

Revitalized chess club prepares for Saturday tournament

Michael Neary Journal Staff

5-6 minutes

Kyle Red Willow recalls, years ago, when his father taught him to play chess as a 5-year-old child.

“My father, who passed away, taught me chess when I was 5,” he said. “So I taught my son Conrad how to play when he was about 5.”

Conrad, who’s now 6 years old, was among about 20 children playing chess on Monday night at the Rapid City Public Library as part of the Rapid City Scholastic Area Chess Club – a club that started up again early in November.

The Rapid City Scholastic Area Chess Club meets from 4 to 6 p.m. on most Mondays in the library, said Jan McGrath, who coordinates marketing for the club. She advised people to send an email in advance if they can

to rapidcityscholastic@gmail.com to inquire about the room and confirm the meeting time.

McGrath noted, too, that parents and guardians are encouraged to attend the meetings, staying with the children as they play.

The club is planning a Holiday “Chess Nut” Tournament from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday in the dining room of the Canyon Lake Activity Center, in Rapid City. Registration is \$10.

Nathan Walstrom, coach and president of the club, led a lesson and discussion about chess during Monday’s meeting.

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“We’re an affiliate club of the U.S. Chess Federation,” he said during a pause, noting that the club had previously been an affiliate about three years ago. In recent weeks, Walstrom and a group of other residents have joined to revitalize the chess club.

McGrath explained that Walstrom, born and raised in Rapid City, was active in the chess club when he was a young student. It came naturally, she explained, for Walstrom to become a leader in the club as an adult

and to spearhead the club's rejuvenation.

Walstrom described some of the benefits of being an affiliate with the U.S. Chess Federation.

“It’s a national organization that sets up tournaments nationwide, and they have a universal rating system so that as our players are playing, they will generate scores or ratings that can be used as a gradation against other national players.”

Walstrom said Saturday’s tournament would not be an official USCF tournament, but he said such tournaments are on the horizon.

“This one is going to be a local tournament to get some excitement going for chess, but in the future we are hoping to host USCF rated tournaments,” he said.

Walstrom said the target age is wide – from kindergarten through 12th grade or so – and he noted some applications of the game that range far beyond the chess board.

“The biggest lesson that I learn from chess is that you’re going to make mistakes, and that’s OK,” he said. “It’s all about how you recover from those mistakes. In chess, we call it a blunder ... and when that happens, it’s about how you recover. How are you going to

handle that adversity?”

Walstrom said chess also provokes a person to think ahead – and to practice the skill of thinking ahead.

Walstrom, who works as a forensic chemist for the Rapid City Police Department, said that practice has helped to nourish his work.

“It’s served me very well as a scientist, and I feel that it’s applicable to just about every field,” he said. “Right now, as a forensic chemist, I’m always thinking about how the implications of my testing results are going to affect another individual.”

Brogan McGrath, a high school freshman who serves as the vice president of the Rapid City Scholastic Area Chess Club, also emphasized the power of thinking ahead that’s instilled by chess. “Visualizing,” is how McGrath described the phenomenon.

“You just continually do it, and then you can see further,” he said.

Danielle Giuseffi, the club’s treasurer, reflected on the allure of chess for her 10-year-old daughter Sydney and her 8-year-old son Jackson.

“Chess provides them an opportunity to think critically and solve problems,” she said. “And I’m so glad they

can do it with other kids. Giving kids an opportunity to play chess against each other teaches more than just the game, but also social skills and sportsmanship.”

Playing fairly and losing gracefully, she explained, are a couple of the key lessons that come from chess.

And Kyle Red Willow, the father who taught his young son Conrad to play after learning from his own father, summed up the pull of chess in expansive terms.

“You use your mind,” he said, “just to put it simply.”

People seeking more information about Saturday’s tournament or about the club itself can go to

www.rcscholasticchess.weebly.com.

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