



**Mechanics'  
Institute**  
Since 1854



2018

ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends,

Entering the front door of the Mechanics' Institute, I think of the librarians, chess players, readers, debaters, trustees, and members who have fought for and supported this San Francisco treasure over its 160 years.

Now, it is our turn.

As you read this annual report, you will note the sense of joy, seriousness, and responsibility with which we approach our work on behalf of the Mechanics' Institute. Our programs convey a liveliness with authors like Joyce Carol Oates and Dave Eggers; our efforts to teach 500 San Francisco public school students how to think two steps ahead through chess illustrates a deep caring about the future; and our daily work to maintain a sanctuary of quiet in an increasingly noisy world reveals a timeless commitment to thoughtfulness and reflection.

Every day, we are inspired to work harder for you, our members and supporters. The stories contained in this year's annual report were made possible by you. Thank you.

With gratitude,

Ralph Lewin  
Executive Director

## MORE THAN JUST A LIBRARY

Recently a member was showing a friend around the Mechanics' Institute library and was overheard to say: "this is a weird little oasis in the heart of San Francisco". Other members have told library staff that the MI library is their living room, co-work and social space. Some come here to read, write, work, and think. Authors peruse the stacks to find inspiration for their characters and locales, do research with our archivist to learn what a 19th century apartment looked like, or meet with other authors to be inspired or get honest feedback on their latest efforts. Programmers hunker down on their laptops to create code for driverless cars. Others access the knowledge and cultural heritage of our civilizations via digital or print resources.

The Mechanics' Institute library is dedicated to the life of the mind, whether that be through reading, writing, contemplation or connecting with other members. The library provides access to thousands of digital resources, yet circulation of print materials is up almost 13% over last year. Members of all ages are browsing, reading, checking out books, and asking the library to purchase new titles.

This year, over 1,000 members and nonmembers joined our weekly Wednesday or quarterly night tours. Have you taken a tour? If not, come join us. You will learn about our history, culture, chess club, library, events, and much more. It will be time well spent.

*"This is a weird little  
oasis in the heart of  
San Francisco."*

# GETTING WITH THE PROGRAM

The MI's events attracted a total of 3,698 attendees this year, and reached even more through our Facebook Live-streamed programs and YouTube archives.

Fall 2017 highlights included the MI Treasure Hunt, an interactive extravaganza created for AIA's "Architecture and the City - Secret City" festival, as well as a special all-day program for the 100th year anniversary of the Russian Revolution, with authors Richard Robbins, Yuri Sleskine, and Bertrand Patenaud.

Winter and spring events included an array of programs attracting sold-out audiences. We welcomed heroic political whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg; famed novelist Joyce Carol Oates spoke about her newest book; tech wizard Jaron Lanier graced the stage to discuss what it means to be human at a moment of unprecedented technological possibility; and hosted a Harvey Milk Day dedication, presenting biographer Lillian Faderman in conversation with gay activist Cleve Jones. A dynamic panel, "Bay Area Women on the Political Front Lines", featured local candidates and community leaders including Christine Pelosi and Natasha Middleton.

In summer, members enjoyed a participatory Bloomsday Celebration at DADA Bar; "Pictures of Gone City", on the downsides of tech in the Bay Area with Richard Walker and Walter Thompson; and a presentation by MI member John Villasenor on cryptocurrency.

Ongoing collaborations with ZYZZYVA for their Spring Issue Celebration and Litquake's "Comfort Lit" welcomed audiences new to the MI, while CinemaLit audiences grew, continuing to be a much-loved Friday night destination for film buffs. Most popular were the "Golden Age Divas" and "The Edge of Noir" series of films.

The events department is grateful for the volunteers who continue to support our programs; their infectious enthusiasm and steady assistance is invaluable.

We look forward to presenting you with the best the Bay Area has to offer.



