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'International Mahjong Night' is July 30

Submitted

Local mahjong enthusiasts are inviting the public to "International Mahjong Night" on Thursday, July 30, at the Western New York Welcome Center, 1999 Alvin Road, Grand Island.

People are encouraged to bring their own mahjong sets and to share their own stories as part of the socializing.

The evening starts at 5:30 p.m. with sign-in and open socializing, followed by a mahjong show-and-tell at 6 p.m. and a history-of-mahjong presentation at 7 p.m.

The show-and-tell will highlight several sets from different eras and styles, including a vintage 1920s bone-and-bamboo export set, a late-20th-century Cantonese-style set, and an American mahjong set, with jokers and other features unique to the U.S. version. Owners will be on hand to share personal stories about how, where and when they acquired their sets.

Displays and accessories will include a 3-D-printed mahjong rack, mahjong mats and a mahjong table, so visitors can see the game's equipment up-close.

The evening is intentionally social – attendees can chat over pre-

MAHJONG MARKERS

VARIETIES: There are more than 40 different variations of mahjong. Most play American mahjong, which is different from the Chinese mahjong played at two Grand Island venues.

ON GRAND ISLAND: The Chinese mahjong group that started on Grand Island is a grassroots group that has no dues, sponsors, elected officers, funding or fundraising.

MEETING TIMES: The Grand Island mahjong group meets at 1 p.m. Mondays at the Grand Island Golden Age Center, 3278 Whitehaven Road; and at 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays at the Western New York Welcome Center, 1999 Alvin Road.



Tools of the trade for the game of Chinese mahjong include tiles, chips, labels and cases. (Submitted photo)

mium Perry's ice cream sundaes while hearing owners' stories and learning about mahjong's global history.

The date of the "International Mahjong Night" is close to the official Aug. 1 celebration of "International Mahjong Night" in the U.S. and Canada. One of the local players learned about it on the TV quiz show "Jeopardy!".

Grand Island's group of mah-

jong players meets twice weekly: at 1 p.m. Mondays at the Grand Island Golden Age Center, 3278 Whitehaven Road; and at 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays at the Western New York Welcome Center.

It's not just a Grand Island group, though. People attend from various parts of Western New York, including Lewiston, Niagara Falls and beyond.

John Chin is one of the found-

ers of Grand Island's informal Chinese mahjong group that started just a couple of years ago. He said the game of mahjong originated in China in the 1800s and then gained popularity in the 1920s as American mahjong, but with different rules and procedures.

Chin explained that, like poker, mahjong has many forms and is both competitive and fun.

"Mahjong is a more family-and-

friends type of game," he said.

Chin said the game caught on with Western New York-area players soon after he taught a course in mahjong in 2024 at the Grand Island Memorial Library.

When they play mahjong out in the open at the Welcome Center, Chin said, "People walk by and say, 'Oh, we want to learn.'"

He added, "A lot of the players, themselves, have brought their friends and family, as well."

Chin said the players who meet comprise a diverse group that skews toward older adults of varying backgrounds. The number of players who show up varies, but a well-attended night can include seven tables of four players each. Newcomers are welcome and the regulars are willing to teach those unfamiliar with the game, Chin said.

He noted the group has filed an application to be part of University Express, which offers free educational classes for older adults in Erie County.

Chin has even written a song about mahjong, showcasing its international appeal. You might just hear it if you attend the July 30 event.

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