



NO PLACE AROUND TO PLAY LIVE CHESS?

NO WORRIES, LET'S CREATE ONE!

WEST PALM BEACH'S POSITIVE EXAMPLE:

CHESS IS OPEN - UNDER THE PALMS



West Palm Beach

When chess and real life combine they can work wonders – it may start as just an idea but then with some enthusiasm and persistence eventually result in satisfaction and joy for the many! This is how West Palm Street Chess was born following an idea by local resident Joshua Koehler.

By FM Alec Getz

Last National Chess Day (the second Saturday in October), the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority (DDA) officially opened the Fern Street Chess Park, a modest outdoor space where community members could meet to play chess. And since its inception, this place of shade and palm trees has housed over one hundred regulars. It wasn't always like this, though.

The embryo of chess in West Palm Beach was birthed by a local attorney by the name of Joshua Koehler who spent a sizeable part of his childhood playing chess. But as time went on, he found himself more and more astray from the royal game. As Josh tells me, "I'm a local government lawyer for City Hall and have been doing that for about seventeen years. My connection with chess, however, began in high school with my closest friend. We both went to college in New England and were exposed to the chess at Harvard Square. But although my friend was active then, I never played but always watched."

However, as was the case with many people, the lawyer explains to me, the pandemic reversed this trend: being mostly stuck inside the house, Josh developed a fervent appetite for the online version of the Game of Kings, which rekindled his interest in the world of the sixty-four squares. And so, as the pandemic was nearing its close, he was more than hungry for somewhere live to go and play. Josh elucidates further, "I'm forty-six now and started at forty-four. Even though I happened to find myself in chess late in life. My online playing, combined with my involvement with the DDA, makes me think about chess every hour of every day."

Creating a Street Chess Culture in South Florida

Florida, specifically South Florida, has historically lacked the tradition of outdoor chess in public spaces, a practice prevalent in other parts of the United States. Prominent locations like Washington Square and Union Square in New York City, Harvard Square in Cambridge, the beach in Santa Monica, and the chess parks of the St. Louis Chess Club have long been associated with this cultural phenomenon. However, the absence of such spaces in South Florida is where West Palm Street Chess (the name they chose for their social street chess group and use it for all the social media as well as their website westpalmstreetchess.com -Ed.) steps in to fill the void.

With its establishment and activities, West Palm Street Chess introduces a new tradition of outdoor chess to the region. It provides an opportunity for chess enthusiasts and curious passersby to engage with the game in a public setting. By embracing the concept of chess in the street and bringing it to West Palm Beach, the initiative not only offers an opportunity for joy (and pain) but also contributes to the cultural fabric of the community.

West Palm Street Chess bridges the gap that existed in South Florida's chess culture by establishing a tradition of outdoor chess in public spaces. It adds a vibrant and engaging dimension to the community, and enriches the local cultural landscape.

FM Alec Getz was a multi-time national scholastic chess champion and member of the United States Chess Federation's All-American Team. He received the gold medal at the Pan-American Youth Championship and came runner-up in the US Junior Championship. He has all of his International Master norms and enjoys keeping up with the game. In addition to his articles on Chess.com, he has been a published author for Chess Life and currently serves as Features Editor for *American Chess Magazine*.



LOCAL AUTHORITIES PROVIDE RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

And so, Josh says, when he, the chess enthusiast, asked for help in creating a place to play the royal game outdoors, the DDA did a little research and was able to open the park last fall in time for the chess holiday. Josh was able to get in touch with Raphael Clemente, the director of the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority, who also played a major part in creating the park. Raphael tells me a little bit about his role: "I've worked in urban planning for about twenty-five years now with the bulk of it being in the DDA, and I came on board here with the primary responsibility of developing programs and projects that were focused on quality of life and quality of place. With West Palm Beach, we have a growing residential population, and my role has been how we can improve the downtown public realm to be as inviting as welcoming as it could be. I've always sort of worn that hat in the way I think about our job as a special district that serves the downtown area. And we play the role of enabler, helping make these initiatives happen, whether that's with funding or connecting the dots and connecting the idea with a place that would make it happen."

