

**HO3**

**Lisa Bernardin, Program Coordinator, Vermont Brain Bee, April 19, 2019**



## **Vermont Brain Bee**

**Explore Neuroscience**

**Engage Students**

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### **Vermont Brain Bee History**

**By Lisa Bernardin**

In 1985, I was in a major car accident and sustained significant brain trauma that affected my executive functioning. I had difficulties with problem solving, decision making, and organizational skills. My brain had changed and I was perplexed by the differences in my behavior and wanted to learn more. In 2005, I read a book about the history of brain science, which fascinated me and led me to want to learn more about how the brain can be remodeled. I found out about the International, National and Regional Brain Bees in 2009, when there were about 35 Brain Bees around the country. There was no Brain Bee in Vermont, so I set out to get one established, which required two things: the support of expert neuroscientists in the judging process and at least three high schools participating in the event. My search led to a collaboration with my hometown's Middlebury College and the University of Vermont, which had excited graduate students and neuroscientists eager to bring this goal to fruition. I then secured participation from three high schools – Champlain Valley Union, Middlebury Union and Mt. Abraham Union High Schools – and on February 13, 2010, we held the first-ever Vermont Brain Bee!

Since then, we've held 10 Annual Vermont Brain Bees, going from 11 students from 3 schools participating in 2010, to 48 students from 8 schools participating this past February, 2019. Over the past ten years, more than 330 students have participated in the Vermont Brain Bee. This worthy event has shown that many of these students choose neuroscience as a career. And there are now more than 60 competitors at the National level – proof that high school students' interest in neuroscience has grown across the country! We'd love to reach more students in more rural parts of the state so that they, too, can participate in this exceptional and exciting, educational program that has an impact on each of their futures in science. And this event is FREE!

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But running the Brain Bee utilizes a lot of time and has expenses – a website, staffing and organization of Brain Bee clubs, outreach presentations, and supporting travel to outreach locations and for the annual Vermont Brain Bee winner to compete in the national Brain Bee, now called the US Championships. Sponsorships are helpful for the annual event, but don't cover ongoing costs for the work that happens throughout the year. The Vermont Brain Bee became non-profit in November 2018, to assist with increasing potential for additional funding. It is now Vermont Brain Bee, Inc. Spreading the word about this incredible program could help attract sorely-needed support.

The winner of this year's VT Brain Bee, Vilena Lee, a senior from Burlington High School, is competed this past weekend at the US Championships at Penn State Medical College in Hershey, PA. She placed 17<sup>th</sup> out of 56 competitors which was pretty exceptional. You can find her photo in the appendix. Second place went to Isabelle Petrucci from Essex High School. She would now like to share her experiences at the Vermont Brain Bee with you. After Isabelle, you'll hear from Erik McLysaght, a senior Mt Abe Union High School. He is a 3x VTBB competitor and President of the Neuroscience Club of the 2019 winning team.

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I'd like to end with a reading of the testimony of Kameron Clayton, 2010 and 2011, Champlain Valley Union High and VT Brain Bee participant.

### Discussion

--What can be done to spread awareness and importance of learning about the brain and of teaching neuroscience to high school students?

--For those interested in helping to spread the word about the VBB to high schools in your district, I have put a link below that list the 88 Vermont high schools by county.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_high\\_schools\\_in\\_Vermont](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_high_schools_in_Vermont)

--Suggest funding sources to help keep this going in future years.