

Hermiston student hopes to resume chess competitions

Luke Gray, 16, started playing in elementary school

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

At recent Hermiston High School's student-led conferences, sophomore Luke Gray, 16, set up a chess board with a puzzle. The Hermiston resident then asked passersby to solve the game. A player had to sacrifice a valuable piece for a lesser piece to secure a win.

Gray said he likes such puzzles, because they make him think and he enjoys solving problems. This is why, he said, chess is fun; a player gets to reason themselves out of binds.

The common perception of chess players is they are brainiacs, Gray said, also admitting he might fit the description.

"I've definitely been called that before," he said.

He gets good grades in school, he said, and he considers himself a thinker. These days, he has been pursuing business classes. Accounting and marketing are so



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Luke Gray poses for a portrait Nov. 3, 2021, during student-led conferences at Hermiston High School. Gray, 16, has won three regional chess titles.

much his favorite, he is now considering business as a career, he said.

"I like to crunch numbers," the teen said.

Gray said his interest in chess

goes back several years. He said he first learned the game in elementary school but did not start playing seriously until middle school. It was then, he said, when he joined the chess club at Armand Larive

Middle School, Hermiston.

Delia Fields, Hermiston secondary schools librarian, and until recently the high school chess advisor, said she became acquainted with Gray in middle school. She knew right away, she said, he was special — a talented chess player and an excellent young man.

Fields said she is one of a few school district staff members who have worked with chess players over the years, and she credited retired social studies teacher Dan Jamison for his work with the club. For them, she said, it is fun to see students, like Gray, mature.

As he has grown as a player, Gray has attended tournaments, where he has won major accomplishments. Three regional titles and one win at a state competition are among his greatest achievements. He said he thinks he could have won more under different circumstances.

Because of the coronavirus epidemic, many competitions last year were canceled. This was disappointing, he said, but necessary. He expressed excitement, though, over the contest season resuming in 2022.

Until he can start major competitions again, he said he has chess-related activities to keep him busy. He enjoys following the play of famous chess masters, he said, such as Hikaru Nakamura. Gray also said he likes to play with friends.

The Hermiston High School chess club, under advisor Ernest Kincaid, meets twice a week. People tend to pop in and out of club gatherings, Gray said, especially these days. Gray said the marching band is capturing the interest of students who might otherwise be participating in the chess club.

Gray, too, has interests outside of chess, he said, as he has made varsity in tennis. Chess is a hobby, he said, he does not ever see himself pursuing the game professionally.

Gray said he has watched top professional players, who spend hours playing and then hours after each game studying their every move. He said he is not willing to dedicate himself so fully to the game. It might be maddening, he expressed.

"It's probably not going to drive you insane," he said, "but it could."

Hermiston resident decorates big for Thanksgiving and more

Cindy Erevia has more than 60 scarecrows outside, more inside

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

While Christmas decorations have been going up in neighborhoods and stores, Cindy Erevia has been decorating for Thanksgiving Day. According to Erevia, she does not forget Thanksgiving, and she does not overlook many other holidays, either.

Located near the intersection of East Ridgeway Avenue and Northeast Seventh Street, Hermiston, Erevia's front lawn is crowded with decorations. Sixty-five scarecrows are on display,



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Cindy Erevia, a lifelong Hermiston resident, poses with her Thanksgiving Day decorations on Friday, Nov. 12, 2021.

and they share the lawn with many turkeys and more.

Scarecrows hold a special place in Erevia's heart, "because they're cute," she said. She has nearly 200

more of them in her home. Because of their association with the harvest, and fall, the scarecrows fit in with her Thanksgiving decorations, she said.

She has names for some of her scarecrows, she said. They mean a lot to her, just as all of her decorations are important to her. One 5-foot, inflatable turkey, for instance, makes her smile as she talks about it and the good deal she got on it. It cost her \$5 at Home Depot, she said.

Getting a bargain is part of the fun, she said, and she goes to local stores after a holiday to look for discounted items.

Another fun part of her collection-and-display hobby is seeing the happiness she creates for other people, she said. According to Erevia, people frequently stop in front of her home, marvel at her displays and take photos.

"It makes me really

happy," she said.

And she said she thinks she has inspired other people, including one neighbor, to create their own displays, and this makes her glad, too.

It takes her around a week to make a display such as the one she has now, but taking it down is a quicker process. And once it is down, she starts building the next arrangement. Thanksgiving and Christmas are her favorites, but she also does Valentine's Day, Easter, St. Patrick's Day, Mother's Day and more. She missed Veterans Day this year, but she said she usually does that one, too.

One of her three children helps her on occasion, she said. Her son, who is an "excellent painter," she said, will build snow sculp-

tures and then paint them. On one recent Valentine's Day, he made a beautiful snow swan, according to Erevia.

She started this hobby five years ago, she said. A lifelong Hermiston resident, she used to live in a remote location. Back then, it did not make much sense to decorate, she said, so she did not place any decorations on her home. Then five years ago, she moved to the town's center, where she currently resides. Now, as people can see her work, decorating makes sense, and she is constantly at work doing it, she said.

Her next decoration, for Christmas, will start after Thanksgiving and it will take a couple of weeks to complete.

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