



A Report to the City of Sunrise Commission from The Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess 2020-2021

Prepared: September 10, 2021

MISSION & BACKGROUND:

The National Scholastic Chess Foundation, in partnership with The City of Sunrise, created **The Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess** (hereinafter referred to as “the Center”) to provide a sustained and institutional commitment to providing community-based chess programs and initiatives in the City of Sunrise, Florida.

Formed in November 2016 with an initial grant of \$25,000 from the City of Sunrise, programming began in January 2017. Funded each year by a generous grant from the City, along with matching contributions from other agencies throughout Broward County, chess has become a major part of the social and educational fabric of Sunrise.

The Center’s goals include:

- Improving student academic performance in Sunrise Schools by facilitating the critical thinking skills associated with chess and “thinking before you move” principles so important to the students;
- Increasing familial engagement in schools and the community in Sunrise;
- Creating stronger community social and cultural bonding in Sunrise through exposure to chess;
- Developing best practices for mentoring and teaching chess in the community;
- Promoting new methods to introduce chess to all ages, including seniors and veterans, in Sunrise;
- Contributing to a reduction in juvenile interventions by providing alternative activities in Sunrise that reduce risky and negative behaviors among at-risk youth.

In the following pages, we report on the activities of the Center during the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

During the spring and summer of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic required the Center to adapt to the conditions of remote learning and the challenges associated with physical distancing. These lessons continued to serve us through the 2020-2021 fiscal year until we began offering in-person programs again in May 2021. By licensing additional online chess resources and using services like zoom, we were able to successfully teach classes and offer tournaments for our Sunrise schools and the children who would traditionally participate in open play and our in-person classes and events.

Program Highlights:

- The Center provided staff instruction online for over 100 classes at Nob Hill Elementary and Sandpiper Elementary.
- The Center provided online instructional support to Bair MS and Franklin Academy.
- The Center produced 7 online scholastic tournaments where students play against their peers and have their games reviewed by a national or international master chess player. Over 400 young chess players competed in these events.
- The Center produced the 2021 Sunrise Champions of Chess Tournament at the Civic Center with the assistance of Leisure Services staff on June 12 with over 70 competitors and total attendance of 150, including family, friends, teachers and interested members of the community.
- The Center produced a simultaneous chess exhibition with WFM Dr. Amelia Hernandez and extended the hours of Open Play for the annual Back-to-School Roundup produced by City Staff.
- For 4 weeks in May, we hosted Open Play chess at the amphitheater in City Park in east Sunrise as an outdoor activity.
- From June 5 forward, we have hosted Open Play every Saturday at the Sunrise Civic Center. We have been sending 2 instructors to handle the increased number of participants.
- New this past year – Job skills development/intern initiative: Delivering programs online created a situation where we needed more instructors than with traditional delivery. To accommodate this, we engaged some of the students who have come up through our programs to assist with classes and to host special “community play” sessions online. These students earned over 200 hours of community service to contribute to high school graduation and National Honors Society requirements. When we began in-person programs again, we had 3 teens who no longer needed community service hours, so we were able to pay them for tournament direction and other help.

Plans for 2021-2022:

- Increase support for Sunrise schools.

We are again providing weekly in-person instruction for Sandpiper Elementary and Nob Hill Elementary. For Bair Middle School, we are increasing our services by providing an instructor to assist the school’s chess teacher. We will also continue offering online resources that support the teachers at Franklin Academy, Sunrise.

New for this school year, the Center is working with the math department chair at Piper High School to launch a new chess club. This has been a program we have wanted even before beginning the Center and is finally coming to fruition. The first club meeting was held on September 9 with 15

students attending the planning session. The students say that more will want to join, especially when we confirmed that this club will offer opportunities for students to participate in regional, state and national competitions if they commit to the program. The Center will be sending 2 instructors who will alternate days so there is at least one chess professional working with the chess club sponsor for each club session. Whereas Bair Middle School is a feeder school into Piper, the Center is also connecting the teachers so we can facilitate support between the two programs.

- Free tournaments for kids.

Working with City Staff, we are again producing 3 tournaments (2 at Flamingo Park – October and February, plus the annual Champions of Chess tournament in May) that will be open scholastic events. New for this school year, we are working with Franklin Academy to produce 2 free tournaments at the school, one in December and another in March; these events will be open scholastic events following the same format as the tournaments we host in City facilities. With 5 free events in the City of Sunrise each school year, this will give students plenty of opportunity to put to the test the knowledge they are acquiring in our chess classes.

