



Vanya Shivashankar and Gokul Venkatachalam declared co-champions of the 2015 Scripps National Spelling Bee

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Co-champions are both veteran spellers in national competition

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md., May 28, 2015 /PRNewswire/ -- Vanya Shivashankar, a 13-year-old speller from Olathe, Kansas, and Gokul Venkatachalam, a 14-year-old speller from Chesterfield, Missouri, were declared co-champions of the 2015 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

This year's event made history in two ways: It was the second year in row two spellers won, and one speller, Shivashankar, is the sibling of a past champion.

The declaration of co-champions came after round 20, when Shivashankar correctly spelled "scherenschnitte," which is defined as "the art of cutting paper into decorative designs." Shivashankar's sister, Kavya, is the 2009 Bee champion.

Venkatachalam responded by correctly spelling the word "nunatak," which is defined as "a hill or mountain completely surrounded by glacial ice."

Rich Boehne, chairman, president and CEO of The E.W. Scripps Company, declared Shivashankar and Venkatachalam co-champions and awarded them the engraved Scripps National Spelling Bee championship trophy immediately after Venkatachalam's correct spelling in round 20. This is the second consecutive time since 1962 – and the fifth time overall – that co-champions have been declared at the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

"Vanya and Gokul are seasoned pros, who each returned to the Bee competition this year with confidence and even greater command of some very difficult words," Boehne said. "It is a privilege to see them and the other 281 spellers throw themselves into the rigor and discipline it takes to compete in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Scripps is proud to be the longtime steward of this esteemed educational event, which is a national treasure."

Shivashankar represents the *Olathe News* in Olathe, Kansas, in this year's competition. She is an 8th-grade student at California Trail Middle School. Venkatachalam represents the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in St. Louis, Missouri. He is an 8th-grade student at Parkway West Middle School.

Shivashankar also competed in the Spelling Bee in 2010, 2012 (tied for 10th place), 2013 (tied for 5th place) and 2014 (tied for 13th place). Venkatachalam had participated in the Bee in 2012 (tied for 10th place), 2013 (tied for 19th place) and 2014 (3rd place).

ESPN broadcast the championship finals live.

The spelling competition began Tuesday with 283 competitors, who qualified to compete in the Bee by winning locally sponsored bees.

With more than 11 million spellers starting at the local level, the Scripps National Spelling Bee is the nation's largest and longest-running educational program. The competition is administered on a not-for-profit basis by Scripps, which is based in Cincinnati.

The competition was held in the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. Round-by-round results are available at spellingbee.com.

Cole Shafer-Ray of Norman, Oklahoma, representing *The Oklahoman*, placed third in the competition.

The co-champions each receive: a \$30,000 cash prize and the Scripps National Spelling Bee engraved trophy; a \$5,000 cash prize from Words with Friends; a \$2,500 U.S. savings bond and a complete reference library from Merriam-Webster; and a \$1,100 set of reference works from Encyclopaedia Britannica, including the Britannica Global Edition, 1768 Encyclopaedia Britannica Replica Set Deluxe Edition, and a three-year membership to Britannica Online Premium.

Broadcast sponsors for this year's event were Microsoft and Words with Friends. Microsoft presented all 283 spellers with a Microsoft Surface 3.

About the Scripps National Spelling Bee

The Scripps National Spelling Bee is the nation's largest and longest-running educational program. The National Spelling Bee started in 1925 with nine contestants. The purpose of the Scripps National Spelling Bee is to help students improve spelling, increase their vocabularies, learn concepts and develop correct English usage that will help them all of their lives.

The Scripps National Spelling Bee is administered on a not-for-profit basis by The E.W. Scripps Company. Scripps took ownership of the Bee in 1941 and, after not holding the competition for three years during World War II, has managed the Bee continuously since 1946. 2015 marks the 71st year that Scripps has operated the National Spelling Bee. In that span, the terms "Scripps" and "spelling bee" have become synonymous.

About Scripps

The [E.W. Scripps Company](http://www.scripps.com) serves audiences and businesses through a growing portfolio of television, radio and digital media brands. Scripps is one of the nation's largest independent TV station owners, with 33 television stations in 24 markets that reach nearly one in five U.S. television households. It also owns 34 radio stations in eight markets. Scripps also runs an expanding collection of local and national digital journalism and information businesses, including mobile video news service [Newsy](http://www.newsy.com) and weather app developer [Weathersphere](http://www.weathersphere.com). Scripps also produces television shows including [The List](http://www.thelist.com) and [The Now](http://www.thenow.com), runs an award-winning investigative reporting newsroom in Washington, D.C., and serves as the longtime steward of the nation's largest, most successful and longest-running educational program, the [Scripps National Spelling Bee](http://spellingbee.com). Founded in 1878, Scripps holds to the longtime motto, "Give light and the people will find their own way."

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