Raphael says that usually he gets his ideas from the community, although he credits Josh with everything for this project. He tells me that when his long-time friend asked him for a favor that was right in line with his scope of work, there was no way that he was going to turn Josh's request down. As Josh explains it, "we were riding our bikes one day





alongside the ocean and we had gone to the downtown area. I said to him, 'it seems pretty straightforward to set up chess parks in the downtown for spontaneous, casual social interaction.' And for Raphael, heeding that suggestion was a no-brainer – he had his staff look at what was the best way to go about it and decided to start with a pop-up park, because outdoor chess tables are an investment, and he wanted to understand if there really was a demand for this park, given we're not Harvard Square or Washington Square or any chess park like that. We don't have that tradition in the same way as an urban area does, but the idea for the chess park came from the DDA as a natural part of their goal which includes promoting the downtown, understanding its mission in the idea of urban placemaking." DDAs, in general, are responsible for marketing the area that they serve, encouraging relocation to the area, beautifying it, and what's known as "placemaking" – gathering spots to bring the community together. And this is exactly what the chess park does. Explaining Josh's role in the park, Raphael continues, "Josh had pointed out to me other cities that had outdoor places where chess was played. And I seem to remember that being on a list of things that we could do to improve public spaces by activating them. I thought that's an interesting idea – let's do a little digging on this one. We found a location that was a great space but wasn't activated, so we reached out to the owners and proposed this idea as a pilot project. We always want to work with the community and get a buy-in first, so we went ahead and did it as a light, quick and cheap approach – as a pop-up. It was a smash hit. And Josh was important in inviting the local chess playing community to participate and come out to embrace the space, which we think was vital to its success and what's kept it going ever since."

Luckily for Josh, the park was situated right on a street corner that got a fair amount of traffic, so people walking in that area stopped by for a while. Josh explains, "as online chess felt more accessible and lent itself to everything great about the game, the next step was to find as many people to play as possible. The pedestrian foot traffic showed immediate interest. We immediately had people stop and talk to us and start to play. We got their contact details and now I have one hundred and thirty-four phone numbers in my directory of chess players, with one hundred percent of them walking by or observing us in a public forum."



WHEN BLACK AND WHITE UNITE!

West Palm Street Chess, and the newly-formed nonprofit group, The Street Chess Coalition Inc, are the results of an unlikely duo: Franklin Rivers and Joshua Pariente Koehler. Franklin and Josh, born in 1977, just five months apart, seemed to have nothing in common on the surface. Their appearances, races, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, levels of education, and professional experiences diverged significantly.

Franklin attended the Pentecostal church and worked to attain his educational degrees later in life, while Josh grew up in a privileged Jewish family that financed his college education. Josh pursued a career as a local government attorney, while Franklin ventured into entrepreneurship as a small business owner. Despite these apparent disparities, their connection through chess unveiled unexpected similarities.

Both Franklin and Josh discovered shared threads as their bond deepened. They learned that both their fathers had served in the Vietnam War, forging a connection through their familial experiences. Moreover, they both harbored a love for creative pursuits like filmmaking and creative writing. The joy of social interaction and the ability to captivate others with their vibrant personalities were also traits they both shared. They each found fulfillment in engaging with new people and drawing them into their world. And both individuals exhibited a deep concern for their community and a desire to serve a purpose larger than themselves. It was through the game of chess that these shared traits came to light. Without this unlikely connection, Franklin and Josh might have never exchanged a single word with one another.



IT TAKES TWO FOR SUCCESS

But the park is also what it is today due to the efforts of a man named Franklin Rivers, who's often referred to as the street preacher of chess because of his vibrant personality. Franklin's enthusiasm fueled the whole community in downtown West Palm Beach, drawing ever more passersby to the venue. And thanks mainly to Franklin's efforts, the park boasts the community that it has today and which comes out every week to play. In terms of Franklin getting people to come out to the park and play, Josh explains that "Franklin



FRANKLIN: 'HEY, YOU PLAY CHESS? COME PLAY CHESS WITH US, WE'RE HAVING FUN!'

