



Annual Report 2024

WE ARE AN ECOLOGICALLY
CONSCIOUS RETREAT AND
LEARNING CENTER CELEBRATING
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
PRINCIPLES. WE WELCOME
ALL OF THOSE WHO SHARE
OUR MISSION TO CREATE
MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS
AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE
IN OUR WORLD.



A MESSAGE FROM ANNA

As I reflect on this past year, I've often felt overwhelmed by the challenges facing our country and our world. One way I've found hope is through service to The Mountain. This place, a refuge and inspiration for so many, continues to offer a safe, inclusive, and transformative experience. Again and again, we see that those who find renewal here carry that energy outward to do good in the world. There is true power in community, and I'm honored to support The Mountain's growth and sustainability.

2024 was a year of transition and resilience. I offer deep gratitude to Beverly Cree, who served as Acting Executive Director during the summer while continuing her vital work as Development Director, and to Kerry Keys, who began serving as Interim Executive Director in August. Their leadership—and the commitment of our incredible staff—has helped strengthen collaboration and build a more sustainable structure for the future.

To sustain this momentum, we need you. Please consider engaging with The Mountain by attending programs, volunteering your time and talents, sharing job openings with your networks, or donating to support our mission. Every contribution makes a difference. Your engagement—whether through time, resources, or advocacy—makes a tangible difference. The Mountain is not just a place; it is a living, evolving community that thrives because of the collective efforts of those who believe in its mission. I invite you to join me in strengthening this beloved sanctuary so that it can continue to inspire and uplift generations to come.

Thank you for your dedication and support. Together, we are The Mountain.

Anna Martin
Chair of the Board of Trustees
The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center



Our Core Values

Our core values, central to all philosophies and practices of The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center, Inc., are based on the Principles and Purposes of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

- The inherent worth and dignity of every individual
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part
- Working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we reflect on the past year at The Mountain, we are reminded of both the challenges and the growth that have shaped our community.

The heart of our mission lies in the transformative experiences we offer to our guests. Our retreats and programs let us serve as a place for reflection, growth, and community-building. This year we welcomed new groups, including retreats for veterans, meditation sanghas, and new education & wellness groups. We also hired additional Youth Programs staff and renewed our focus on MountainCamp and Youth CONs.

The past year has also seen continued improvements across our facilities, including renovations to our Staff Housing, Lodge, Tower, and Duplex Cabins. We partnered with the Southface Institute to fund energy efficiency improvements to our cabins, and worked with FEMA and state agencies to plan for renovations to our dam - helping to safeguard our property and preserve our natural environment for future generations.

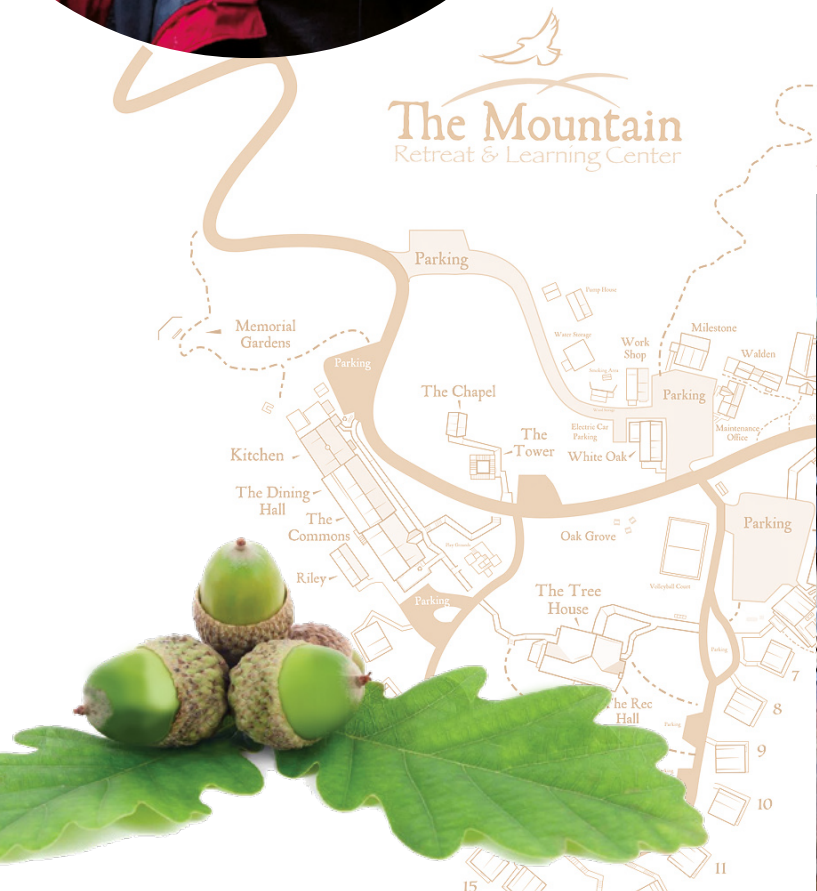
Despite the challenges faced by The Mountain, Western North Carolina, and by the world in 2024 - The Mountain remains a place of hope, growth, and connection. We are proud of the strides we've made in facilities, programs, and community engagement, and we look forward to continuing this journey with all of you. Together, we will uphold a commitment to our mission of providing transformative experiences that inspire individuals to live more intentionally, connected to each other and the natural world.

