematical Olympics coaches.

I end with a call to all the educational authorities of Cuba, to make every possible effort to continue what was sown by Dr. Luis Davidson.

Teachers and teachers to teach Mathematics based on the ability to reason and not rote learning.

To students who already love Mathematics, to set goals and accept increasingly higher challenges to exercise their talent; and those who fear it or even declare themselves allergic to it, that they know that this allergy has a cure, that they will be able to find and count on teachers and professors who have the vaccine against said allergy.

39 comments have been posted

Biadice Quiñones Davidson said:

Excellent article, proud of my beloved grandfather and I wish I could have enjoyed it longer. I hope that his teachings reach many more generations.

Nestor del Prado Arza said:

I am glad to know your opinion about this article that I wrote with great affection towards your grandfather, my teacher friend. Of course you should be proud of him.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 20:49 [/REPLY](#)

Louis Daniel said:

Biadice excellent history and legacy that of your grandfather Luis Davidson. I would have liked to be part of the group of students that he prepared in the study of mathematics.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021 AT 8:59 A.M. [/REPLY](#)

yanet said:

What an emotional article, I loved learning about that great teacher, congratulations on your birthday.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 5:01 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

ivan said:

Good morning, thank you for your article, Professor Néstor, where you can find the book Equations and Mathematics by Professor Davidson. All the best

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 5:04 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

little angel said:

When I entered high school, Professor Davidson and his wife Robertina already enjoyed well-earned prestige among professors at that level of education. He added his talent to the great work of the Revolution. What good news that you will be remembered.

Thank you Néstor.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 5:48 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

David Perez Davidson said:

I am enormously grateful that you have written such a sincere and at the same time so interesting article about Dr. Luis José Davidson San Juan, from the bottom of my heart I tell you that I am very, very proud of each and every one of the achievements made by him, he was a wonderful person professionally as well as personally, and I know

what I am talking about because I had the good fortune to be by his side for many years, both his and my grandmother Robertina Maquieira Mayans, my old people, I hope that his teachings reach many people all over the world.

Nestor del Prado Arza said:

David, thank you for your nice comment. Because of your surnames I assumed that you were the grandson of my teacher friend Davidson, now I know that you are the son of Teresita, whom I appreciate very much. He gets a big hug from me.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 20:53 [/REPLY](#)

David Urrea said:

I met the professor and his family.

I would like to highlight his simplicity and ethics.

I remember an anecdote in which he got up very early one morning because he had to go to some activity.

He got dressed and left without making a sound or even turning on the light. So as not to wake up his wife.

When he got to where he was going, some looked at him insistently without daring to say anything, until someone told him, teacher has one shoe of one color and the other of another color.

Nestor del Prado Arza said:

Hi David, thanks for your comment. I have been told that this anecdote is true, but not with the shoes, but with the stockings of two different colors. Even that in a later meeting, the Galician Fernández, then Minister of Education, jokingly asked him: Dr. Davidson, have you already checked his socks?

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 AT 4:34 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Javier Pérez Capdevila said:

This is top-notch work. Congratulations to Nestor Del Prado Arza.

It has caught my attention how Davidson was able to give an explained class on our apostle. And I say this because Néstor knows my criteria about the need that, even as mathematicians, we must know a lot about history and literature.

Brother, you have written a great article, I congratulate you again.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 7:12 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Bread said:

Long live you, teacher, I had the honor of being trained by you at the Federico Engels Vocational School in 1977, 1978 or 1979. I do not remember the exact year, but I do remember your teachings that later helped me graduate from the university as an Engineer. Nuclear Specialty Physicist

Thank you, thank you teacher of teachers

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 7:14 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Julio Cesar Hubert Bernal said:

Magnificent article and magnificent purposes. The entire Cuban society must understand that the development of the country depends on the development of basic sciences. Without a doubt, Néstor, you are privileged and it is not just a matter of luck. I started university in the year that the great Dr. Davison retired, but his fame and talent, embodied in texts, have already transcended, so there were not a few times I heard that name. May the event on the 15th be a success. Greetings.

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 7:19 P.M. /REPLY

Yosue said:

Greetings, interesting and moving article.

