



MECHANICS'
INSTITUTE
Since 1854

2024 Annual Report



To Our Community,

We are very pleased to present the fiscal year 2024 annual report, which highlights past year achievements and shares our plans for the future. During this 170th anniversary of Mechanics' Institute, we celebrate a year filled with many accomplishments! Our vision for the future, anchored in San Francisco's Financial District, has five critical pillars.

Pillar 1: Strengthening Membership and Programming

2024 saw Mechanics' Institute working to restore membership to pre-pandemic levels of engagement. We have expanded and diversified our programming, providing programs and events to suit the wide and varying tastes of all those who enter our doors.

Program offerings have included author talks with top national as well as emerging writers; the opportunity for deep study via our James Baldwin and Marcel Proust seminars; a significant expansion of our book clubs; engaging writers' groups for beginners to advanced writers; discussion panels on subjects affecting our lives in the Bay Area; robust growth of our chess programs including tournaments, classes, lectures with Grand Masters, programs in our local schools, and chess in the community programs throughout San Francisco, carried out in partnership with a variety of other nonprofit and City organizations.

Through this work, we have grown our membership by 30% this past year and welcomed more than 5,000 visitors to Mechanics' Institute.

Pillar 2: Fostering a Diverse Community

We have been very intentional in building relationships with new board members, new staff members, and new community partners and program presenters who represent a broad-based and widely diverse constituency.

Some of these partners include: The Mexican Consulate, Mission Cultural Center, Downtown SF Partnership, Yerba Buena Gardens Conservancy, San Francisco Parks Alliance, Museum of the African Diaspora, LitQuake, UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, the San Francisco Public Library, Chinatown Community Development Center, Stanford d. School, Arion Press, California Institute of Community Art and Nature, the Chinese Historical Society, American Institute of Architects San Francisco, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theater, Heyday Press, *Catamaran Literary Journal*, The Bright Knights, WNBA, the San Francisco Giants, the Center for the Art of Translation, and the San Francisco Writers Conference.

We are so pleased to enhance the depth and breadth of our MI community, fostering important relationships that advance our mission and make our organization an ever-evolving place to be.

Pillar 3: Increasing Our Visibility

Even after 170 years, many consider Mechanics' Institute "the best kept secret in town". Raising our public visibility is a critical part

of our strategic plan, to allow us to build our programming, ensure healthy growth and attendance from members and the community at large, and elevate our earned and charitable income to keep pace with costs.

Through our public relations efforts this past year, we have welcomed more people into the library, increased circulation, grown membership, and built robust attendance at our chess and literary program events, meeting or surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

Through various local media channels, our work has received important coverage, highlighting several of our author talks and our annual scholastic chess tournament. In the year ahead, we will be launching a new website to include more modern features and be more user friendly.

Pillar 4: Enhancing Organizational Effectiveness

This past year we've continued to streamline our operations, built stronger staff engagement in decision-making, restructured some of our work teams, and worked hard to grow a sense of entrepreneurship as a work culture. Respecting our history and tradition while embracing new ways to think and act – these are key values that we carry out every day. Our team is "small but mighty" and we embrace all that each staff member brings to the table each day.

Pillar 5: Growing our Financial Health and Sustainability

This year we created a five-year financial plan to grow the financial health of Mechanics' Institute and to help ensure a strong and sustainable future for the institution. This blueprint calls for growing the occupancy of our building's retail and office tenants, increasing charitable income to the organization, building membership, and growing our endowment.

We are pleased to report that a jazz club, 7 Social, will be opening soon in our 65 Post Street space, and that we have extended the lease partnership through 2030 with our retail clothing store tenant, Indochino. And our building occupancy rate is currently at 80% and growing, as we continue to expand our office tenants of professional service firms, nonprofits, arts organizations, and other small businesses.