JOSH, HE'S A KEY PERSON IN MAKING THIS WHOLE PROGRAM WORK. AND THAT'S WHAT PLACES ALL ARE ABOUT: THE PERSONALITIES, PEOPLE AND STORIES.

is vocal and didn't have any reservation in engaging the person on the street to say, 'hey, you play chess? Come play chess with us, were having fun!' he was constantly promoting it. The guy's a leader."

Raphael chimes in, "The guy's a ball of energy and a showman – like Josh, he's a key person in making this whole program work. And that's what places all are about: the personalities, people and stories."

Franklin learned chess from his uncle but didn't have the resources in chess that more privileged people had, so he spent time at the local recreation center. Franklin was never athletic, so chess suited him perfectly. In off time from his job at a cleaning service, he spent time at the park, where he attempted to create the diverse chess community he didn't have growing up. As Franklin tells, "my job is building what we started, getting people to come

out here and play, spreading the message and letting people know it's a joyful environment that will not only enhance your skills but also allow you to network and meet people from all walks of life. My vision for the park overall is to build a chess social club and have people from all walks of life come in and experience what West Palm Beach has to offer. We have regulars come on a weekly basis, on any given day the regulars are about ten to fifteen people, but we also have thirty to forty people walking up, which is great. And when you play outside it's a different form of energy – we're not quiet. We're talking and laughing, and there's so much going on. It's a whole different ballgame."



CONTAGIOUS POSITIVITY FOR A SNOWBALL EFFECT

In May 2022, Josh had the opportunity to meet Franklin at the future site of Fern Street Chess Park. Setting up a couple of foldout tables, Josh extended an open invitation through Nextdoor.com, inviting local chess enthusiasts to gather and test the potential location. Franklin, along with a few others, responded to the invitation and attended the event. Immediately, Josh recognized Franklin's vibrant personality – a force of nature that effortlessly made strangers feel like lifelong friends.

As Franklin played his first game against another skilled player, his enthusiasm overflowed. He exclaimed with excitement, declaring that this was the billed matchup of the day: "This is it! This is it! This is the matchup! Oh my god!" Josh assumed that Franklin and the other player were already acquainted, but to his surprise, they were not. Intrigued by their encounter, Josh returned home and shared the story with his wife, Jill. Strangely enough, Jill found Franklin's name familiar and decided to check her Nextdoor.com feed. There, she confirmed that Franklin was indeed the person Josh had encountered.

Jill explained to Josh that Nextdoor.com primarily consisted of negative posts, with people complaining about neighborhood issues or searching for lost pets or odd jobs. However, Franklin stood out from the rest.

FRANKLIN AND JOSH ANECDOTES

In the heart of downtown West Palm Beach's vibrant entertainment district – the lively 500 block of Clematis Street – a bustling scene unfolds on a Saturday night. The entire block has been transformed into a pedestrian-only zone, abuzz with partygoers seeking excitement. Amidst this vibrant atmosphere, eight chess games are in progress right in front of a popular pool hall and bar called "Lost Weekend." The supportive collaboration between Lost Weekend and West Palm Street Chess allows us to utilize two expansive 12-foot tables set up on the sidewalk. This arrangement has become a regular occurrence on Saturday nights, typically from 8 pm until midnight. It serves as a testament to the pool hall's commitment to fostering the chess community in the area.

Engrossed in his own game, the sound of a familiar voice captured Josh's attention. It resonated through an amplifier, drawing his gaze upwards. There stood Franklin, microphone in hand, his exuberant energy

His posts exuded positivity, personal anecdotes, and engagement with the community. Whether he was sharing a video of himself dancing with the question, "Do you like how I dance?" or seeking opportunities to meet up and have fun, Franklin's interactions displayed a genuine connection with people he had recently met. His ability to create an atmosphere where everyone felt like old friends intrigued Josh, and he realized he had found a partner in his mission to bring more local chess players into the fold.