*Daniel Ellsberg in conversation with Robert Rosenthal*



90

Programs hosted by the events department



3698

Total event attendees this year



*Joyce Carol Oates and Charles Gross with staff and attendees*



John Donaldson retires after 20 years of service



500

Youth Outreach  
children taught  
weekly



225

Scholastic Tournament  
participants



Grandmaster Hou Yifan lectures to a spellbound audience

## ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

It is with mixed emotions that we announce the retirement of our chess room director, John Donaldson. Over his 20 years of service, John has worked tirelessly to make our chess program one of the most respected in the country. We cannot thank him enough for the recognition and prestige he has brought to the Mechanics' Institute through his accomplishments with the US Chess Team and on his own merit. He hands the baton to a new Mechanics' Institute chess director.

One of this year's chess room highlights included a lecture by Grandmaster and former Woman's World Champion, Hou Yifan. Over 100 people crowded the chess room as the charismatic and accomplished Grandmaster from China held the audience spellbound, talking about her development in chess – from a 6-year old prodigy to competing with the world's best – in an unforgettable evening.

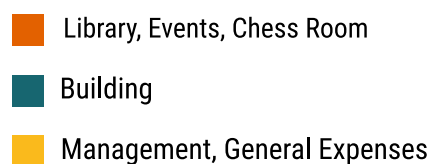
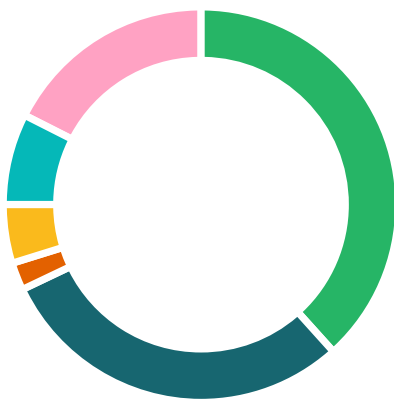
The chess club's Tuesday Night Marathon continues as the bedrock of San Francisco's chess culture, attracting players of all ages and walks of life. Drawing over 100 participants for the fifth consecutive year, the TNM is the largest weekly tournament in the United States. A new tradition begins with this year's fall TNM when, starting in October, it also becomes the first Mechanics' Institute Club Championship.

The MI continues its service to the community with our Youth Outreach Chess Program. We visit 20 schools each week, teaching chess to 500 children – providing an outlet for creative thinking, social interaction, and individual intellectual development. The majority of these schools are economically disadvantaged under Title 1; studies show that in these schools, chess has great effect in enhancing academic development. Our annual spring Scholastic Chess Championship is an event eagerly awaited by hundreds of students, and in 2019 we will add a fall tournament to enhance their opportunities.

John leaves a vibrant chess club in his wake, and we will carry the torch into next year and beyond.

# Financial Highlights

Financial Summary (Audited), Fiscal Year Ended **August 31, 2018**



| INCOME                      | \$3,301,600 |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Rental Income               | \$1,305,480 |
| Bequests, Donations         | \$494,828   |
| Library, Events, Chess Room | \$124,794   |
| Membership                  | \$338,416   |
| Investment Income           | \$968,243   |
| In-kind Donations           | \$69,830    |

| EXPENDITURES                 | \$3,396,979 |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| Library, Events, Chess Room  | \$1,615,349 |
| Building                     | \$856,733   |
| Management, General Expenses | \$924,897   |

**Total Assets** (cash, accounts receivable, prepaid expenses, investments at fair market value, deferred rent, building and equipment) **\$17,064,230**

**Total Liabilities** (accounts payable, other liabilities, unearned income, tenants' deposits) **\$461,765**

**Net Assets** **\$16,602,465**

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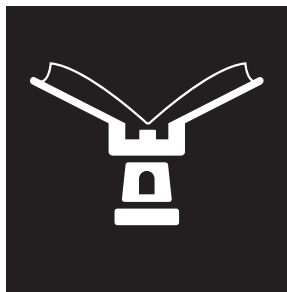
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