Thank you for your support of The Mountain. Your dedication helps ensure we can continue our work of fostering spiritual growth, community, and environmental stewardship. We are excited to welcome another year of growth and transformation.

Kerry Keys
Interim Executive Director

To Base of The Mountain

As a camper from the go's, Kerry still enjoys connecting with youth during CONs and MountainCamp.



OUR MOUNTAIN TEAM

Year-Round Staff

Kerry Keys
Steph Anderson
Maryline Bagwell
Hayes Bowen
Naramani Brown
Robin Canady
Clint Carruth
Pamela Courtney
Beverly Cree

Wally Graeber
Ryli Dungjen-Gibb
Raileigh Duschén
Shelley Hall
Kerry Kennedy
Jesse Kirsliś
Alina Martin
Mick Mayer
Sarah McNulty
Phillippa Mead
Cat Turner
Gabe Murray
MC Palme
Ted Rosensweig
Scott Sasich
Jennifer Shackley
Liliana Spellman
Sandy Srelz
Cameron VanWormer
James Williamson
Penny Youngblood

Contractors

Paola Cuevas
Mark Gramlich
Bill Kirkman
Gualberto Lopez
Tiffany Torres

MountainCamp Staff

Warren Bacchus Jr
Stella Baker
Hannah Bowman
T Kay Browning
May Currens
Josh Dekin
Rachel Delbos
Rebecca Delbos
Celista Dillon
Richard Easterling
Dayna Eglinton
Danu Foscue
Wally Graeber
Arden Herman-Wilmarth
Winston Lancaster
Parker MacDowell
Sebastian McKinley
Kate Miller
Piper Miller
Gabriella Nuccio
Rosalia Nuccio
Ed Smith
Andrea Stedman
Tiffany Torres

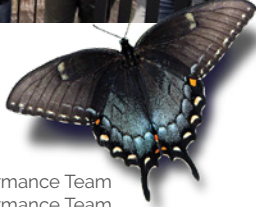
Youth CON PALS
(Peer Advocate Leaders)

Emerson Scott
Cassidy Howard
Zayden Gettys
Finn McGreevy
Raven Woosley
Maryn Hester
Eliza Martin
Monty Retzlaff-Taylor
Atticus Carroll-Browning
Wyatt Fields
Eli Irwin
Evan Jones

Interim Executive Director
Executive Director
Kitchen Manager
Assistant Facilities Director
Farm Associate
Finance Director
Marketing
Development Director
Acting Executive Director,
Advancement Director
Youth Programs Manager
Farm Manager
Guest Services
Maintenance
Farm Manager
Farm Associate
Guest Services, Technology
Kitchen
Marketing
Youth Programs Director
Kitchen Co-Manager
Kitchen
Facilities Manager
Guest Services
Guest Services
Housekeeping, Kitchen
Kitchen
Kitchen
Guest Services
Kitchen Co-Manager, Housekeeping

Housekeeping & Kitchen
Technology
Human Resources
Construction Contractor
Director of Youth Programs & Strategy

Counselor
Counselor
Counselor
Spiritual Mentor
Counselor
Counselor
Health Coordinator
Counselor
Counselor
ASCENDER Mentor
Program Leader
Program Leader
Counselor
Counselor
Counselor
Program Leader
Counselor
Counselor
Counselor
Program Leader
ASCENDER Mentor
MountainCamp Co-Director