During the summer of 2022, Josh entrusted Franklin with his chess gear backpack, which contained four silicone mats, four digital chess clocks, and four chess sets (quadruple weighted plastic pieces with a median set weight of 56 ounces). Until that point, the two had been organizing street chess meetups on Saturday afternoons. It had originally started with Josh meeting a medical doctor friend named Stu for afternoon chess at a coffee shop. However, Franklin had an idea that would revolutionize their chess gatherings. He decided to shift



palpable as he exclaimed, "Y'all know what time it is!" Caught up in the moment, Josh enthusiastically shouted back, "What time is it, Franklin!?" Without missing a beat, he responded with gusto, "It's CHESS TIIIIIME!" The chess players gathered around the tables burst into laughter, sharing in the infectious joy and camaraderie fostered by this unique chess experience on Clematis Street.

In a supermarket parking lot, I eagerly wait for a group of individuals I've only known for a short period, a month or two at most, to join me in my car. Our destination? North Miami on a Saturday

night, specifically the hotel bar of the renowned Eden Roc Hotel, which hosted the prestigious 2022 Meltwater Champions Chess Tour / FTX Crypto Cup. With no detailed plan in place, we embark on this spontaneous adventure. Our intentions are simple: arrive after 9 pm, valet the car, set up our chess sets at the bar, and hope to engage with a grandmaster or two. This was the very tournament where Magnus and Hans were famously photographed playing chess on the sandy beach, just weeks before their momentous match.

Until very recently, this entire block had been closed to vehicle traffic, allowing businesses to set up tables, games, and a performance stage in the middle of the road. The lively atmosphere featured live music, dining, drinking, and dancing, drawing in a diverse crowd. It was within this dynamic setting that West Palm Street Chess was born. Franklin, with his captivating personality, engaged with the people who were drawn to the chess tables, collecting their phone numbers. He then passed these numbers on to Josh, who took on the role of building the organizational infrastructure for West Palm Street Chess.

Josh created group texts and threads to keep the growing community of chess players informed about the upcoming meetups. Meanwhile, the Saturday night event on the 500 block remained a constant, consistently attracting new players each weekend. The pedestrian energy and enthusiasm were palpable, as the chess tables became a central part of the block's festivities.

What made West Palm Street Chess even more special was the dedication of Franklin and Josh to documenting the chess activity. Armed with their iPhones, they took countless photographs and videos that showcased the unique atmosphere of the gatherings. They diligently uploaded this content to various social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, NextDoor, Twitter, and YouTube. Through these visual representations, they aimed to demonstrate the authenticity of the community they were building, dispelling any doubts and inviting others to join in on the experience.

The first to arrive is Miguel, a former FBI agent from New York City. Soon after, Franklin joins us. Lastly is Dana, who works

as a chef on Caribbean cruising yachts. Filled with good music and contagious laughter, we embark on our journey southward. Upon arrival, we find our way to the pool bar, where we promptly set up our chess sets and immerse ourselves in the game. As the night progresses, several Meltwater event employees join us, as well as a notable Grandmaster, adding to the excitement. We engage in rounds of Bughouse. The clock strikes midnight, and I gaze around me, taking in the surreal atmosphere, it strikes me – I've just met these incredible individuals, and it's all thanks to the unifying power of chess.



