

Burton Lerner

Burton (Burt) Lerner, 87, who impacted a generation of young chess players, passed away peacefully on April 11, 2017, in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. He is survived by his three children, Andrew, Deb, and Scott; his four grandchildren, Jamie, Matthew, Josie, and Crosby; and his sister, Lois Finkelstein.

For many years, Lerner was active as a board member and treasurer with the American Chess Foundation (forerunner to the US Chess Federation). But his enduring legacy is through his work with scholastic chess. Lerner's son, Andrew — who graced a 1977 Chess Life cover as the elementary national scholastic champion — provided the initial impetus. "Burt was a volunteer in the scholastic chess community from 1972, when I first started playing in tournaments, until he retired in 2005," said Andrew.

For more than 20 years, Lerner served as the main organizer and vice president for Collins Kids, a group of young American competitors led by legendary instructor, John "Jack" Collins. During Lerner's tenure, Collins Kids became regular fixtures at the U.S. Team Championships and at various international competitions. Lerner himself led delegations of scholastic chess players to Iceland and Israel. Lerner also served as a founding trustee for Chess in the Schools, which began in 1986 to bring chess to New York City's inner-city public school children, and which continues to this day.

To recognize Lerner's outstanding work with our country's young chess players, from 2005-2010 US Chess renamed the National Elementary Championship to the Burt Lerner National Elementary Championship in his honor.

Joan DuBois, who retired from US Chess in 2020, remembers Lerner's lighter side. She recalled how Lerner and his dancing partner once cleared the floor showing off their footwork while hosting the Icelandic Chess Kids in the Catskills. "When the band played, people stepped back just to watch," DuBois said. "It was amazing."

Lerner was born in Bronx, N.Y. on February 17, 1930, to the late Ethel and Harry Lerner. He served in the U.S. Army, graduated from Rutgers University, and settled in Tenafly, New Jersey, where he raised his family. Lerner was the president and owner of electrical contracting company, Tenavision, Inc., which occasionally lent its expertise to Chess in the School. In their Summer 1999 newsletter, Chess in the Schools specifically thanked Lerner and his Tenavision crew for rewiring their new offices.

The family is requesting contributions be made to The Michael J. Fox Parkinson Foundation in Lerner's memory.