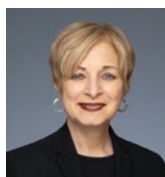
As we look to the year ahead, expect a beautiful and easy-to-use new website and branding, enhanced programming to include a chamber music in the library series, acquisition of new books and materials, writing classes for those throughout the beginners to advanced writer spectrum, authors sharing their work, new chess classes and tournament, discussion panels, and movies that entertain and provoke our thinking. And most of all, we'll continue to be here as your cultural home, a place to gather with old and new friends, stimulating our minds and feeding our souls.

Thank you so much for being a part of our community and for your support of our mission and we look forward to seeing you at Mechanics' Institute!



Tom Lockard

Tom Lockard
Chair, Board of Trustees



Katherine Bella

Katherine Bella
Chief Executive Officer

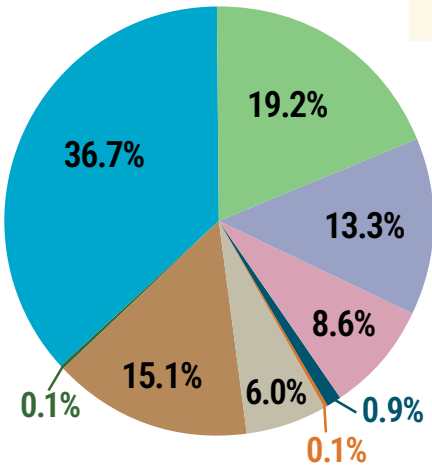
Financials



Income

Rental Income	\$814,263
Bequests, Donations, Grants	\$561,405
Chess Room Income	\$365,885
Event Income	\$38,239
Library Services Income	\$4,101
Membership Dues	\$252,221
In-Kind & Other Donations	\$640,722
Other Income	\$3,071
Restricted Funds Released	\$1,555,254

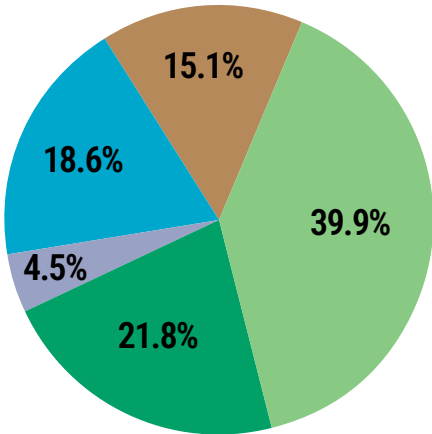
TOTAL Income **\$4,235,161**



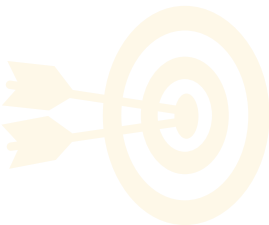
Expenses

Library, Chess & Events	\$1,690,922
Building	\$924,937
Fundraising	\$190,732
Management and General	\$787,848
Mechanics' Institute Special Projects—Professional Fees	\$640,722

TOTAL Expenses **\$4,235,161**



**Note: This financial report does not reflect the changes in the endowment returns. For more information, please see our financial audit.*



Mission

The mission of Mechanics' Institute is to create opportunities for people to enhance their lives by gaining useful knowledge, skills and experiences in sharing ideas with others.



Vision

Mechanics' Institute provides resources and nurtures communities that inspire people to explore, be curious, and express their creativity in our historic downtown San Francisco building and anywhere they are.



“

Petrarch remarked about his library: 'Here I gather all the friends I now have or did have, not only those... who have lived with me, but also those who died many centuries ago, known to me only through their writings... I am where I wish to be.' That's exactly how I feel when I'm immersed in a great book next to the stacks at Mechanics' Institute.

—Mason Duke, Program Committee Member

Library Stats at a Glance

NUMBER OF BOOKS
IN LIBRARY COLLECTION

110,000

MEMBER ENTRIES TO THE
LIBRARY (22% INCREASE)

17,233

eMATERIALS IN
CIRCULATION (eBOOKS,
eAUDIO AND eMAGAZINES)
(158% INCREASE)

7,376

BOOKS AND PERIODICALS
PURCHASED

2,400

VISITORS ON TOURS
OR VISITOR PASSES

2,000

Library

The Mechanics' Institute library is open six days a week for our 3,000 members to check out books or materials, to use as a workspace for digital nomads, or as a place for a quiet moment to read, write or study. The library continues to see an increase in both returning and new members since the pandemic: annual memberships have increased by 20% over last year; visitors accessing passes and public tours have more than doubled to 2,000; and librarians fielded 5,534 in-depth reference questions from members during this period.

