



Chess club great move for kids

by Caroline Connors



Sarah Fitzpatrick invites 13 of her son's friends over every Friday after school to their Beverly home, but not to watch movies, play video games or build forts in the snow.

Instead, the children, all first- and second-grade students, sit quietly at two long tables in the Fitzpatricks' family room to play chess under the instruction of Dr. Mikhail Korenman, a Russian émigré who has brought his passion for the game to kids on the South Side.

The Friday afternoon ritual began a couple of months ago, when Fitzpatrick realized there was a bunch of kids interested in the game who had no place to learn or play it.

Her son, John, is a firstgrade student at Lenart Regional Gifted Center in Chicago, which does not offer a full range of after-school enrichment activities because of the wide geographic diversity of its student body, Fitzpatrick said.

So Fitzpatrick decided to create a chess club at her house for neighborhood kids who are in the same situation as John, including Lenart students Philip and Elizabeth Kujawa, Megan Norris, Danny Walsh, Blake Crawford, Anthony Potter, Alex Pierre Washington and Josh Biel; St. Barnabas Elementary School students Nora Harvey, Declan Hurless and Jack Byrne; and Sutherland students Campbell Bartel and Jack Walsh.

While having 14 kids in the house at one time can get a little crazy, especially when they're all wearing coats, hats and boots, Fitzpatrick said the kids are well behaved and respectful—a prerequisite for play under Korenman's instruction.

An international chess organizer and member of the World Chess Federation, Korenman is a former chemistry professor at Bethany College who holds a Ph.D. in education from Kansas State University. Since coming to the U.S. in 1994, Korenman has been making inroads—one chess club at a time—in developing chess programs and promoting international competitions.

Together with his daughter Paulina, 20, Korenman is teaching kids from kindergarten to high school age how to solve problems and, in the process, improve their writing, math and logic skills, Paulina said.

Their method seems to be working, especially for the Lenart team from the Beverly group, which recently won first place in a chess competition held at Ridge Academy.

Fitzpatrick's husband John said he grew up playing chess with his dad and brother, and he looks forward to playing chess with his son. Hosting the group at his house is a great way for the kids to stay connected, many of whom attended preschool at Beverly Montessori together, he said.

Even though the playgroup may not be traditional, all involved agree the kids have all made a smart opening move on a good time.