

School of Mathematics and Statistics

Newsletter

November 2020

John Joseph 'JJ' Valletta

- Last month we suffered a great loss with the untimely death of our colleague JJ Valletta, who had a heart attack whilst out hillwalking on Ben Vorlich above Loch Earn on Sunday 25th October. JJ had only been with us, as an Associate Lecturer in Statistics, since January this year, but in that time he had firmly established himself as a highly collaborative and positive force within the School. We remember him for his warm smile, his positive attitude, his passion for his native Malta and, above all, his commitment to the students he taught.

JJ came to us from an applied data science background; he held degrees from Malta, Sheffield and Southampton, and had spent two years working at McLaren F1 Racing improving their car design and at University of Exeter working on biomarker discovery in malaria. He seemed equally at home discussing analysis of intricate mechanical systems and complex human diseases. His passion for using data to answer pressing practical problems shone through his teaching, and he was always striving to find better ways to communicate this to students. Each module he was involved in was substantially improved by his input. With his 'can do' attitude, he was also contributing to improvements in our teaching of computing, and building research links in medicine.

Personally, those of us involved in recreational football remember JJ's cheerful and skilful involvement in the lunchtime leagues. His major passions were canoeing and hillwalking, and indeed these were a strong motivation in his choosing us over other possibilities in England. CREEM coffee was enriched by his presence.

He was only 37 years old, and is survived by father Tony, mother Pauline, sister Nadia and nephew Michael. As a School, we put together some memories booklets, both from [staff](#) and from [students](#), and these have been sent to his family. We are currently discussing how best to remember JJ, through a staff and a student prize, a one-off or annual lecture and a service of remembrance once we are able to gather together physically. Any thoughts on this will be welcomed by Mark and Len.



JJ (in orange) surrounded by students on Sturdy Hill on the Burn trip at the end of February

Congratulations...

- to Yoav Len and his wife Cara on the birth of their son Elliot on Thursday 22nd October. Elliot's happy to be in the world and keeps his parents up at odd hours of the night.
- to Nseobong Uto on passing his PhD viva on 9th November with a thesis titled 'Construction and comparison of semi-Latin rectangles'. Nseobong is looking forward to a postdoc position.
- to our undergraduate Molly Chung who won the poster competition for University Laidlaw Scholars with her poster 'Investigating mathematical patterns in music'. Also to Michael Sutherland who was runner up in his year for his poster 'Enumeration and symmetry of fractal carpets'.
- to Bob Grundy, who on Tuesday 10th November got a hole in one at the tenth hole of the Eden course, when retired staff members Alan Cairns, Colin Campbell and Bob were having their usual 'Tuesday' round of golf.



New arrival Elliot

Virtual Activities

- In the second half of October, Peter Cameron intermittently attended some talks at a virtual meeting on *Dynamic Algebraic Combinatorics* at Banff International Research Station (BIRS) in Canada. One of the highlights was a talk by Oliver Pechenik describing his work with Rebecca Patrias confirming a 25-year-old conjecture of Cameron and Fon-Der-Flaass on the orbit lengths of the 'rowmotion' map on the set of antichains in the product of three chains.
- Rosemary Bailey and Peter Cameron attended (virtually) the *3rd Workshop on Algebraic Graph Theory and its Applications* at the Mathematical Center in Akademgorodok, Novosibirsk from 2nd-8th November. Rosemary asked 'Can algebraic graph theory help to find good block designs for experiments?' and Peter talked about 'Graphs defined on groups'.
- Natalia Jurga gave a talk entitled 'Hausdorff dimension of self-projective sets' at the *31st Fall meeting of the Semi-annual Workshop on Dynamical Systems and Related Topics* at Penn State University, from 30th October-1st November. [Note that 'semi-annual' means 'biannual', not 'biennial'.]
- István Kolossváry presented a virtual talk 'On the intermediate dimensions of Bedford-McMullen carpets' on 12th November at the *Ergodic Theory and Dynamical Systems Seminar* at the University of Vienna.
- Jon Fraser gave a virtual talk 'Dimension theory and the Sullivan dictionary' on 29th October at the *Dynamics Seminar* at the University of Vienna. He gave another 'A new perspective on the Sullivan dictionary' on 3rd November at the *Dynamics Seminar* at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Other News

- Jon Fraser's 270 page book *Assouad dimension and fractal geometry* was published on 29th October by Cambridge University Press in their series *Cambridge Tracts in Mathematics*.

Next Issue

- The next edition of the School Newsletter will be circulated in December. Items for inclusion may be sent to maths-news@st-andrews.ac.uk at any time but a reminder will be sent out a week before the deadline.