Rubik's rules

by Jennifer Freeman

Joe Ginger of Canton, Ill., has sparked interest in adults and children alike by teaching a class on the how-to's of solving the infamous Rubik's cube.

RUBIK'S RULES - Teacher Joe Ginger looks on as student Jessica Calhoun shrieks in excitement after Ginger shows her the final step to solving her Rubik's Cube. Ginger teaches a class through the Canton Park District (Illinois) on the cube, with has regained popularity since it arrived in the United States in the early 1980s. CNS Photo by Jennifer Freeman. CURIOUS CUBE - The Rubik's Cube can purportedly be solved from any scrambled position in as few as 22 twists, but it typically takes even the experts at least 52 moves. CNS Photo by Jennifer Freeman. "When I am teaching the cube and when the people are working on the cube, all you see is smiles on their faces because they know soon they will be able to impress their friends," said Ginger.

Jessica Calhoun, a sixth-grader at Ingersoll Middle School in Canton, said her classmates always ask her to show them what she has learned. "

I drew quite a crowd this morning," she said during a recent session with Ginger at the Junior/Senior Center at Big Creek Park in Canton.

Calhoun said she has invited her friends and classmates to join the club but they deemed it "dorky" and have decided not to attend.

Jeannie Calhoun, Jessica's mother, said "(My children) thought I was crazy when I said, 'Hey, wanna go to Rubik's Cube class?'" But, she said, Jessica was eager to learn how to solve the cube and accepted her invitation.

"She still has to have the cheat sheet," Jessica said of their newly discovered mother-daughter Rubik's rivalry.

Jeannie Calhoun said her daughter is moving along at a much faster pace than she is, but the two are enjoying themselves, as are others who have joined the group.

Ginger's interest in the Rubik's Cube has been passed on to many people throughout the past few decades. In 1981, Ginger was president of the Canton Chess Club and taught players how to improve their chess games at the club. After seeing a Rubik's Cube in a store, Ginger thought it would be fun to teach the players how to solve the cube in addition to improving their chess games.

"The players loved the idea, so I was learning how to solve the cube when my wife, Sharon, got a booklet on how to solve the cube. I then decided to read the booklet so I could teach the cube much sooner," Ginger said.

After working with the players, Ginger and his family held a televised Rubik's Cube contest in 1982. One of Ginger's original "cubers," Sarah Richardson, was just 11 years old when she participated in the contest.

"I had it down to a minute and 10 seconds," she said.

Now, after having forgotten all she had learned the first time, Richardson is seeking Ginger's help again in hopes it all will come back to her.

"Once you get it down, it's easy," she said. "It's just a pattern."

Canton Park District Superintendent Jon Johnson and board member Kevin Stephenson were eager to help Ginger out with his Rubik's classes.

"This is a recreation center, and this is a form of recreation," Stephenson said.

Stephenson said he supports the idea of bringing new activities to the community, especially Ginger's, which people may not see as typical recreation. Ginger has plans to hold another contest this summer, sponsored by the Canton Park District. Ginger said he hopes more people will become involved so there will be enough participants to separate the contestants into age categories.

But what is the secret to solving the cube? Ginger said the key is to take it one step at a time.

"The real secret is this," Ginger explained. "Once a person solves the first step on the cube, they start to realize they can do it one step at a time, that you don't have to be a genius, but willing to have some fun and learn a few combinations."

Ginger said he is often asked if he can solve the cube blindfolded like the boy on television.

"My answer is this. I am working on this, but the best I can do so far is to solve the Rubik's Cube with one eye closed," he said as he laughed out loud. "To try and solve the cube with no help is like going hunting with no gun."

The Rubik's Cube can be solved from any scrambled position in as few as 22 twists. So far no one has succeeded in demonstrating this method. Some people can solve Rubik's Cube in 52 moves.

The following hints are from Rubik's Solutions Hints Booklet. For more help, including specific sequences and diagrams, check out the free downloads at www.rubiks.com. (Click on "Information," then "Shop," use the drop-down menu to select "Downloads," and click on "Free."

- The easiest way to solve Rubik's Cube is layer by layer, starting at the top. It is very difficult to solve face by face, and with billions of combinations, nearly impossible to solve by trial and error.

- Always hold Rubik's Cube in the same orientation while completing a layer. Remember the colors of the top center cube and the center cube facing you.

- Opposite colors never appear on the same cube piece. For example, no cube piece will have both blue and green, which are opposites, in its color scheme.

- Think in mirror images when positioning edge cubes. Two quarter twists of two touching faces turn an upside-down edge cube right side up.

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