In an effort to enhance our members' library experience, we have created a new staff role with this focus and also initiated new member orientations and reintroduced skill-share sessions including Tech Support Hour, Genealogy Research, and Exploring Library Resources. Our website blogs provide book reviews as well as updates on our latest book purchases and our archives and special collections. We are grateful to our members for their support as we expand and grow all of these programs.

Welcoming three library interns this year to support our collections and archives, we initiated partnerships with San Jose State University's School of Information and City College of San Francisco's Library Information Technology Department. These partnerships designate Mechanics' Institute as a learning site, enabling students to earn college credits through internships.

“

I am a writer, editor, and teacher, and having a member library at my disposal is the secret to my loyalty—and adoration. The assistance from such wonderful librarians is a privilege; it has enhanced my research in innumerable ways. And when I have a random hour or two downtown to sit and lose myself in work amidst the richness in the stacks and the warmth of the light slicing through the giant windows.... Heaven!

—Connie Hale, Author

“

With its fantastic library, perfect for writing and research, its diverse schedule of cultural events, and its standing as the epicenter for chess in San Francisco (the first chess club in the U.S.A.!), Mechanics Institute is one of my favorite historical treasures for work and play.

—Robert Mailer Anderson, Novelist and Screenwriter

Preserving Our Building

In fiscal year 2024, we have been very pleased to welcome a new retail tenant, 7 Social, at our 65 Post Street address. 7 Social will operate as a jazz club, music venue and social club adding vibrancy to our downtown Financial District neighborhood. We are also pleased to have extended the lease of our other retail tenant, Indochino, through 2030. Through these efforts and our work to build out our office rentals post-pandemic, we are delighted to report an 88% occupancy rate, and climbing.

Offices are used by a wide range of organizations, including nonprofits, attorneys, therapists, writers, startups, and individuals who need a workspace outside the home. Additionally, our conference rooms are rented on an ad hoc basis by a variety of groups. We are honored to be a professional hub of the Financial District.

We also replaced the flooring on the 5th through the 9th floor of our main building at 57 Post Street, adding beauty and improving durability for our tenants and visitors, and we are amidst a lighting improvement project in the library stacks as well as a comprehensive effort to increase security in the building.



“

Historic Mechanics' Institute looks like a library, feels like a library with its fine collection and provoking programming. This gem is not to be missed.

—Peter Wiley, Chairman Emeritus,
John Wiley and Sons





“

I still remember the time I attended my first Tuesday Night Marathon more than 12 years ago — the pregame camaraderie, the excitement of postgame analysis, and the silence that suddenly descended when the tournament director announced, “Start your clock.” A silence filled with expectations, excitement, and hope. Suddenly, I knew I belonged.

—Renate Otterbach, Member

Chess Programs by the Numbers:

INDIVIDUAL TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS

4,809

PARTICIPATING NON-MEMBERS

2,252

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

2,157

CLASS SESSIONS HELD

235

TOURNAMENT SESSIONS

107

TOURNAMENTS

72

UNIQUE CLASSES TAUGHT

32

Chess

Chess For the Community

The Mechanics’ Institute Chess Club is widely recognized as the oldest continuously operating chess club in the U.S. Welcoming Institute and community members at all levels of expertise, we offer classes, adult and scholastic tournaments, and lectures in a congenial setting throughout the year. We continue to host chess luminaries including GM Sam Shankland and GM Dimitri Komarov over the course of the year, who provide their expertise to players.

Mechanics’ Institute continues to see an increase in both members and non-members participating in tournaments who range in age from 5 to 85. We also have grown the frequency and number of tournaments held throughout the year including Tuesday Night Marathons, Memorial Tournaments, and Quads.