Sunday mornings at the Fern Street Chess Park offer a family-friendly atmosphere from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. It's a time when many children arrive accompanied by their parents, and some of these young players exhibit remarkable skill, surpassing even adults



Kai Abuan, Nora Ahmed, Maximilian Bergler, Wolfgang Bergler, Colby Bennardo, Dr. Stu Bagatell, David Carrell, Julian Cassanetti, Mikey Feneloncosta, Lanier Glenn, Cairo Glenn, Nicholas Gardner, Farit Gazizov, Daniel Gazizov, Jeremy Gauthier, Nolan Gauthier, Ashley Goldstein, Vanelly Geiloard, Christopher Gween, Aidan Gween, Rowan Gween, Susana Gween, Jonathan Jadunandan, Rigel Jadunandan, Luis Murga, Mamie Ocean, Quentin Thaddies, Andre Thaddies, Jeannie Tan, Jamie Roberts, Benjamin Rodney, Franklin Rivers, Diego Vasquez, Luca White, Georgina White, Duane White, Christine White, Liliana Krol-Wieczorek, Michalina Wieczorek, Radoslaw Wieczorek, Antosia Wieczorek, Stefania Wieczorek, Blair Williams, Casper Young.
Franklin Rivers is front and center. Josh Koehler is on the left side of the photo crouching. Photo by Michael Dillow

in their chess prowess. Among them is Rigel, whose father hails from Suriname. Recently, he shared victory in our kids' blitz tournament with a young visitor from Poland, who happens to be Antosia's cousin. Antosia, a courageous young girl undergoing medical treatment at the Paley Institute in Palm Beach County, has gained a following of 28,000 on Facebook, where her parents share their experiences to raise awareness about a rare birth condition. Despite their challenging circumstances, Antosia and her two younger sisters excel at chess, often catching opponents off guard with their talent. With their blonde hair neatly styled in pigtails, adorned with flowers, they exude both politeness and a competitive spirit, leaving many adults resigned to defeat.

In one corner of the park, Franklin, sporting a sleeveless shirt, tattoos and gold teeth, faces off against Antosia, who sits in a wheelchair following her recent medical treatment. Engaged in a spirited 5-minute game, Franklin fills the air with his chatter and laughter, while Antosia remains focused and silent, a serene smile gracing her face. Suddenly, Franklin looks up and exclaims, "What!? What!? Look who it is! What!?!?" A middle-school aged boy named Michael has just arrived, accompanied by his father. Michael, known for his love of blitz chess and his penchant for trash-talking, finds in Franklin a mentor figure. We affectionately refer to Michael as "Michael 3000," envisioning his future success and rising ELO rating. In the midst of fending off Antosia's meticulous attack, Franklin leaps to his feet, engaging in a secret handshake with Michael 3000, consisting of ten intricate steps. The ritual

concludes with a loud exclamation of joy from Franklin, who then proceeds to dance in a circle. As I savor my black coffee, I take in this heartwarming scene, appreciating the unique bonds formed through chess.

A MESSAGE FOR THE LIKE-MINDED

In closing, I asked Josh and Raphael if they had any message for our readers. Josh's answer was that there could be a huge demand for a park like this if the local community decided to take the initiative and act.

"I'm not a prodigy but just an average guy. Any community can do this. Obviously, you need to know who to contact to make it happen; you need that financial background and passionate desire to have it in your community. But since I work for City Hall, I know that cities want to have interconnected, healthy places. You're going to be surprised by the kind of response you get, with the diversity of race, religion, ethnic background, old homeless people, students, kids, experts, masters as well as beginners. Everyone's mixed in there and interacting with each other. I've really been struck by how everyone's unified by chess and how all those distinctions I mentioned go out the window when you're just joking around, having fun and trying to checkmate your opponent – unless you're like me and trying to flag the guy."

Raphael tells things from his perspective; based on his experience with the DDA, he says that one element doesn't make a project work. It's got to be a combination of elements: the right place at the right time



and having the people that are going to utilize it and make it successful.

“We tend to rather over-think things and focus a bit on the big projects and heavy lifts – but really thinking small and on a more intimate level for public spaces could have a big bang for your buck. Not everything needs to be large-space or expensive; these small investments in public realm activation by inviting people to come out and do something like play chess can yield big benefits, especially when you have smaller places to work with, which in many cases in urban districts is all you’ve got. I do see this growing and maybe we’ll add other tables and other locations. But I just want to say: come out, play chess and explore our downtown. We’re a unique place with character and charm. And I’m thrilled that this park has been a success. The thing that makes my job fun and exciting and keeps me motivated to come to work every day is being able to work with the community to make this stuff happen.”

