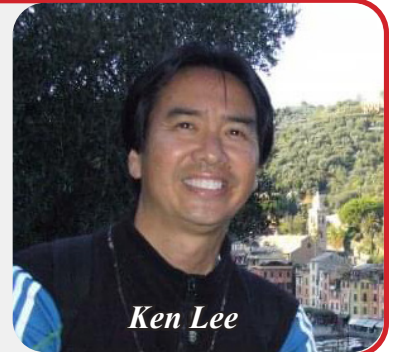


Building Community Through Chess

Ken Lee



Ken Lee

Gelareh Golanbar has been part of the chess community since 2019 when her eldest daughter, Adrina (10), first picked up a chess piece at Medina Elementary in kindergarten. Eventually, Gelareh served as a co-chair of the PTA run Medina Chess Club, which is the biggest and one of the most respected elementary school chess clubs in Washington state. Her youngest daughter, Liana (7), also plays competitive chess.

I sat down with Gelareh to chat about being a chess parent and what the game of kings has meant to her and her family.

Ken: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by *Northwest Chess*.

Gelareh: Thank you. When I read your article about AG Bob Ferguson, I knew that I would enjoy connecting with *Northwest Chess* magazine. I enjoy the way you present information about chess in such a personal and joyful way.

Reading your articles makes me feel like I'm part of a larger community. One of the reasons I agreed to do this interview is because I hope this article inspires other chess parents to get out of their comfort zone and volunteer.

I think there's a common misconception that you have to be a really

strong chess player in order to help out in the chess community. That's simply not true. Really, the most important thing is enthusiasm.

Ken: How did you first become involved in the chess community?

Gelareh: Around 2019, my daughter's kindergarten teacher at Medina Elementary introduced us to our school chess club. Her first coach was Coach Wendy Ruppel. It was prior to COVID and I really was amazed at how she took to it so quickly.

Soon after, I started volunteering at Medina Elementary, and I was drawn more and more to the chess club. Even though I didn't play much at the time, I really enjoyed watching my daughter play and learn so many life skills at the same time.

Ken: How did your volunteer work develop from there?

Gelareh: At first, I was involved in tournament planning for Medina All City and Queen's Quest—which has a goal of promoting chess to girls.

When Liana got started in chess a few years later, I really became involved as a co-chair of the Medina Elementary Chess Club.

Coming back from COVID was challenging, but

we were one of the first school chess clubs to manage to go back to in person competition.

Ken: What specific benefits are you seeing with your girls as it relates to chess?

Gelareh: I see great gains in self-confidence. I see that they understand the value of planning and hard work. As an extra bonus, we are developing new friends and connections through the chess community.

That's how we met Coach Sloan Setiadikurnia. He is our girls' primary chess coach and mentor.

Ken: What additional benefits do you see for yourself and your family?

Gelareh: As a family, chess provides us with a unique opportunity to blend our interests.

For example, we recently attended our first national tournament in Columbus, Ohio. It was amazing to be part of the Washington team. We, of course, connected with old friends like Siva Sankrithi and Coach Josh Sinanan.

They were so kind and helpful to us at our first national tournament. They helped prepare our girls to play very long tournament games.

Additionally, we made many new friends as well. I just love the chess community and how we support each other. It's like being a part of an extended family.

Ken: What are some new projects you are working on?

"I hope this article inspires other chess parents to get out of their comfort zone and volunteer"



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Gelareh: I've decided to up my game and go beyond being a volunteer. After developing such a great relationship with Coach Sloan over the past year, an opportunity came up to create a new chess center.

In March 2024, we had a soft launch of Grand Knights Chess based in Bellevue. <https://grandknightschess.com/>

I was brainstorming with Coach Sloan about the vision for this new school. We wanted to welcome both beginners and more serious tournament level chess players.

For our tournament level chess players, for example, we have a prerequisite that the students understand that they will be playing longer tournament style games over the course of the week.

We are very excited about Grand Knights Chess and, of course, my girls are involved in the program.

Ken: What's your vision for the future of chess for you?

Gelareh: For my girls, they want to continue to play, study and work hard to get better. They haven't expressed a goal to become Grand Masters. Even if they don't pursue chess in the future, I know that all this work will be helpful for them in the long run. For me, I do feel a lot of passion about creating community in the chess world.

I really love the idea of involving the whole family. I can sense that a lot of parents want to get involved. They just need the right kind of inspiration to make it happen.

Ken: Do you ever dream about having a big GM tournament in Seattle or even establishing a chess center here, like the one in St. Louis?

Gelareh: Well, I'm just getting started. But, why not!? Seattle has an established chess community. With support and vision, we could make it happen!

For those who want to support the chess community in new and meaningful ways, we recommend that you connect with Gelareh at gelarehgolanbar@gmail.com or Ken at kentonleeseattle@gmail.com.



*Gelareh, with Liana and Adrina.
Photo courtesy of Gelareh Golanbar.*