Chess classes focus on bringing people together, promoting inclusiveness, and breaking down barriers. Our year-round offerings include Introduction to Chess; Women, Girls, and Gender Expansive Individuals Online Chess Class; Monthly Chess Socials; and Classes with Chess Masters covering a range of topics.

Mechanics’ Institute also provides community engagement in open spaces through collaboration with the following partners:

- Downtown SF Partnership at Mechanics’ Plaza
- San Francisco Parks Alliance at UN Plaza
- Yerba Buena Garden Conservancy at Yerba Buena Gardens
- Chinatown Community Development Center and its facilities

Scholastic Chess

Our scholastic programs provide educational benefits beyond the classroom for youth in San Francisco public and private schools and to those who enroll in our chess camps or participate in tournaments. Our chess coaches provide enrichment activities through lunchtime and after-school programs, working with educators in each school.

Our annual Spring 2024 Championship, held in March, was the largest on record, with 353 participants. The tournament got a visit from Mayor London Breed and a write-up in the San Francisco Chronicle; it was the culmination of a year of expansion to 13 schools with 358 students participating in weekly games during their lunch and after-school program and with Mechanics' Institute chess coaches providing 454 sessions during the school year. In addition, our half-day chess camps expanded to 8 camps and 149 campers.

“

Eighty-five percent of our students are designated as socioeconomically disadvantaged; without Mechanics' they would never have access to high quality chess instruction. We've seen big improvements in our players' attentiveness and in their capacity for thinking ahead. Thanks to Mechanics' Institute's presence onsite over the last 15 years, chess has become an integral part of our school culture.

—Judy Viertel, Teacher and Librarian
at Marshall Elementary School



Participating Schools:

Alta Vista Elementary
Alvarado Elementary
Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8
Cathedral School for Boys
Alice Fong Yu Alternative School
Francisco Middle School
The Hamlin School
Marshall Elementary
Marina Middle School
San Francisco Schoolhouse
Sherman Elementary
West Portal Elementary
West Portal Lutheran
Yick Wo Elementary

Scholastic Chess by the Numbers:

SCHOOL SESSIONS PROVIDED
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

460

PARTICIPATING STUDENTS
IN SCHOOLS

358

PARTICIPANTS IN ANNUAL
SCHOLASTIC CHESS
TOURNAMENT

353

TOURNAMENT SESSIONS

348

NUMBER OF YOUTH
ATTENDING SCHOLASTIC
CHESS CAMPS

149

CLASSES

37

PARTICIPATING
SCHOOLS

13

CHESS
COACHES

12

Programs, Events & Literary Groups

This year we hosted a panorama of events to delight and inspire our audiences. A grand total of 982 members and 1,181 non-members attended. Our most popular events this year included:

- **Lunar New Year and The Year of the Dragon: What Will It Bring?** with renowned Bay Area author Maxine Hong Kingston; former San Francisco Chinatown parade director David Lei; and educator Linda Lei
- **Stories are Weapons** with author Annalee Newitz in conversation with journalist Alexis Madrigal
- **Cityscapes 2: Reading the Architecture of San Francisco** with John King discussing the follow-up to his Pulitzer Prize finalist book *Cityscapes*
- **Celebrating National Poetry Month** with California Poet Laureate Lee Herrick, San Francisco Poet Laureate Tongo Eisen-Martin, and Oakland's Inaugural Poet Laureate Ayodele Nzinga
- **New Year Wellness and Renewal** with Dr. Dacher Keltner and Dr. Aric Prather

“

I support Mechanics' Institute because it provides a rich array of cultural programming that educates and inspires. I always look forward to visiting the beautiful, historic space in downtown San Francisco and engaging in interesting conversations.

