

REMEMBERING ARKADIJS STRAZDINS

The New Britain Chess Club has been blessed to have great leaders throughout its history. By far, the greatest was the legendary Arkadijs Strazdins (“Straz”).

Mr. Strazdins was born in Latvia, and he achieved chess master strength as a young man. Early in his career, he drew a game with Efim Bogoljubov, the challenger in the 1929 and 1934 World Chess Championship matches. “Straz” served in the Latvian Army during WWII and moved to the United States in 1951.



Soon after becoming a New Britain resident, “Straz” joined the city’s chess club. In the first few decades, he gave many simultaneous chess exhibitions and served as club treasurer, secretary, and team captain. In 1970, “Straz” was elected NBCC president, a position that he passionately served for thirty-one years. In addition to this major role, “Straz” was instrumental in establishing a relationship with the newspapers to cover club-sponsored events and local chess news. Under his leadership, the club became the largest chess organization in Connecticut by the mid-1980s. In addition to his work as president and chief tournament director, he meticulously kept and preserved the club records dating back to his joining. Beyond the club, “Straz” was a staunch ambassador of Connecticut chess, having served on the Connecticut State Chess Association Board of Directors and competed in many state championships. For his decades of service to chess in our community, the CSCA honored “Straz” with a special banquet in 1997. He also received a lifetime NBCC membership in 2001.

Mr. Strazdins is etched numerous times in the NBCC archives. His biggest achievement, as noted in the NBCC Hall of Fame, was earning the most wins or ties for first place in classical time-controlled tournaments - an astounding seventy-one spanning nearly fifty years, more than double of anyone before or since.

Generations of chess players have been inspired by Mr. Strazdins’ devotion and zeal for the club. For five decades, his tireless efforts in this cause enriched the NBCC and chess throughout the region. In 2007, the club held the 1st Arkadijs Strazdins Cup, an annual tournament that is still held today to remember this amazing man.

No matter who you were, Mr. Strazdins would always welcome everyone with his charm, warmth, and old-world gentility. He was truly a compassionate and altruistic man and a staunch member advocate. On behalf of everyone whose lives were touched by “Straz,” let us take a moment to reflect on the life of this special person. His spirit lives on!