2024-2025 Board of Trustees

Anna Martin
Rachel Kinback
Dave Zenner
Joy Irwin
Rev. Maggie Lovins
Marlene Trader
Scott May
Jason Cobb
Camille Cassingham
Kerry Keys

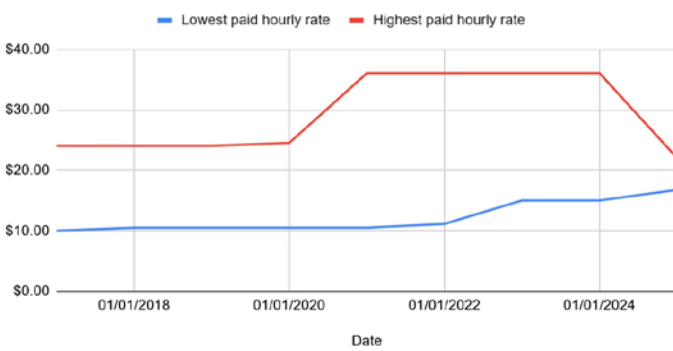
Board Chair
Institutional Performance Team
Institutional Performance Team
Institutional Performance Team
Leadership Development Team
Leadership Development Team
Planning and Finance Team
Planning and Finance Team
Leadership Development Team
Ex Officio/Interim Executive Director

2024-2025 Nominating Committee

Robert E. Smith
Laurel Amabile
Wayne Morris
Erin Powers
Lee Reading
Adelaide Whitehead
Teresa Youngblood
Marleen Trader

Committee Chair
Committee Member
Committee Member
Committee Member
Committee Member
Committee Member
Board Liaison

MRLC wages for full-time, year-round employees (2017 - 2024)
(Not including housing and benefits)



In 2024, we worked to increase wage equity and transparency for the organization - including by implementing the following changes for full-time, year-round employees:

- Increased the wage floor by 11.6% (from \$15 to \$16.75).
- Decreased the ratio between the highest- and lowest-compensated employees by 45%, shifting from a 2.4x ratio to 1.3x.

(Note: the hourly rate above is calculated as wages minus any donations made by employees to the organization, and does not include housing or other benefits.)



“While we try to teach our children all about life, the farm teaches us what life is all about.”
— Anonymous



THE MANY HANDS PEACE FARM

Established in 2009, our farm contributes to The Mountain's overall environmental sustainability by:

- producing food, mushrooms, flowers, and herbs for use in our kitchen and dining hall.
- selling produce at Highlands Farmers' Market and Cashiers Farmers' Market. This generates revenue, raises visibility for the Farm and The Mountain, and provides our staff direct marketing and sales experience in addition to their farm training.
- farm staff regularly host farm tours, workshops, and other educational programs about regenerative agriculture and foraging native plants for food, medicine, and self-care

Sunday Gatherings

Farm Manager, Raileigh Duschén, combined her interest in mindfulness and regenerative agriculture for the summer and fall weekly programs. Guests gathered at the farm for mindful movement and meditation, food forest foraging, sound bathing, a community potluck in the garden, herbal tea, and a sacred circle.



PROGRAMMING

Place and People and Programming – An Exceptional Experience

An Opportunity...
To stand atop a granite cliff on the Highlands Plateau overlooking the majestic Blue Valley...
To breathe in the pure mist of clouds swirling amidst an ancient forest of elegant dwarf white oaks...
To feel a heightened sense of wonder replacing time...
The Mountain and the spectacular views alone invoke spirit.

So begins the work of The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center:
Energizing people for positive change
Embracing diversity
Maintaining a healthy environment

Engaging interfaith, intercultural, and intergenerational communities
Living simply and sustainably
Practicing civility

Providing adventure in leadership, spirituality, and education for youth
Working for peace and justice
Promoting the inherent worth and interdependent web of all existence

Programs Supporting The Mountain and our Unitarian Universalist Community

- Mountain Volunteer Weekend
- Grateful Gathering
- Youth CONs
- MountainCamp
- Intergenerational Camp
- Racial Healing Initiative
- Homecoming
- Adult Farm Camp
- Emerson UU Choir
- Columbia UU Volunteer Work Weekend
- Tennessee Valley UU
- UU Spartanburg
- UU Congregation of Asheville
- UU Chapel Hill
- UU Birmingham
- UWomenspirit
- SEUUMA - Southeast U U Minister's Association
- LREDA - Liberal Religious Education Director's Association
- UUTC Brevard
- UUCA Men
- UU Columbia
- UU Hendersonville



