Three Port Washington families love to compete with their rocks and brushes.

Jerry Packard of Port Washington was born into a curling family.

His great-grandfather John Campbell, who was a veterinarian in Poynette, brought a curling stone with him from Scotland in 1846. Packard now cherishes that keepsake, a 42-pound stone circled with a wood inlay.

Packard learned the sport when he was in high school, but it wasn’t until he was in college that he played it with the same fervor as his ancestors, going to bonspiel tournaments on most weekends

Packard’s grandfather and mother played the game. His wife Sara, their sons Jay of Mequon and Tim of Charlotte, N.C., and grandsons Colin, 7, and Campbell, 4 — the sixth generation — also love the sport.

The Packards are one of three Port Washington-area couples who belong to the Milwaukee Curling Club, which was founded in 1845 and is the longest continuous operating curling club in the nation. The club has its ice facility at the Ozaukee Country Club in Mequon, but may move to the Ozaukee County fairgrounds in

Cedarburg if the county builds a multipurpose structure there.

Town of Port Washington residents Jim and Maureen Schmit knew little about the sport when they went to an open house 23 years ago. Now, they’re planning the club’s 60th Milwaukee Kiltie Mixed Bonspiel which will be held Jan. 8 to 10.

“A friend kept pushing me to try it. I told her, ‘I don’t like winter, and I don’t like winter sports,’” Maureen said.

“Jim and I finally went to an open house. We tried it and signed up immediately. The membership was in the mid-20s to mid-80s in age and from all walks of life. But when you walked out on the ice, you were a curler. It didn’t matter what your job was.

“It made the winters go quicker because you can curl as often as you want.”

The club is open every day from October through March.

Maureen curls with a women’s league, Jim curls with a men’s league and they’re together for mixed and open leagues.

“We instantly had 200 new friends,” Jim said. “It’s a great group of people, a very sociable group. I enjoy curling with the guys, but I really prefer mixed teams.”

Scott Heatwole met his second wife Sue on the curling ice.

Friends invited him to join the club after his first wife Susan died.

It’s a game that appears deceptively simple.

Four-person teams take turns delivering eight stones, called rocks, from one end of a sheet of ice as close as possible to the center of a bull’s-eye at the other end. One or two team members may sweep in front of the rock, warming the ice surface to change the speed or direction of the stone.

Only the team that has the rock closest to the circle scores points — one point for each rock closer than an opponent’s rock.

The skill lies not only in getting the rocks close to the bull’s-eye, but also knocking

away other curlers’ rocks or strategically placing rocks to guard one that is closest to the center.

There is considerably more to it. The best player is called the skip. He or she stands at the far end of the ice and directs where the next rock should be thrown. In the observation area, closed-circuit televisions show the play on all sheets of ice, but the players can’t see it. They must rely on the skip.

“It’s a game that’s relatively easy to learn, but the strategies and the finesse of delivering the stone comes from practice,” Packard said.

“Some call it chess on ice,” said Dave Goelzer, president of the Milwaukee Curling Club.

Scoring eight points is much rarer than getting a hole-in-one in golf or a 300 game in bowling, Packard said.

It is so rare that when it happens, curlers said, all action stops on the ice so everyone can see the rocks’ placement before play resumes.

When Packard’s great-grandfather played, it was a man’s sport and few women played.

“You needed strength to get the stone to the end on natural ice,” Packard said.

His mother was on the girls’ curling team in high school. The team could only play when the ice conditions were right, Packard said.

“A horn would sound when the ice was good, and they would drop everything to go curling,” he said.

That changed with the advent of man-made ice.

“With artificial ice, it’s easy to get the stone to the end,” Packard said. “Women are often as good as men.”

“Or better,” his wife added.

Packard was the club’s ice maker for many years, but now his son has that job

and grandson Colin helps create the slightly bumpy surface needed for the stone to glide swiftly.

Real brooms were once used by sweepers, but now brushes are preferred. Curling shoes have a slippery surface on one sole and rubber grips on the other.

Curlers usually have their own brushes, but the stones, which are made of granite from an island off Scotland and cost between $600 and $1,000, are owned by clubs.

It’s a competitive, but gentlemanly game, Packard said.

“It’s a game that you play to win, but you don’t go out to humble your opponent,” Packard said. “I’ve never seen anybody cheat. There are no referees or umpires. You call it yourself. It’s an honor game.

“After you’re finished, you shake hands and say, ‘Good game,’ and sit around a table and socialize.

“The winning team buys the first round and the losing team buys the second one.”