In their efforts to connect with the community members, Josh and Franklin realized they needed to go beyond being just an informal social group. They wanted to engage in community activism, which led them to establish a Florida not-for-profit organization called “The Street Chess Coalition, Inc.” They have recently completed the incorporation process and are currently in the application stage for 501(c)(3) status.

The purpose of The Street Chess Coalition can be described through their threefold mission:

- 1) advocating for public chess infrastructure as a way towards making chess more accessible to the general public, especially those who may not have easy access to traditional chess clubs or venues. This includes initiatives such as creating outdoor chess spaces in public parks or installing permanent chess tables in public areas or working with local businesses to set up outdoor chess boards;
- 2) serving as an umbrella organization for the numerous community groups in our area that lack chess resources, but have incredible dedication from volunteers and mentors, etc. in order to marshal the incredible and untapped human resources of the volunteer community organization model. By working with volunteers, partner organizations, and local businesses, the Street Chess Coalition can leverage the collective skills

A model for the spread of chess infrastructure in communities throughout the United States

The accomplishments of West Palm Street Chess can serve as a valuable model for creating chess infrastructure in communities where it previously did not exist. Here is a step-by-step approach that can be followed:

1. Utilize social media tools: Start by using platforms like Nextdoor.com to attract chess players who may not be part of a chess club or participate in tournaments. Reach out to unrated players who play online and engage them in the local chess community. Use social media to promote the chess culture, sharing photos and videos of the activities.
2. Play in public places: Choose a highly visible location with high pedestrian traffic and play chess in public during peak hours. This will generate curiosity and attract more people to join in. Collect the names and phone numbers of interested players to stay connected and grow the chess community through text messages and social media updates.
3. Approach local government: Reach out to the Parks & Recreation Departments or local elected officials to discuss the possibility of installing temporary, low-cost large bistro tables with chess boards imprinted on them. These tables can be placed in publicly accessible areas to create a visible presence for chess. Include storage boxes with chess pieces that remain with the tables at all times, secured with super glue to prevent loss or theft.
4. Document activity and gather evidence: Take photographs and document the organic chess activity happening at the site. This evidence will be useful to showcase the demand and usage of the temporary “pop-up” chess park.
5. Make a final presentation to local government: Once the demand for chess has been established and the temporary park is successful, make a detailed presentation to the governing body of the local government during the “public comment” portion of their regular meeting. Advocate for the allocation of funds for permanent chess infrastructure, such as concrete or stone tables. Highlight the positive impacts and community-building attributes of chess infrastructure.
6. Advocate persistently: Follow up the presentation with emails and phone calls to elected officials, city administration, city managers, and parks & recreation directors. Emphasize the benefits and positive impacts that chess infrastructure can bring to the community. Continuously advocate for the investment in permanent chess tables, as they can have a lasting impact.

By following these steps, demonstrating the demand and positive community impact of chess, and engaging with local government officials, it should be evident that investing in chess infrastructure is a logical and valuable decision.



American Chess Magazine will present this award at a ceremony in West Palm Beach on June 12. Senior Editor Pete Tamburro will make the presentation.

and efforts of many individuals to achieve its mission of building a stronger chess community and promoting the benefits of the game to a wider audience;

- 3) advocating for the introduction of chess into the public school curriculum as a step towards building a stronger and more diverse chess community. By exposing young people to the game of chess early on, The Street Chess Coalition can help to cultivate a new generation of chess players and enthusiasts.

Their non-profit’s corporate purpose is to preserve, promote and advance the cultural significance of chess as a game, art, science and sport, through community outreach and engagement; to inspire, whether in victory or in defeat, the qualities of perseverance, mental resilience,

critical thinking, circumspection, courage, discipline, determination, humility, fair play, foresight, passion, creativity and poetic originality, while building self-image and self-esteem, encouraging personal growth, enriching the mind, and cultivating hope, happiness and a sense of fulfillment in people of all ages and backgrounds.