Anecdotes also come to my mind that include the outstanding Professor Davidson, from when he was studying and later as a Mathematics teacher, both in Secondary and Pre.

One of my favorite books "Ekemental Mathematics Problems", which I would have taken away from the last word, because it was not so elementary, but which were solved using elementary Mathematics.

I was one of those who participated in the National Mathematics Contests promoted by him, in one of them I obtained a grade of 100 points when I was a teacher in High School. The way he presented the problems, his mastery in explanations led me to become a contest coach, with winners at the national level.

Greetings also to Doné, promoter of the Contests in Camaguey.

I feel happy with this recognition to one of the greats of Cuba and of Mathematics.

Thank you Professor.

Yoel Suarez Escanell

SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 AT 7:32 P.M. /REPLY

Adriana Carr said:

It has given me great joy to read your article. I congratulate. honor honor

I met Professor Davidson with his wife when she was a child. My mother Juliana Pérez had been his student at the Matanzas Institute. And she followed in her footsteps as a high school math teacher for 36 years.

Davidson helped in the preparation for Mathematics Competitions and his merit is recognized by many professionals today.

Everyone is happy to remember him.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 20:04 /REPLY

Andrews said:

Many are allergic to math until there is something strange in the payroll or vacation time fund.

Even Pythagoras is reborn!

Ha ha ha.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 20:57 /REPLY

Eslaen MZ said:

Excellent article! Thank you for posting it. And thank you for keeping the light that Professor Davidson still shines with.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 20:57 /REPLY

Philip said:

I had the honor of meeting him in the 80's at the IPE Nacional, as well as. to his wife. , Robertina (I think that was his name) excellent professional and person

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 21:33 /REPLY

Maria said:

Many outstanding people in different activities in Cuba. Jobs like these are necessary so that everyone, even if we are not related to their activities, knows about them. Thanks for this testimony. honor honor

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 21:39 /REPLY

Ricardo Bringas said:

Dear Nestor,

After reading your article, I cannot help but make a comment. I was extremely lucky that Professor Davidson was part of the group of teachers who trained us for the Mathematics competitions. At that time we did not realize how privileged we were being. Davidson and Reguera were both extremely simple people and great educators. Later we learned more about their stories and great merits.

My name must have been one you had to write by hand to fulfill your commitment to Davidson in the summer of 1977 at the Lenin School. I remember that the contest was a weekend, Friday and Saturday the tests and on Sunday they gave the results. Later, those of us who were part of the national preselection spent 3 more weeks at Lenin being trained by Davidson, Reguera, Recio and yourself. These were events that I remember with great pleasure and that contributed very positively to my future training as a professional.

I am of the opinion that there is currently a lot to do in competition training. It is necessary to increase the level of training and specialize the coaches more in order to achieve better results. In the world the level of the participants in competitions is very high and it is difficult for us to achieve medals in the international Olympics for pre-university students, which in my opinion are today the highest level and the most important to identify talents and define the vocation for math.

By the way, you mention the award ceremony that will take place on the 15th of the 2019 and 2020 International University Mathematics Olympics. This year, very good results were obtained at said Olympics and the news was practically not seen in the national press.

A hug,
Ricardo Bringas

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 22:28 /REPLY

Rafael Emilio Cervantes Martinez said:

Beautiful and sobering stories that pay just tribute to Professor Davidson as a mathematician and educator.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 23:04 /REPLY

yam said:

Thank you professor for remembering famous people who do not have the fame or money of a musician, but who are much more important to me.

8 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 23:58 /REPLY

opinion said:

Unfortunately, Profe, a relatively short time ago I was asked to help a boy who, after finishing high school, entered a medium technician and had problems with mathematics and physics (I'm an engineer, that's why they asked me for help).

I remember as if it were now that I was explaining the trinomial to him and I told him "this term must be broken down into factors", he looked at me as if I were an elephant in a glass shop and I had to clarify, "two numbers that multiply to give 42", and then I realized that I DID NOT KNOW THE TABLES. How the... did he even finish elementary school, not to mention high school.

