

State chess tourney returns to Morgantown

BY TRACY EDDY

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The West Virginia State Chess Championship tournament returns to Morgantown this weekend after 20 years away.

Morgantown Chess Club President Jens Madsen said the tournament was organized in Charleston for the past three years, and this year the players of Morgantown put in a bid to host it.

"We thought that players in this side of the state deserved to have it here," Madsen said.

Madsen has been president of the Morgantown Chess Club since it was founded in 2005. The club began its initial year with only four members, but has since grown to 30 members. Nearly one third of them are school-aged children, Madsen said.

Nine members are scheduled to play in the state championship tournament.

Martin Harper, one of the founding members of the club, said the original four never expected to host the state tournament.

THE WEST VIRGINIA State Chess Championship tournament will be held at the First Christian Church on Cobun Avenue, on Saturday-Monday. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, 1-6:30 p.m. Sunday and 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday. The tournament is open to members of the U.S. Chess Federation. Entry fees are \$35 for adults and \$25 for juniors (kindergarten through 12th grade). Onsite registration will take place from 9:45-10:45 a.m. today.

"We didn't think too far into the future," Harper said. "We never conceived in those first meetings we would hold the state tournament. It's a great feat."

Nearly 30 chess players are expected to compete in the state tournament, Madsen said, with some of them coming from Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Chess tournaments generally last one or two days, Madsen said, but the state championship tournament lasts three full days.

Competitors will play two games a day, each game lasting an average of five hours, Madsen said.

"Most people don't realize this," Madsen said. "But playing chess can be both mentally and physically draining."

Harper said the best way to prepare to compete in a chess tournament is to get a good night's rest.

"Some people will brush up on a favorite opening," Harper said. "But there's no way to study a person's game, because you don't know in advance who you will be playing."

Players of all ages will compete on the same level, Madsen said.

"The nice thing about chess is that it's not an overtly physical game," Madsen said. "People at any age can compete against each other."

Madsen has been playing chess since childhood, when he found an old chess set his parents had laying around. He was fascinated by all the different figures, he said, and started pretending to play until his mom taught him the rules.

In last year's tournament, Madsen took

second place, defeated by Donald Griffith from the Charleston area.

Griffith has held the state champion title for the past 12 years, and if he wins this year's tournament he will break the record for consecutive wins, Madsen said.

"I think the rest of us are going to try really hard to keep him from winning and breaking that record," Madsen said.

The winner of the tournament will receive the title of West Virginia state champion and a wandering trophy to hold onto until next year's tournament.

The winner will also get \$250, and a signed and framed copy of chess-themed artwork drawn by local artist and chess enthusiast Justin Jenkins.

Spectators are welcome to come to the tournament; admission is free.

Harper said that if the state championship tournament goes well, it could mean only good things for the Morgantown Chess Club.

"We could attract a national championship in the future, and it could help the growth of the club," Harper said.