

Cochise Chess spreads knowledge and community throughout the county

The only rural bilingual chess program in the nation

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The Cochise Chess Club holds games at the Copper Queen Library in Bisbee.

Photo by Nick Mueller

BISBEE — Cochise Chess has a mission to get chess into the hands of everyone. The nation's only bilingual chess program in a rural county, this nonprofit supplies chess sets and expertise to libraries throughout the county.

Its founder, Nick Mueller, an instructor at Arizona State University's CISA Writer's Studio, sees the program as a way to encourage learning.

"I've always seen chess as an excellent educational tool," he said. "With my background in English and educational technology, it's amazing to merge learning with fun in such an impactful way."

From the original location at the Copper Queen Library in Bisbee, Cochise Chess has expanded to include chess times at the Copper Queen Library annex, the Douglas Public Library and the Huachuca City Public Library. The plan is to add the Naco, Elfrida and Wilcox libraries in November.

Mueller described how rapidly the community got on board with the mission of Cochise Chess.

"We've gone from zero members when we started out, not so long ago in June of 2022, to 100 members a year after that," he said. "And now, we have over 200 members all across the county."

Five assistant coaches volunteer with Mueller to keep Cochise Chess completely free.

Participants say the chess club is a fun way to spend time.

"I've been coming here since last year, and helping out with different things," said instructor Winston Fredrickson. "It's kind of an opportunity to socialize and have some sort of focused activities to do."

People from many walks of life enjoy the sessions at the Douglas Public Library.

According to Copper Queen Library Services Coordinator Alison Williams, from Cochise Chess' origins as a summer program for kids, its scope and mission have expanded to welcome people of all ages.

"We're such a small community and with such a small budget that if we can serve everybody, then we can have kids, teens and senior citizens or people who don't have a larger community. They can come and meet people by playing chess."

She praised the contributions of Mueller to the Copper Queen Library.

"As the former title-holder of best small library in America, in 2019, I think the reason why we are award-winning is because of people like Nick, who have an idea for a program and come to us, and we're able to support and promote these wonderful programs," she said. "Because our library is our community."

Mueller mentioned that a point of pride for Cochise Chess is its significantly higher-than average membership of minorities and women.

"It's very rewarding to see all sorts of players, all sorts of people who wouldn't necessarily interact ordinarily get together over chess," he said. "One person might speak English and one person might be a Spanish speaker, but we're all pretty level on the chess board."

Cochise Chess is at the Copper Queen Library on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon, and is at the Copper Queen Annex from noon to 2 p.m. on the second and fourth Fridays of each month.

There are games at the Huachuca City Library from 3-5 p.m. on the first and third Thursdays of the month, and are in Douglas from 3-5 p.m. on the second and fourth Thursdays.

There are plans to collaborate with Project Encore for an event at GrooveLab in Sierra Vista on Oct. 21.

Schools, libraries and communities in Cochise County can invite Cochise Chess to visit by filling out a short survey at CochiseChess.org. Financial contributions are welcome, which will become tax-deductible once its 501c3 status is finalized.



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