No Professor, forgive me but math went to the bowl, my sister is 6 years younger than me and she was not taught addition and subtraction just like me, they forced me to learn addition and subtraction from 1 to 19. Once I surprised her "playing drum", translation, counting with her fingers on the table and then she admitted to me that she was NEVER taught to add and subtract mentally.

Unfortunate, so unfortunate that I'm sure today a graduate of 12 would have a hard time solving an exercise from Baldor's Algebra book, SIXTH GRADE.

Greetings Professor

9 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 0:18 /REPLY

Ochoa said:

We met Dr. Davidson personally at the first National Mathematics Competitions in 1973 . Apart from his extensive knowledge of Pedagogy and Mathematics, he was an exquisite person and a great organizer, down to the last detail. His work sowed the seed of the great development that the teaching of the subject currently has and the growing level reached by our education. More than a teacher, I consider him a friend.

Nestor del Prado Arza said:

Hello Ochoa, were you a contestant for the province of Holguin?

I remember an Ochoa from Holguin who, in addition to being brilliant in Mathematics, was also brilliant in Literature.

In any case, thanks for your comment.

9 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 18:47 /REPLY

Robertina Davidson said:

I want to thank Néstor and the comments about the article published by him in Cubadebate for the brilliant words expressed about my father where he defines his value as a teacher, researcher, educator, as a person and above

all his simplicity. I feel proud to have had two wonderful people in my life, my parents Robertina Maquieira Mayans and Luis José Davidson San Juan, both Mathematicians who were partners in life and in their profession. I want to express to finish about my father he had two great passionate loves, one was my mother and the other was mathematics.

9 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 10:57 [/REPLY](#)

Robertina Davidson said:

I want to thank Néstor and the comments about the article published by him in Cubadebate, for the brilliant words expressed about my father where he defines his value as a teacher, researcher, educator, as a person and above all his simplicity. I feel proud to have had two wonderful people in my life, my parents Robertina Maquieira Mayans and Luis José Davidson San Juan, both Mathematicians, who were partners in life and their profession.

I want to express to finish about my father that he had two great passionate loves, one was my mother and the other was mathematics.

9 SEPTEMBER 2021 AT 11:38 [/REPLY](#)

Esther said:

How beautiful this Cuban, how beautiful his work, thank you for sharing about him with all of us who did not know him. It is a true example, a joy to be able to have contact with someone like that. Thank you. Congratulations to his family, I join in celebrating the 15th from my home. I wish I could read the book you quote.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021 AT 1:00 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Julito Torres said:

Thank you very much, Professor Nestor Del Prado for this necessary article in homage to the tremendous Professor Davidson. I am one of the students who participated in the National Mathematics Contest that was held in 1977 at Lenin (I think I won a 2nd Prize), but I do not remember the details of the names of the contestants written "by hand". What I do remember very clearly are the phenomenal classes that, in advance preparation, were given to us for several months by professors Luis Davidson and Raimundo Reguera, among others. Thanks to them I began to love Mathematics deeply.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021 AT 1:13 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Dr. Tomás Crespo Borges said:

Nestor, I always read your section but I don't like to comment, but today it's about Dr. Davidson, it was an obligation to remember him; Davidson together with Reguera and Dr. Núñez played a fundamental role in the introduction in Cuba of the methodology of teaching Mathematics developed in the former GDR. Furthermore, it should be noted that he was a foolproof revolutionary and those who knew him and worked with him as you did, know the cause of my emphatic expression.

Thank you Nestor for your work

SEPTEMBER 9, 2021 AT 4:39 P.M. [/REPLY](#)

Prof Luis E Davidson said:

First of all, my deepest gratitude to Mr. del Prado for his eloquent writing about my father, Dr. Luis José Nicolas Davidson San Juan, in which he not only honored him, but also our entire family.

I think you could write an encyclopedia about my father; as an educator, author, publisher. Admired and appreciated by his colleagues in Cuba, and in many other countries; not only because of his knowledge and contributions to education, but also because of his affable treatment.

He was always in a good mood, with positive thoughts. An extremely honest man, faithful friend, devoted husband to our mother, Dr. Robertina Maquieira Mayans, and an exemplary father to my sisters and myself; You could say that he was almost a perfect man.