- Mayor's Chess Challenges

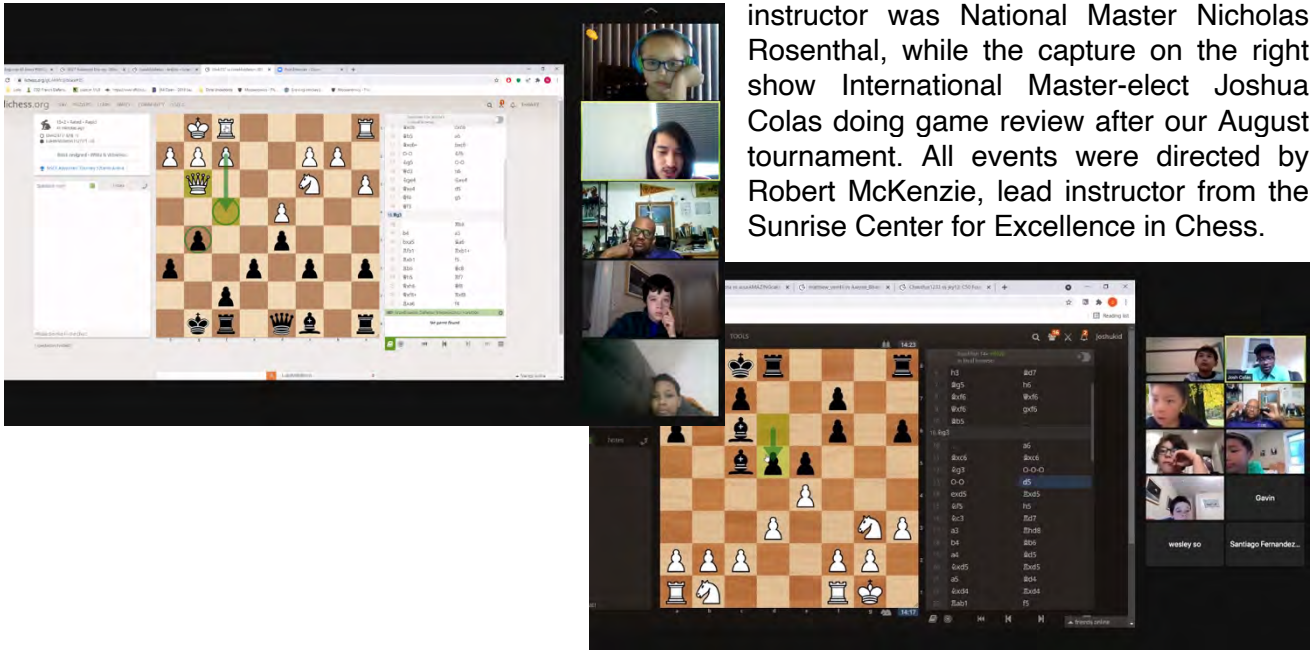
Now that the Mayor's Chess Challenges have returned, we will again be providing an instructor to help facilitate these events. This has been a very successful outreach activity for the City over many years, especially when our instructors have been accompanied by some of the chess playing officers from the City of Sunrise Police Department.

- Expanding our job skills/intern initiative: Based on the success we had with this initiative last year, it is our goal to expand our intern program to provide students with new opportunities to serve, earn community service hours, and to work and gain job experience. While we will have this open to high school students who have been with us in their younger years, this will also be a key component of the program we are developing at Piper High School.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE 2020–2021 PROGRAM YEAR:

1) *ONLINE CLASSES & TOURNAMENTS:* Throughout the school year, we were able to deliver classes each week using online chess platforms and zoom to students at Sandpiper and Nob Hill. We also provided the chess platform to help the chess programs at Bair Middle School and Franklin Academy.

The Center produced 7 online scholastic tournaments reaching over 400 students. For each event, after 2 hours of competition, we had an hour of free game analysis with one of our master chess instructors. The left-hand picture is a screen capture from an event in the spring where our resident instructor was National Master Nicholas Rosenthal, while the capture on the right show International Master-elect Joshua Colas doing game review after our August tournament. All events were directed by Robert McKenzie, lead instructor from the Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess.



2) *BACK TO SCHOOL ROUND-UP:* Despite the rain, the City had an excellent turn-out for the annual Back to School Roundup in August. Once again, the Center was able to promote the educational benefits of chess during this event with a simultaneous chess game by WFM, Dr. Amelia Hernandez (pictured at right) outside and a 3-hour open play with our instructors in the theater lobby. The boys in the photo were part of our Bair Middle School chess club; both are now in high school.



3) *OPEN PLAY CHESS HAS RETURNED*: The Center restarted Open Play chess for the month of May using the stage of the amphitheater in east Sunrise.

When the city was able to re-open its facilities as of June 1st, we returned to the lobby of the theater at the Civic Center and by the second week were surpassing the average weekly attendance we enjoyed before the pandemic.

The number of children served each Saturday ranges from 10 to 20. Many adults participate on a regular basis and many parents come and play chess with their children and grandchildren.



