



Virginia Scholastic Chess Association

Sunday, May 17, 2020

My fellow members of the VSCA—Players, Parents, Coaches and our Volunteers:

We, the members of the VSCA Board of Directors, hope this note finds all of you, your families, friends and those you care about, safe and healthy.

The VSCA is at a crossroads. Because of three pending and critical staff departures this fall, we will not be able to continue as an organization without a significant commitment from new, dedicated volunteers.

At the end of this summer, Bart Mebane is retiring after 20 years as webmaster, registration and pairings coordinator, and board member. Gopal Bhagavatula, whose son Rohit is a graduating senior, is also retiring this fall after 9 years as treasurer and board member. Mike Hoffpauir, VSCA president and a National Tournament Director with 20 years of experience, is very likely going to relocate to Louisiana before the end of 2020 to tend to his elderly mother. Mike also has increasing commitments to chess at the national and international level which limit his VSCA involvement.

None of these departures are in any way related to the coronavirus pandemic. But, the loss of 50 years of experience, coupled with the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, means that the VSCA will need to change and adapt if it is to survive.

While the VSCA has split its activities between Central Virginia and Hampton Roads in recent years, the growth and success of the Hampton Roads Chess Association (HRCA) has made future VSCA involvement in that area unnecessary. Going forward, VSCA activity will need to re-focus its efforts in the Greater Richmond-Charlottesville corridor.

The only US Chess-certified Tournament Directors from the Richmond area who have worked at VSCA tournaments in the past year are Mike Callaham (VSCA secretary and Board member), Brian Garbera (former VSCA Board member) and Varun Natarajan (graduating senior at Maggie Walker). These are all valuable volunteers, but we need more.

Of our nine members of the VSCA Board of Directors, three are departing (Mike, Gopal, Bart), and four live in the Hampton Roads area (Tina Schweiss, Julie Wells, Cheryl Havens, Jeff Forbes). Tina, Julie, Cheryl and Jeff are also board members of HRCA, which is rapidly growing non-profit based in Virginia Beach. While they are and have been extremely supportive of the VSCA, they are not consistently able to staff Richmond-area events due to the distance involved and their HRCA commitments. The remaining two VSCA Board members are Mike Callaham, from Richmond, and Nailya Plaskey from Louisa County. As mentioned earlier, Mike has his own chess organization and commitments. Nailya has three young children and hosts a local chess club. Both already volunteer for the VSCA as much as their schedules allow.

There is currently very little parent involvement in the Richmond area. Unless that changes drastically, and immediately, the VSCA will not be able to continue. This is not about occasionally helping out at a tournament if your child happens to be playing. It's about a dedicated commitment to the organization. If an event is on the calendar, it has to happen, and there have to be enough volunteers to support it, both on the front lines and behind the scenes.

What we need are a President, Treasurer, Board Members, Tournament Directors, registration and pairings coordinator, webmaster, newsletter editor, and volunteers to handle scheduling, supplies, awards. We also need ideas and vision.

Being President or Treasurer is more than a title, it requires experience and knowledge of how to run a non-profit organization and how to properly maintain the books, file the annual taxes, prepare the periodic financial reports, and remain compliant with federal statutes governing the operations of a 501c(3) non-profit organization. Learning these things "on the fly" is risky, missteps can be costly.

Once the pandemic has stabilized, the options for the VSCA are:

1. Continue the current program of monthly or semi-monthly tournaments.
2. Continue holding events on a more limited basis.
3. Reorganize and continue to support scholastic chess in other ways. (But some form of income or fund raising would be needed.)
4. Dissolve the organization.

This summer the current Board of Directors will have to choose of these options. Your response to this email will help to determine our choice. Let us know your thoughts ... we want to hear them. Please send them to: vsca.entries@gmail.com

For the Board, and wishing you good health and good chess ...



Michael E. Hoffpauir
National Tournament Director and FIDE Arbiter
President, VSCA