When I was very young, he used to read me adventure books that greatly exalted my imagination, but also about the magic of mathematics, and with a vast repertoire of interesting anecdotes, which aroused my curiosity for that wonderful world of numbers. As an adult, I followed in his footsteps as a Mathematics professor at universities; as a small tribute, my classes begin with many of those anecdotes.

His greatest pride was the family he founded. Sundays were the happiest days of his life; seeing his wife, his children and grandchildren, sitting around the table (adorned with flowers from the garden, cut by him), to share lunch.

Another of his proud creations was the remarkable Mathematics magazine "Epsilon," with national and international circulation, which saw the light of day for the first time in January 1972.

But my father didn't just like numbers. He enjoyed good music, singing, poetry, and good literature; Also mystery novels.

I remember listening to him once, that he had achieved his goal in life, according to this thought that I had read many years ago: "There are three things that each person should do during their life: plant a tree, have a child, and write a book. He not only accomplished those three things, but he did it exponentially.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my love and admiration for my father, on the centenary of his birth.

Nestor del Prado Arza said:

Thank you for having written and sent this legitimate and deserved testimony of an eldest son. A while ago I was chatting with Robertinita about what I posted on Facebook today. She told me that she had liked her and that indeed Davidson was not a man to give up in the face of difficulties. She told me other anecdotes. I'll tell you that I didn't know she existed. She only knew about you and Teresita.

Now we are friends.

I hope to find Teresita in the activity on September 15.

She receives my cordial greetings from Havana.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 AT 4:17 P.M. /REPLY

Pedro Arencibia said:

Luis: We were classmates when we started studying Mathematics; I am not used to leaving comments but my thanks to your father have decided me to leave this comment. I will tell you that in a book that I wrote about university and high school education I quoted your father's writings and in the acknowledgments I wrote: I thank Dr. Luís Davidson San Juan for his kind and respectful treatment during my stay as an inserted university student, together with today Dr. Francisco Castillo Aranguren, in the preparation group for the Mathematics Olympics of the Ministry of Education of Cuba, solving exercises and mathematical problems

(and sometimes only trying to solve, given the high degree of difficulty of some of them) that would form part of a book for the training of High School students selected to participate by Cuba in the International Mathematics Olympiads; That pleasant stay happened a few months before finishing my studies.

I will tell you that in June 1989, when the Branch of the Mathematics and Computing Society was founded in Pinar del Río, I went to the room he and Reguera shared at night and thanked them for their teachings in my training as a mathematician and as a teacher. I will tell you that when I was a student I studied, among other texts, your father's Doctoral Thesis to examine the subject of Complex Variable. A big hug to you, even though we weren't close in that first year and then life took us in different directions, although maybe we're not that far now. Pedro Pablo

SEPTEMBER 13, 2021 AT 2:20 P.M. /REPLY

Hugo Guerrero said:

I had the honor of having him as a neighbor and friend, his knowledge of mathematics was exceptional and he always tried to clarify any doubts that he had. Well deserved recognition to Davidson that he will always be in the hearts of all of us.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 AT 9:49 A.M. /REPLY

Martha Alvarez said:

Precious article, which reflects the greatness of our beloved Master. He was an example in many ways, for transmitting the beauty of mathematics at all times, for promoting mathematical activity in the youngest and, not least, for sowing kindness and affection in everyone around him.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021 AT 4:57 P.M. /REPLY

Maria Teresa Cisnero said:

Professor Davidson was not only a great mathematician, but a worldwide ambassador for the teaching of Mathematics. The organizer and promoter of the contests, facets that many of us know.

I also had the privilege of knowing Davidson as a husband to Robertina, as a father to Luisito, Robertina and Teresita. An exceptional man personally and very loved by his family and friends.

Thank you for the emotional article of him, a beautiful tribute.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2021 AT 10:53 A.M. /REPLY

Ana Cecilia Garcia said:

Sensitive and beautiful article. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Luis Davidson and his wife Robertina Maqueira. Also today I enjoy the friendship of members of his family, magnificent people who are equally the work of that excellent marriage of mathematicians, authors of significant achievements during their fruitful lives.

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021 AT 7:27 P.M. /REPLY

39 comments have been posted