



Annual Report to Scott County - 2023

The Scott County Chess Club strives to promote the game of Chess in Scott County and Mississippi – providing opportunities for persons of all ages and skill levels to learn and play the game. As part of our five-year anniversary, this report will include the first five years of existence and overlapping with the information in last year's report. Future reports will only include new information between July 1 of one year to June 30 of the next.

We begin by expressing our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the people of Scott County, and others outside the county, who have supported us since our inception. We could not have come this far without the support we have received.

The Scott County Chess Club was organized in May 2018 because of Aaron Thomas Baker teaching his father, Chris, how to play Chess. Baker, then 7, learned the game in gifted class while in the second grade at Forest Elementary School. The Bakers contacted Dianne McLaurin, branch manager of the Forest Public Library, about creating the club and meeting at the library. Two meetings were held inviting the public to show whether there would be support for the club. The Friends of the Forest Library group was supportive and purchased five Chess sets to help the club get started.

We adopted the name **Scott County** Chess Club because we wanted to convey the message of being open to everyone in the area. We first started using the meeting room at the Forest branch and moved out into the main area of the library for more visibility. Since the game is naturally quiet, it didn't pose trouble with other patrons. We established 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. on the first Saturday of each month to hold meetings which consisted of playing Chess and teaching the game where applicable. Before long, we had as many as 20 or more people attending regularly. Chris Baker initially assumed the title of founder and coordinator. The Club became an affiliate of the U.S. Chess Federation (USCF) as well as the Mississippi Chess Association.

In March 2020, The COVID-19 pandemic struck and the library shutdown, severely crippling us like it did many other activities. The library re-opened in September 2021 and allowed us to resume meetings. Many previous members had drifted away, but we saw new members show up to play and learn the game. Rebuilding has been slow, and we are not yet back to pre-COVID attendance, but we are making progress.

Through the connections made in the chess community across the state, and participating in tournaments in other locations, Baker took the club to a new level in November 2021 by hosting its first tournament. While visiting Roosevelt State Park for other activities, Baker noticed that Alfreda-Harris Lodge would be a perfect venue for a Chess tournament. Therefore, he organized the Roosevelt Chess Classic, named for the state park where it would be held and included individual and team players. This would become an annual event in November.

Baker recruited local businesses as sponsors to raise money for cash prizes. On November 13, there were 46 players who came from across Mississippi, and some from Tennessee, Louisiana, and Florida to Scott County to play Chess. First place winner in the Open section took home \$200 and other first place winners in the other sections received trophies. Prizes were also awarded to other players placing high in the competition. Friends from the chess community served as tournament directors.

The tournament was well received and caught the attention of the state chess association. State leaders brought the scholastic team tournament to Roosevelt State Park in January 2022 and more than 70 kids across the state participated.

On Nov. 19, 2021, Baker was a guest on “Good Things” with Rebecca Turner on the statewide radio network of SuperTalk Mississippi. I talked about chess, how it is played, its growth in Mississippi, and our club.

One of our reasons for choosing the library as our regular meeting location is that it is a great hub of community activity and provides a great location. Forest has the only branch open on Saturdays. While we have had good turnouts, some people said they want to come but the time was not convenient. In January 2022, a second meeting location was arranged at a local business for the afternoons of the same days at the library. However, the turnout expected did not materialize so for now, that option is suspended.

Most of our publicity had used social media including Facebook and some Twitter. *The Scott County Times* has remained generous in publishing stories. I send monthly email blasts to members and others. In January 2022, Baker started a club newsletter produced and distributed online for members and others interested in our activities. Baker realized in December 2021 that regular emails to members were too long. Therefore, the newsletter is available as a PDF and attached to email. All the details are made available without the emails being too long.

Baker received certification from the U.S. Chess Federation in March 2022 to serve as a club tournament director. This allows us to host tournaments and Baker to supervise rated games for USCF member players.

The club took another step forward in May 2022 by hosting its second tournament which was called the Bienville Chess Classic, named for the Bienville National Forest that covers much of Scott County. The idea here is to give as much of a local identity as possible to our events. This tournament series was slightly different in that it only included individual games and would include unrated games as well as USCF rated games. A special feature for the Bienville Classic is the championship award named for Beverly Jo Rhodes. She was a great Forest Library patron and former gifted teacher at Forest High School who taught chess to many students during her time. Beverly will forever be part of our program through the memorial award given to the first-place winner in the Open section.

We had more than 30 players participate in the first Bienville tournament which was significant since we were competing against high school and college graduations for attention during that time of year. Players came from across Mississippi and one player drove 17 hours from Florida to participate and ended up winning the championship. All the games were very competitive and included some of the best players in Mississippi who went down to thrilling tiebreaker rounds.

We have received continued support from the business community in supporting our tournaments through sponsorships. We have nine businesses in Scott County who have helped to fund our events. Donations are first applied toward the prize money for winners. After that, donations are applied toward the trophies and medals. Registrations have been covering remaining expenses. Remaining funds are kept for use toward the next tournament and any operating expenses.

On May 26, 2022, Baker returned as a guest on “Good Things” with Rebecca Turner on the statewide radio network of SuperTalk Mississippi. This time, he talked about chess tournaments and additionally how Chess is growing in Mississippi.

In addition to the social media and email blasts already used, a website was launched in September 2022. The site located at scottcountychessclub.org has been a wonderful publicity tool. It is designed not only for our club, but also as a comprehensive promotion tool for chess itself. There is a lot of information there about the game as well as what we are doing and what is going on around the state in relation to chess. Additionally, Aaron Baker designed the logo that we now use in our publicity.

In September 2022, the club had a booth at the Wing Dang Doodle Festival in Forest to promote the game to the public and raise awareness about Chess and our Club.

We have had multiple opportunities to teach the game. The Boy Scouts of America offers a merit badge for Chess and Chris is a certified BSA merit badge counselor. In celebration of National Chess Day on Oct. 8, 2022, we hosted a merit badge workshop for Scouts across Mississippi. Several Scouts came to Forest and earned their Chess merit badge. This will be a regular activity whenever possible.

In late October 2022, Baker was elected to the Board of Directors of the Mississippi Chess Association and then appointed as the vice-president. This will allow him to continue Chess support on a higher level.

In November 2022, we hosted the second annual Roosevelt Chess Classic and again saw a tremendous turnout at Roosevelt State Park with 69 players from across the state and continued support from our sponsoring businesses.

In late November, Chris and Aaron traveled to Hazlehurst to teach Chess to Scouts at the Winter Camp of the Andrew Jackson Council's Hood Scout Reservation. About 40 Scouts earned their Chess merit badges.

In December 2022, the club participated in the Forest and Lake Christmas parades to further raise public awareness of Chess, and this will become a regular activity.

In March 2023, Chris and Aaron were invited to Noxubee County where a group is trying to establish a chess program. We held an educational clinic teaching kids and some adults how the game is played.

In April 2023, we hosted the second annual Bienville Chess Classic and saw a strong turnout at Roosevelt State Park. We initially had more than 50 registrations, but some players had to withdraw due to various circumstances, leaving us with 45 players – still an increase over the first Bienville tournament. For the first time, we also had registrants for the unrated section which helped introduce new players to tournament action.

On June 1, Baker returned as a guest on "Good Things" with Rebecca Turner on the statewide radio network of Super Talk Mississippi. Baker was joined this time by a fellow chess leader as a co-guest. The main topic this time was building chess in schools across the state.

This concludes the club's general annual report for FY 2023.

Sincerely,

Chris Allen Baker

club co-founder and coordinator
Tournament Director