Each week our instructors provide small group and individual lessons and also acts as a facilitator assisted by City staff. The bottom photo shows students and a parent paying attention as Robert McKenzie gives a short lesson using his demonstration board.



4) *SUNRISE CHAMPIONS OF CHESS TOURNAMENT*: Traditionally held in May when school is still in session, we had to wait until June 12 this year. Still, our first in-person tournament for more than a year was a grand success with more than 70 competitors and over 150 total attendance. We had our two usual sections: elementary (see pictures) and middle/high school. New this year, we added a small “friends and family” section so our parents could play too! And our chess playing police officers from the City of Sunrise Police Department came out to play against the kids between tournament rounds. This is always popular with the parents, as well as with the children. Thanks to City Staff for all the work with set-up and helping us organize another fantastic event!



Addendum – A letter from one of our instructors

September 4, 2021

To City of Sunrise Leaders and Elected Officials,

My name is Robert McKenzie, and I am one of the chess instructors for the Sunrise Chess Open Play each Saturday at the Sunrise Civic Center. This letter is to inform you of the positive impact that the return of in-person chess to Sunrise has had on the community, the children, and the adults.

Each week, I get to work with a diverse group of people from multiple ethnicities, all ages, male and female, all socializing and discussing an activity beneficial to the mind and to precise and accurate decision-making. This kind of gathering stimulates and promotes a robust and thriving community that can only move forward in its evolution. In addition to that, the children are now leaving their video games and indoor isolation behind and physically interacting with the world and people, getting to meet other kids and engage in an ancient and global game that can be a lifelong pursuit. The adults gain these same benefits as they too are now back conversing and talking about their child or playing themselves.

There are also plenty of adults who come to get some competition over the board and tell me that this is the first time in years that they have been able to get an in-person game and how much they love the setup and idea of Chess Open Play. Just today there was a well-spoken and successful gentleman from Spain, a new resident of Broward County, named Louis who said he hasn't played an over the board chess game in decades. He was so excited and happy for the opportunity to come and play that he asked me questions about chess for over 30 minutes. He said he wanted to move to Sunrise for the activities like chess and amazing facilities that Sunrise offers.

I can tell you many more stories such as this; however, my point is that chess is a game that promotes critical thought, engages diverse members of the community in a constructive activity, allows children a positive outlet for creativity, and portrays the City of Sunrise positively to all residents and visitors. I thank you for your commitment to chess these many years and highly recommend your continued support of chess within the great city of Sunrise.

Sincerely,

Robert McKenzie

Lead instructor, The Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess
National Scholastic Chess Foundation Level 3 Chess Coach
United States Chess Federation Certified Chess Coach, and Tournament Director,
Elected to the USCF Scholastic Council for 2021-2023 term.
Broward County Public Schools Teacher (26 Years)

Addendum – A letter from one of our instructors

September 10, 2021

To the City of Sunrise Commission,

I wanted to express my sincere appreciation for your continued support of scholastic chess in Sunrise. I have participated in the NSCF teacher training workshops and partnered with the Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess to bring chess instruction to my students at Bair Middle School. Chess helps students learn to slow down and think through problems and is a bit of an antidote to the quick reaction, act-without-thinking mindset that is common in our society today, but is especially noticeable in the early adolescents I teach. The support of the City of Sunrise in our school's chess initiative for many years has been most appreciated, and even more so over the last year and a half. In light of the COVID-19 restrictions, we still managed to keep our chess program alive online. The Center provided access to an online instruction program plus shared best practices to keep our program going and, when we returned to in-person instruction, we were immediately able to pick up and continue the classes. Because of that, our students were more engaged with chess than ever before, and we had our highest-ever participation in the Champions of Chess tournament in June.

I am writing this letter because I know that there are many competing priorities for funding from the City and I wanted to voice my support for the continuation of the chess programs. I have taught in other cities throughout the County and the commitment the City of Sunrise makes to its schools is without parallel in my experience. The chess program is a shining example, and I can report that in this new school year chess is generating an even greater level of enthusiasm from our students and from the parents. The Center has just arranged for me to meet the Math Chair at Piper High School who is going to lead the chess club there and we are already working on plans of how we can create synergies between these programs. We are looking forward to a very productive year and it would not happen without the generous support of the City of Sunrise. So, on behalf of my students, thank you.

Yours truly,

Maurice O. Thompson

English teacher at Bair Middle School
and Teacher of the Year for 2020-2021

Summary

Of course, none of these great results would have been achieved without the generous support of The City of Sunrise and the invaluable assistance we receive from Leisure Services staff. We are looking forward to returning to normal operations over the coming school year and are excited about the expansion of services already in the works.

For information, please contact Robert McLellan, Program Director, The Sunrise Center for Excellence in Chess at (818) 469-2063 or robert@sunrisechesscenter.org

