For many people, the holidays were spent with family and away from work. For others, the break was a time to play chess.

More than 600 people competed in the 18th North American Open in Las Vegas from Dec. 26-29. The Continental Chess Association, which organized the event, noted on its Web site that the tournament is always held on those dates, "regardless of the days of the week."

Giorgi Kacheishvili, a Georgian grandmaster, won the tournament, finishing ahead of a field that included 10 other grandmasters.

In Washington, more than 200 players played in the 35th Eastern Open from Dec. 27-30, with Alex Yermolinsky, a grandmaster, coming out on top.

Students from 21 colleges and universities, meanwhile, competed for glory at the Pan American Intercollegiate Chess Championships from Dec. 27-30 in Fort Worth, Tex. The tournament is always held over winter break.

Two perennial powerhouses, the University of Texas at Dallas and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County tied for first, with the University of Texas at Brownsville and Stanford finishing close behind.

Chess activity in the United States paled in comparison with Europe, home of the two of the oldest holiday tournaments.

The Hastings International Chess Congress in England has been held every year since 1920-21, except during World War II. It has a rich tradition, although it no longer is as prestigious as it was.

This year's tournament, which included 13 grandmasters, began Dec. 28 and ended Monday. The winner was Igor Kurnosov of Russia.

In Italy, the Reggio Emilia tournament, named for the town in which it is held, has been an annual attraction since 1958. It once lured world-class players, and Viswanathan Anand, the current world champion, made his breakthrough there in 1991.

The tournament is no longer considered as elite, but this year's event, which began Dec.
27 and ended Sunday, included Ni Hua of China, No. 26 in the world, who easily ran away from the field.

Ni finished at Reggio Emilia with a nice final round victory against Mihail Marin of Romania.

In the opening, both players engaged in an elaborate dance for control of key squares, in particular f5.

Marin’s 25 ... Qb4 seemed logical, as two rooks are often worth more than a queen, but Black could not coordinate his pieces. Instead, 25 ... Qc7 26 Nd4 Ra1 27 Kh2 Nd4 28 Rd4 Qe5 29 Ng3 Qc7 30 Qd3 Ne6 31 Rd7 Qf4, and Black is fine.

Marin’s 29 ... Ng6 was a mistake. He should have tried 29 ... Nc7, although after 30 Nd6 Ra4 31 Qd2, White is better.

Marin gave up because in the final position he cannot stop White’s e pawn.