

ALL THE RIGHT

MOVES

Rebecca Lelko likes a challenge. The NDCL junior recently tested her mettle by competing in the Susan Polgar Chess Tournament in Las Vegas.

"I went to the tournament last year, but this year I won," Rebecca announces, smiling. "The competition is very fierce, so it was definitely an accomplishment."

kindergarten." Mrs. Lelko says. "The reputation of the education given by the Sisters of Notre Dame is quite well-known.

Going from Notre Dame Elementary School to NDCL was a natural choice. We were very pleased with the Notre Dame community – and it is TRULY, a COMMUNITY – and, again, the reputation of the high school spoke for itself. As we watched Jeff graduate earlier this month, we agreed that we had made the best decision for our children by sending them to NDCL!" Dave Lelko is manager of the City of Chardon.

"Jeff will be attending Florida Technical College," Rebecca says. "It's funny that we might both wind up at tech schools."

Sixteen-year-old Rebecca has been playing chess since she was four. "I watched my mother teach my older brother, and I was curious," she recalls. "Little sisters like to know what's going on." Her interest piqued, the young master-in-training continued playing, soon entering competitions throughout the local area.

"I joined the Vivacity Chess Club in Mayfield Village, and I also became a member of the NDCL Chess Club, starting in 9th grade,"

Rebecca notes. "There's a big group of players at NDCL."

She credits the academic excellence of NDCL for contributing to her success.

"I believe that being challenged in school every day helps keep my mind sharp, so that even when I'm not practicing, I'm still keeping my mind in shape," Rebecca explains. The sharp-witted student was also involved in the Ohio Math League competitions.

As a result of winning the 2007 Polgar tournament, Rebecca earned a scholarship to Texas Tech University.

"It's a scholarship for half of my tuition," Rebecca says. "I'm not sure whether or not I'll accept it yet. I still have some time to decide."

The Susan Polgar tournament, named after the quadruple Women's World Champion, is known to be especially fierce. "Everyone is nice to each other, but we all want to win," Rebecca states. "There is no lack of competition just because we're girls. No one grants anyone else any concessions. In fact, the highest-rated player at this tournament, as determined by the United States Chess Federation, was only 11 years old."

While established moves sometime lead to exciting matches, Rebecca finds they rarely determine the outcome.

"It's always cool to see a great move, and everyone studies openings, but you never know how a game may develop," she explains. "It's unusual to see textbook plays made by experienced players." The experience of high-level play has been an exciting one, she adds.

"The game itself is addictive," Rebecca describes. "I really enjoy the thinking part of the process."

Alfreda Lelko, Rebecca's mother, believes her decision to send both her children to NDCL paved the way for success.

"My husband Dave and I actually made the decision to send Jeff (and, of course, later Rebecca) to Notre Dame Elementary School, starting with

Alfreda Lelko feels especially proud of Rebecca's determination as she made her way up the ranks of mostly male chess players.

"Rebecca has gone to so many tournaments where she's been the only girl," Mrs. Lelko remarks. "She learned to hold her own against the boys. So often older girls tend to lose interest in games like chess – they get intimidated or they feel like it's somehow not feminine to compete with boys. Rebecca is now ranked within the top 100 female players in the United States under 21 years of age. I watch her win, and it almost seems surreal to me. It's almost like it happened in a dream."

The youthful champion intends to keep right on playing.

"I'm planning to keep working off my momentum," Rebecca insists with a grin.

"I'd like to see how far I can go. I'm not sure where I'll compete next, but I know I'll stay with it." **NDL**