



Jayden Ashley, 6, of New York City, moves his queen as Yanique Van Ness, 8, of Schenectady, attempts to protect her bishops at the MATCH Chess Camp at Proctors on Monday, July 7.

Photos by Ross Marvin/Spotlight

Keeping things in check

Chess camp teaches kids life skills

By ROSS MARVIN
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Shaune Sundown, 11, is simply hoping to survive.

His black knight is his only piece on the chessboard and his opponent, Keeshma Singh, 9, is on the attack.

She has only one piece on the board as well — a queen.

Sundown knows he can't win, but his goal is to keep Singh from taking his knight in fewer than six moves.

Sundown and Singh aren't engaged in a real chess match. Rather, they're engaged in an exercise created by Grandmaster Maurice Ashley, who brings his unique brand of chess to Proctors this week for the first MATCH Chess camp.

Where the usual summer camp has kids fishing, swimming and playing kickball, the 27 campers at Proctors spend long afternoons considering the moves of pawns, bishops and rooks.

The players, ages 8 to 14, display varying levels of skill. Some are beginners, and some, like Singh, have won trophies in local and regional tournaments.

Singh and 19 other campers were awarded a full-tuition scholarship to the camp, which costs \$420.

Private contributors the Golub Corporation, the Schenectady Police Athletic League, the City Mission and others donated scholarship funds.

The City Mission provides lunches to campers.

Ashley, who's coached three national championship chess teams and one individual national



Chess Grandmaster Maurice Ashley, standing, teaches a "survival chess" exercise to a group of 27 students at the camp.

champion in New York City, says he hopes the camp will bring a general interest in chess to Schenectady. He says the value of chess goes far beyond the game's rules.

"I want chess to be used for other reasons. It teaches critical thinking and problem-solving skills," says Ashley, a former ESPN chess commentator. "I want to translate these chess skills into life skills."

Ashley has been coming to Schenectady for several years to do chess demonstrations at both Proctors and the Hamilton Hill Arts Center's Juneteenth Celebration. This is his first-ever chess summer camp.

Camp organizer and chess enthusiast Marshall Tucker, of Schenectady, urged Ashley to run the camp after watching nearly 100 area children participate in monthly chess tournaments at Proctors.

Tucker hopes that the camp will become an annual event.

"We've already had discussions to get Union College on board as well as continuing our relationship with Proctors," says Tucker, who hopes to increase the camp's enrollment next year by moving to a bigger facility. "It's all in the planning stages."

Caitlyn Foley, Proctors' education program manager, says she too hopes the program will continue next year. Proctors hosts several arts-based camps as part of its Summer Adventures series.

"Like all of our summer programs, the chess camp continues to create hands-on experiences for kids who are excited about learning," says Foley.

Foley noted that campers don't sit in a room and play chess all day. Ashley's students will also participate in improv acting workshops with the Mop & Bucket Company's Brenny Rabine, watch movies in the GE Theatre, go rock climbing at the Electric City Rock Gym, and make an instructional chess video for SACC-TV, Schenectady's public access station.

Ashley says he thinks these activities help with team building, an important and often overlooked aspect of chess.

"Chess is an extremely social game," says Ashley. "You're not sitting in a room by yourself, you're talking to a person and having fun."

As Ashley speaks, the room is abuzz with young chess players excited at the prospect of putting their opponents in check. They're excited to make their skills a little better.

"I'm here to learn new moves about how to capture pieces," says Singh, of Schenectady, who captured Sundown's knight after a few moves. "Today I learned how to trap a knight with a queen."

The five-day camp runs through Friday, July 11.

County to increase jail staffing by 24

Contract talks continue following corrections officers' union veto

By ROSS MARVIN
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In an attempt to meet state mandates, Schenectady County officials will likely hire 24 new corrections officers, at a cost of about \$1 million.

The mandate comes at a time when the county is facing fiscal difficulties and an across-the-board increase in state mandates.

Sheriff Harry Buffardi said he's included funds for the additional officers in his proposed 2008-2009 budget. Corrections officers earn an approximate annual salary of \$50,000 including benefits.

The county jail is currently staffed with 140 officers and suffers from constant understaffing, said Buffardi.

The mandate, which was issued by a state agency that oversees local jails and their operations in 2006, requires an increase in staffing to about 160 officers.

Buffardi said he hopes the increase in staff will decrease his annual overtime budget.

Buffardi's 2008 budget total is \$11.7 million. Jail costs total \$9.5 million of the budget. The remainder is for administrative costs, road patrol and the sheriff's civil office.

Corrections officers vote against contract

The 140 current corrections officers voted against a proposed contract agreement with Schenectady County.

While vote totals were not immediately available, Buffardi said he believed the contract was vetoed mainly because of an increase in health care co-payments.

County Attorney Chris Gardner said negotiations would continue.

"We'll get back to the table with the unit," said Gardner.

Union President Ron Walsh also said negotiations would continue during his brief remarks to the Legislature at its meeting on Tuesday, July 8.

However, two of the county's three PBA contracts were ratified at the meeting.

Contracts with the 10-member road patrol and 17-member corrections supervisors provide 3 percent raises for 2007, 2008 and 2009. The road patrol also receives an additional 3 percent retroactive raise for 2006.

The contract is similar in nature to contracts with two of the county's largest unions, the 800-member Local 847 of the Civil Service Employees Association and the 180-member SEIU District Council 1199.

In all contracts, the county expects to save more than \$2 million by 2008 through changes in health care coverage.

Gardner points to a successful mail order prescription program and a Canadian drug program as the top savers.

"We continue to provide savings for the taxpayer while providing our county employees with the best health care offered in the public sector," said Gardner.

IN BRIEF

Orchestra seeks community photos

The Schenectady Symphony Orchestra is calling for community residents to submit local photography to be considered for use in a four-minute work of photochoreography that will premiere at the opening concert of its 2008-09 season, "Hidden Gems: Mohawk Valley Vistas."

The concert is scheduled for 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 19, at Proctors Theatre.

Nationally acclaimed photo choreographer James Westwater will create the work using local photos set to "Adirondack," the first movement

of Union College professor and local composer Hilary Tann's "Sarsen."

The SSO is looking for photos of people, community features, architecture and nature in Schenectady, Southern Saratoga County and the Mohawk Valley as far west as Amsterdam and Fultonville. All photos must be submitted as high-resolution digital files on photo CDs or DVDs and must be horizontal in orientation. Each photo must be titled with the photographer's name and identified by subject and be accompanied by a signed photo release form. The deadline for submissions is Aug. 1.

For information, call 372-2500 or send an email to sso@proctors.org.

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All events must be open to the public and announcements should contain the date, time, location and cost (if any) of the event, along with contact information. Announcements are published space and time permitting.

Submissions can be e-mailed to news@spotlightnews.com, faxed to 439-0609, or mailed to Spotlight, P.O. Box 100, Delmar 12054.

The deadline for all announcements is noon Thursday prior to publication.