

Chess prodigy shows skills on D.C. streets

WASHINGTON (AFP) - He sleeps on a bench, but he is king of chess during the day at Washington's Dupont Circle, where he dazzles beginners and masters alike with his winning moves on the park's stone chessboards.

Tom Murphy, 49, makes what little money he has from teaching his prodigious knowledge of the game to passersby for a few dollars.

"He has the title of expert in chess. This is the second highest American title; above him are master. So it means he is quite good," said Washington's Chess Center director David Mehler.

A former math and science major and a celebrity among amateurs, Murphy has made the Dupont Circle public square America's most prestigious chess park after New York's fabled



Tom Murphy, 49, is making a name for himself in chess.

Washington Square, according to some chess lovers.

"The mathematical equation has always been fascinating to me, then when you add the camaraderie, the ambiance, the open air, it's almost irresistible," said Murphy, peering over a park chessboard that draws play-

ers from all walks of life — students, doctors, lawyers, drunkards.

Garrulous and brilliant, Murphy, grew up in North Carolina and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, two well known chess centers, and specializes in a lightning version of chess known as "blitz."

In this accelerated version of the ancient game, players are allowed five minutes for all their moves, and the game ends within 10 minutes.

"The appeal of blitz is

that, maybe in two or five minutes, I may put together a work of art that might last a life time," Murphy said in his inimitable style of explaining chess basics.

The game, he said consists of "few guiding principles: king safety, fight for the center, give every piece a job."

"At blitz he is a very strong player. He has a very fast mind and he sees combinations very quickly. He calculates very quickly," said Mehler, who has been teach-

ing the board game to underprivileged children for 15 years.

Murphy has won several chess tournaments and finished 15th in the 2005 world blitz championship.

He's not always down and out, but his addiction to booze often lands him on the street.

"The pursuit of the ego versus the pursuit of the spirit are in conflict sometimes," he explained. "I enjoy alcohol a little too much."

(See Chess, Page 6)

Poverty

(Continued from Page 2)

sioner Larry Weekly, attended.

Since charity begins at home, what is being done locally to relieve hunger and disease?

Mayor Goodman said, "We have spent millions..." However, during the City Hall presentation, no one mentioned homelessness.

Mayor Gibson stated his city provides services, while Weekly noted his function is not "ribbon cutting" but to find solutions. Weekly's County Commission District is a composed of poor and middle-class constituents, in great part.

According to spokesperson Kimberly Dadena, ONE Vote '08 was founded in 2004 by 11 nonprofit organizations, such as World Vision and others, including Bono of U-2, as a grassroots movement to bring attention to global disease and hunger. The movement is grant funded by The Bill and Linda Gates Foundation.

Stating more on the purpose, Dadena said, there are field developers that establish local chapters and nurture activism.

There is a religious or spiritual connotation to the movement in as much as "scripture calls for Christians to help the less fortunate."

As for its political agenda, the group stresses that presidential candidates get on board, and that "a TV ad campaign, as well as grass roots efforts" are underway to bring more of the public into the mix.

One desired result is allowing for intelligent choices on who to vote for — based on a candidate's commitment to alleviating global hunger and disease, Dadena concluded.

On the local front, Dr. Robert Fowler, pastor of Victory Baptist Church, commented on the movement's focus on issues in regards to "charity begins at home" in Las Vegas.

"My grandmother told me that people living across the street have a greater need than in our own house." Fowler offered this distinction: "The needs in America, as a whole, are more urgent than Clark County, and sometimes it's easier for some people to help people in need when you don't have to see their faces."

He continued: "As a preacher and human being, I have an obligation in trumpeting the country's poor people's needs, and the effort is more effective when collaborating, i.e. [the ONE Vote movement.]"

Fowler offered his insights on whether politicians are doing enough to address the needs of poor people.

"Nobody is doing enough. It's a long-term problem, but all of us must do what we can."

ONE Vote '08 is part of ONE, a broad and growing movement of Americans from every state and walk of life. Millions of people have added their voices to ONE by visiting the www.one.org website for public information and to sign-up.

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