

Omaha World-Herald

Sunday, August 6

Fans of bridge get major helping hand

BY RICK RUGGLES

COUNCIL BLUFFS - The world's two richest men shared their passion for bridge and signed dollar bills for teenage players Saturday at the Mid-America Center.



Bill Gates shares a laugh with Warren Buffett before a session of the Nebraska Regional Bridge Tournament on Saturday at the Mid-America Center in Council Bluffs. The two billionaires donated \$1 million to fund a program for bridge in schools.

Some of the teens who had lunch with Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Omaha investor Warren Buffett also claimed to relish bridge.

"It keeps you thinking," said Brandon Trammell, a 13-year-old from Atlanta who is learning the game through a summer academic program called Odyssey. "I really didn't know anything about it, so I was excited to learn another card game."

And some were less passionate about the card game requiring skill, strategy and teamwork.

"It's fine," said Rich Steffensmeier, a Papillion resident who is going into the 10th grade at Omaha Creighton Prep. "My grandma kind of forced me to do it."

The lunch involving Gates, Buffett and the students was one event in the six-day Nebraska Regional Bridge Tournament.

Linda Granell, spokeswoman for the American Contract Bridge League, estimated that 800 people from around the country participated in the tournament.

"Can you sign our shirts?" Larry Gilbert, a ninth-grader from Mount Pleasant, Iowa, asked Buffett. He already had Gates' signature on his shirt.

By the end of the event, he and many of the 27 other teenagers at the lunch possessed Buffett's and Gates' signatures on dollar bills.

Asked what advice he received from the billionaires during lunch, Mount Pleasant eighth-grader David Litchfield looked toward his buddy, Trey Hill, and responded: "Hey, Trey, what advice did Buffett or Bill Gates or whatever give us?"



When is a dollar worth more than a dollar?
When the bill has been signed by the world's

Gates and Buffett have created a \$1 million fund for junior high school bridge programs. Atlanta's Odyssey school tapped into the fund to teach bridge to students and to send six of them to the Nebraska Regional Bridge Tournament.

Buffett, chairman of Berkshire Hathaway Inc., seemed in mirthful spirits, saying his concentration is so steely while playing bridge that naked women could walk by and he would not notice.

Gates was more reserved.

"It's a great mental game," he said. "It forces you to concentrate and learn how to build partnerships."

Both posed for photographs, joking and talking with the students. During one group photograph, Buffett pretended to struggle with Mount Pleasant teenager Hannah Taylor. They were having a tug of war over his wallet.