

# lifestyles

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## Passion fuels Magic for Koros competitors

By **AMANDA JEROME**  
For The Banner

Orangeville is a place for Magic. Not magic in the theoretical sense, but in the lure of a game called Magic: The Gathering (M:TG).

Since its invention 20 years ago, M:TG, a popular trading card game, has gained an estimated 12 million players worldwide. Its fantasy-based play has inspired comic books, video games, and soon a feature film.

Players of M:TG take it as seriously as any sport and compete in tournaments for cash and prizes.

Orangeville has its own M:TG team, the Koros Reckoners, who gather and play at Koros Games on Broadway. Varying in age and background, they're all drawn to the game for the same reason — fun and community.

"Magic is like if you took poker and chess and morphed them together with a fantasy setting," said Koros Reckoners co-captain, Thomas Kuster.

Kuster, 42, has been playing M:TG since 1994 and has a dream of being on the pro tour.

"The Reckoners have a goal of getting one of us on the pro tour and we will not rest until that is achieved. That, and it is way too much fun to stop," Kuster said.

"Our team plays every Friday night at Koros Games, where anywhere from 20-70 (people) have been known to come out for events. We all know and respect each other. It's a good vibe."

These sentiments are echoed by fellow co-captain Spencer Barge, 20.

"We are all a part of many communities in Magic — the local one, and the lattice that is the entirety of the game. Representing Koros Games, it's important to show people how the Magic community is thriving and contribute to the extended family that is every other Magic player in the world," Barge said.

"It represents an opportunity for greatness doing something I love. Along the way, the people, places, and events I get to experience are truly mind-sculpting."

Barge introduced his brother Carter to the game, who in turn inspired his friend Christopher Wesolowski, 17, to take it more seriously and start competing in events. Now they're all on the Koros Reckoners team together.

"I really enjoy the fact that Magic is a very well thought out and well designed



Photos by Victoria Ostiguy

The Orangeville-based Koros Reckoners traveled to Toronto last weekend to compete in a Magic: The Gathering competition at Ryerson University. The local team joined more than 300 other players in competition.

game," Wesolowski said. "The inventor obviously put a lot of time and care into the game, and this provides for a very fun experience, whether for fun or in competition."

Fun is really the name of the game for Wesolowski who explained despite the stress of playing in tournaments, the game always ends up leading to a good time, despite the outcome.

"Every time I go to a tournament, meet new people, play some games, and learn

more. I feel a sense of accomplishment and well-being.

"It's a great way to spend time and relieve stress. Sure, sometimes the stress leading up to a huge tournament is a little big, but the moment I take a seat, and shake the hand of the person in front of me, it's pure fun no matter how I do from there."

Wesolowski has been playing since 2009 and has seen the rise in popularity in the Orangeville area.

"Since I've been playing Magic I have definitely seen how it has grown in popularity. Even at Koros Games in Orangeville the number of people of all ages that show up to compete and have fun grows every week." He said.

"It also for sure makes me feel like a part of the community. It's great to gather with anyone and be able to spend time playing Magic, have some good conversations, and be involved."

Fellow teammate, Austin Matthews, 19, also enjoys the camaraderie the game provides and even met his girlfriend through playing it.

"One thing I definitely don't like about Magic is the stereotypes towards its players. Many people think that Magic players are all socially troubled shut-ins, but Magic actually forces people to come out of their bubble. When playing at a tournament you are paired up with a random stranger and you have to communicate with them in order to finish the game. This leads to small talk and possibly even a friendship," Matthews said.

"Magic has helped many people come out of their shell, myself included ... it is important to me because it's how I met my girlfriend, it's how I've met the majority of my friends, and it's given me something to do with my spare time other than sit at home drinking and playing video games like my peers."

The game provides friendship and enjoyment, but like any team, the Koros Reckoners take their craft seriously and meet up to practice before tournaments.

"There are countless dimensions to the game and everyone confronts it a different way," Barge said.

"Since the game appeals to people for a number of reasons, the vast majority of players actually don't see the different levels to it. When players make the leap into competitive Magic, that's when the true nature of the beast is exposed.

"It's not enough to be good for any competitive Magic player. A lot of professional players try to be perfect at all times, which has helped them evolve to the point that they're at. No one can be perfect, but the ideal does exist, and we try to find it every time we shuffle a deck."

The Koros Reckoners attended the Pro Tour Qualifier at Ryerson University in Toronto on Saturday (Jan. 18).

The event drew 341 competitors, and co-captain Spencer Barge placed 11th overall.