

Up to the challenge?

■ Longtime Willoughby checkers player takes on world titlist next week

Cassandra Shofar

CShofar@news-herald.com

For Richard Beckwith, it's more than the feel of checker pieces beneath his fingertips or their smooth forward movement on a flat board.

It's the beauty of the game, the depth in its simplicity that has fueled the 40-year-old Willoughby resident's passion for checkers during the last 31 years.

"I started very young because my dad played," said Beckwith, now a senior scientist at Ricerca Biosciences in Concord Township. "I even played in city club tournaments when I was 9 and started playing state level tournaments when I was 15."

Yet even after all these years, Beckwith still learns something new.

"It's just a beautiful game. I find it a great challenge. The rules are really simple, yet it's so deep in strategy," he said. "It just teaches you how to think and look ahead and visualize moves in a logical order. There's a lot of problem-solving aspects to it. I enjoy meeting players in tournaments. I've been able to travel

say even more difficult to master (than chess)," he said. "All the pieces have to move forward. You could make an error really early in the game and there may be no way to recover."

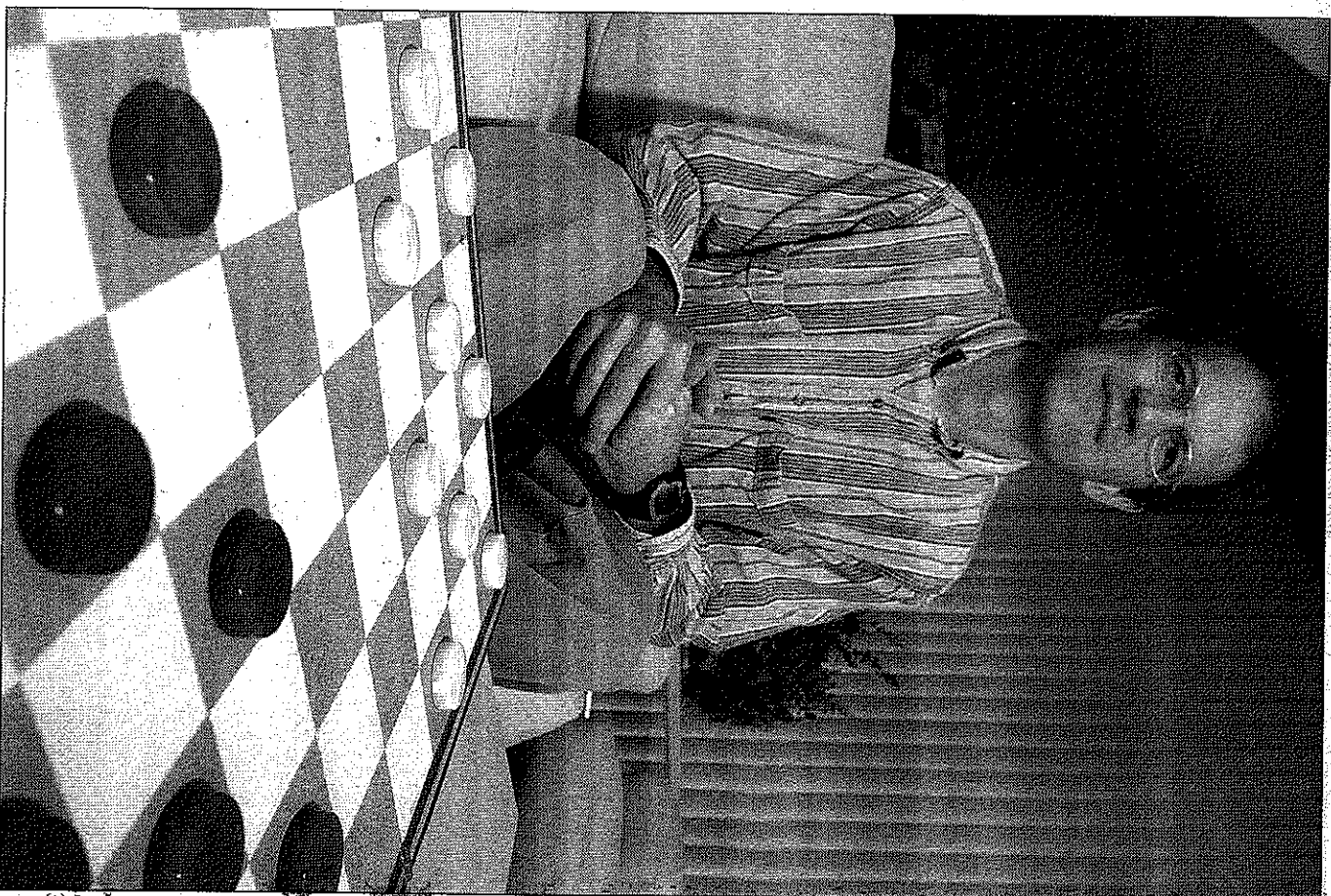
Beckwith prefers Go-As-You-Please (GAYP), which is the more familiar style of Anglo-American checkers. However, three-moves-checkers style — which involves a set of cards that dictate the opening three moves of the game — is also used in tournaments.

"There's more scope of play, a broader number of openings that could arise (with three-moves-checkers)," he added.

Over the years, Beckwith has honed his skills by playing checker champions, such as Alex Moiseyev of Dublin, Ohio, who came in first place during the 2008 World Mind Games in Beijing, China.

Next week, Beckwith, who won a world qualifying tournament in England last year, will be challenging GAYP world championship titlist Ron King of Barabodos. King came in second place during the 2008 World Mind Games, with Beckwith finishing seventh.

The world title checkers match — hosted by The American Checker Federation — will start Monday and run through Saturday (if necessary) at the Rodeway Inn & Medina Conference Center in Medina, Ohio.



Richard C. Beckwith is shown in 2008 with his checkers set.

around the world to play checkers.

While also familiar with the game of chess, Beckwith believes checkers can be equally as difficult a game to master if not more difficult than chess.

"A lot of people think there's nothing to checkers, that it's for kids. But checkers is at least as difficult to master, some would

It will consist of 24 games (as necessary), four games per day and is sanctioned by the World Checker & Draughts Federation.

"Ron's been champion since 1991. He hasn't even lost a single game, playing this style, in his last four matches, so obviously he's a tough guy to beat ... but

anything could happen," Beckwith said with a chuckle.

However, if it's a draw, King will retain his title, he said.

"So the odds are kind of stacked in his favor. He's done so many of these, it's going to be my first one," Beckwith said, adding he's a little nervous, but has been

preparing for the match all year.

"I've played (King) before, so it's not like we've never played each other," he said. "It's an honor to play, win or lose."

Spectators are welcome. For more information, call Beckwith at 440-725-3886.