The Street Chess Coalition, Inc. represents their grand vision for a broader



impact, aiming to serve as a potential model not only for West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, and Florida, but also, potentially, for the entire United States.

COMPLEMENTARY EFFORTS

For many years, Bryan Tillis has played a crucial role in the chess community of Palm Beach County as the founder of Palm Beach Chess and an active tournament organizer and arbiter. His dedication to the game has led him to become the current President of the Florida Chess Association. Within this existing chess framework, West Palm Street Chess serves as a unique and complementary venue for non-traditional chess, offering an alternative to the more traditional chess club setting provided by Palm Beach Chess.

While Palm Beach Chess focuses on providing a traditional chess club experience, West Palm Street Chess offers a distinct and unconventional approach to the game. By organizing chess activities in public spaces and promoting outdoor play, it brings a dynamic and engaging dimension to the chess scene in the area. This non-traditional setting appeals to a broader audience and provides an opportunity for people to enjoy chess in a more casual and social environment.

Rather than competing with Palm Beach Chess, West Palm Street Chess serves as a valuable addition to the chess community. It expands the reach of chess and attracts new enthusiasts who may be more inclined towards the informal and interactive nature of street chess. By offering different experiences and catering to diverse preferences, both Palm Beach

Chess and West Palm Street Chess (and The Street Chess Coalition) contribute to the overall growth and vitality of the local chess scene.

Chess and West Palm Street Chess (and The Street Chess Coalition) contribute to the overall growth and vitality of the local chess scene. Otis Wilson, is another prominent figure in the South Florida chess community, particularly in Broward County, which falls between Palm Beach County and Miami-Dade County (represented by the 954 area code). Besides being an active tournament organizer in the region, Otis is the mastermind behind [954chess.org](https://www.954chess.org).

He has been making regular trips from Broward/Miami-Dade County to join us at West Palm Street Chess on Saturday nights, along with his students, for spirited games of speed chess. Curious about his commitment, I recently inquired why he travels such a distance for chess on a Saturday night. Otis responded that no one else is offering the unique combination of an active outdoor entertainment venue

and speed chess quite like West Palm Street Chess. It is this distinctive blend that draws him to participate regularly.

When playing street chess, Otis has a distinct style. He always dons a black hood that obscures his face, adding an air of mystery to his game. This signature look has become synonymous with his presence at West Palm Street Chess.

Otis’s involvement and support highlight the significance of West Palm Street Chess in the chess community. The initiative’s ability to merge chess with a vibrant outdoor nightlife experience attracts dedicated chess enthusiasts like Otis, who appreciate the unconventional yet engaging atmosphere it provides. Through his participation, Otis has contributed to the growth, legitimacy and success of West Palm Street Chess, reinforcing its position as a leading destination for chess enthusiasts in the region.



HOW TO JOIN AND WHERE TO FIND THEM?

Regular meetups on the 500 block of Clematis Street in downtown West Palm Beach occur on Saturday nights, from 8 pm until well after midnight. Regular meetups at the Fern Street Chess Park in downtown West Palm Beach occur on Sundays, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Regular meetups in downtown Lake Worth Beach occur on Mondays, from 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm.

Everyone is welcome: individuals of all ages, races, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual orientations, and physical abilities – children, adults, elderly people, disabled individuals, and more – gathered around the chessboards, engaging in the game and building connections with one another. By joining this group you will be able to play chess in the rain, sip on coffee or beer, dance to music, engage in flirtatious banter, and have discussions on serious topics such as race relations and the criminal justice system. Also, you can join conversations on personal matters such as family, work-related challenges, legal issues, and aspirations for the future, all while feeling empowered by the new connections made through chess. Feel free to visit their newly launched website <https://www.street-chess.org/>