—Alex Gonzalez, Board Member

CinemaLit

Mechanics' Institute is honored to continue our CinemaLit series with Matt Kennedy. Matt provides a window for attendees into all aspects of filmmaking, adding a new dimension to the viewing experience for seasoned cinephiles and newcomers alike. This year CinemaLit featured the following themes and special guests:

- **Tribute to Summer Musicals**
- **The Hollywood New Wave** with special guest Michael Fox, a film instructor at UC Berkeley and SF State and a member of the San Francisco Bay Area Film Critics Circle
- **Shades of Gothic** with Lara Gabrielle, a film writer and researcher with a focus on the work of Marion Davies
- **Full Color Dramas**
- **Chess in the Movies**
- **Black Civil Rights on Screen**
- **Women Screenwriters and Directors** with special guest K.D. Davis, an assistant director who has worked on films such as *Creed*, *The Equalizer 2*, and *Wakanda Forever*
- **International Coming of Age Films**
- **Tribute to Elizabeth Taylor** with special guest David Thomson, the renowned film critic and historian
- **Documentaries** with special guests such as David Weissman, producer/director of the acclaimed *We Were Here* (2011) and co-director with Bill Weber of *The Cockettes* (2002)

“

As a place to screen and discuss classic films communally, CinemaLit at Mechanics' Institute is a true rarity. In this age of home streaming and shuttered theaters, it has become evermore precious as a haven for cinema lovers.

—Matt Kennedy, Writer, Producer, and Host of CinemaLit



Literary Workshops and Book Groups

We were excited to launch new programming in 2023-2024 reflecting our commitment to fostering community, creativity, and intellectual engagement. Below are some highlights:

Expanded Book and Discussion Groups

Our original single book group has expanded to five, each serving a unique literary interest:

- **World Literature Book Group:** Our longstanding group continues to thrive, engaging members in exploring global literary classics.
- **Brown Bag Mystery Readers:** Reconvened in October 2023, this group focuses on the timeless appeal of mystery fiction.
- **Contemporary Translated Works Book Group:** Launched in partnership with the Center for the Art of Translation, this group spotlights global voices and diverse perspectives. Each gathering begins with an introductory conversation with the book's translator.
- **Cookbook Club:** This group combines an embodied culinary exploration with literary discussion with the cookbook author, offering members an interactive and flavorful experience.
- **Deep Dive Into Design Discussion Group:** This group explores portfolios and works by author-designers from North Atlantic Books and Stanford d.school, fostering creativity and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Seminars

We were honored to offer two seminars with highly esteemed academics this year:

- **Marcel Proust** now entering its 24th year: Dr. Mark Calkins of San Francisco State University guides participants through Marcel Proust's monumental seven-volume novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. This seminar has become a cornerstone of our literary programming, providing in-depth exploration and discussion of Proust's work.
- **James Baldwin:** Dr. Nigel Hatton of UC Merced leads an exploration of one of the most profound voices in American literature, including close study of the germinal novels *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room*, and *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

Writers' Groups and Events

We are delighted to offer space for developing writers to share and improve their craft, as well as lunchtime lectures for history buffs:

- **Poetry Writers' Group:** Inspired by National Poetry Month in April 2024, poets meet biweekly to workshop.
- **Writers' Read!:** This semi-annual event showcases the talents of our vibrant writing community and provides a platform for sharing work, fostering creative connections, and recruiting new members.
- **Monday Noontime History Series:** A popular offering for Mondays at noon covering San Francisco's history.

“

I'm always impressed by the caliber of authors and guests Mechanics' Institute engages with, and the quality of the conversations that ensue. Bringing together Mechanics Institute and the Museum of the African Diaspora audiences to celebrate the literary and intellectual achievements of Black writers and thinkers has led to fruitful cross-pollination of our two outstanding institutions.

—Elizabeth Gessel, Curator of Public and Academic Engagement at Museum of the African Diaspora (MOAD)



Events by the Numbers

TOTAL ATTENDEES

5,521

TOURS

62

BOOK GROUPS

53

LITERARY PROGRAMS

51

CINEMALIT EVENTS

39

WRITERS' GROUPS

6

SPECIAL EVENTS

6

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\$10,000 plus

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*Coming out of the San Francisco fog into Mechanics' Institute,
I feel that I'm coming home to my own private club.*

—Maxine Hong Kingston, Novelist

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