Programs Supporting The Mountain's Extended Community

- GSV
- Warrior PATHH
- Struggle Well
- Team Rubicon
- 5Rhythms
- Women's Recovery
- Yoga and Nature Connection
- The Highlands Retreat
- Performing Artists
- Drepung Loseling Monastery
- John McCutcheon's Songwriting Camp
- FACETS Leadership Retreat for Women Conductors
- NC Baroque Orchestra
- Aaron Shearer Summer Institute
- Qollasuyu
- Alex and Mike's Wedding
- Episcopal Church of the Epiphany
- The Table Athens
- Sacred Lomi
- Our Song
- The Shaman's Path
- Team SAPO
- Combined Meditation Retreat

YOUTH PROGRAMMING

From tending the farm to hiking the forests, singing silly songs or engaging in meaningful spiritual exploration, The Mountain continues to offer year-round life-enriching experiences for youth. For more than 40 years, MountainCamp and Youth CONferences have provided young participants the tools to grow personally, spiritually, and as members of a global community.

In 2024, The Mountain hosted seven weeks of MountainCamp programming in the summer months, and four weekends of programming at Youth CONs throughout the fall, reaching a total of 107 youth and 47 adults who accompanied them.

MountainCamp:

Summer at The Mountain is a time for adventure, tradition, and learning. Youth at MountainCamp discover the beauty of nature, connect with old and new friends, and gain valuable insight into consciously navigating the world around them. Whether participating in a two-week traditional camp session or a seven-week life-skills program like ASCENDERS, MountainCamp serves as an inspiring space for young people to develop confidence, leadership, and an understanding of their personal values.

2024 Offerings:

Elementary Camp, Intermediate Camp, Senior High Camp, ASCENDERS program
2024 Total Participants: 113

Youth CONferences (CONs):

Each year, youth from Unitarian Universalist congregations across the Southeast and beyond gather at The Mountain for a weekend of fellowship, workshops, and recreational activities. These Youth CONs offer a welcoming environment where youth are treated with respect, kindness, and consideration as they deepen their connection to Unitarian Universalism, engage in covenantal community-building activities, and reflect on their spiritual growth.



2024 Offerings:

Peer Advocate Leader (PAL) Training Weekend, Elementary CON, Intermediate CON, and Senior High CON
2024 attendees: 154

The Value of MountainCamp and Youth CONs:

At The Mountain, we believe in fostering a sense of belonging and community. Our youth programs provide opportunities for young people to try new experiences, explore personal growth, deepen connection to the natural world, and shape themselves into compassionate leaders committed to justice and sustainability. Youth who come to The Mountain as individuals leave more authentically connected to themselves, others, and the interdependent world around them.

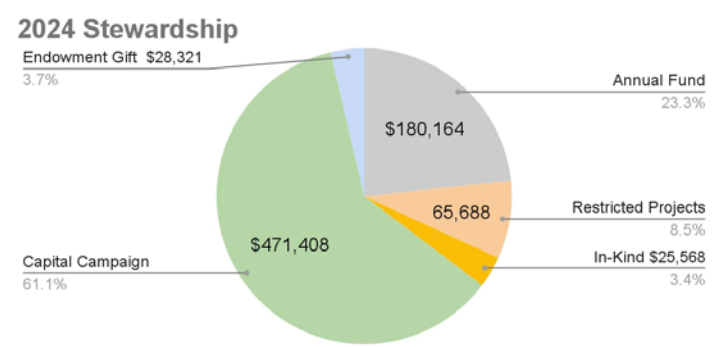
A Camper's Reflection:

“Attending The Mountain for the first time only three years ago, and terrified to be away from home for the first time, I was surprised when my focus quickly shifted from my homesickness to my surroundings. From the friendship of my cabin mates to the morning greeting from the Kitchen staff, I was in awe at how open and loving The Mountain Community is. Soon enough, the days filled with fun and laughter, deep conversations, and amazing views that completely changed my perspective. The Mountain is my home away from home.”

- Finland M., ASCENDER 2024



STEWARDSHIP – ANNUAL FUND, CAPITAL CAMPAIGN, GRANTS, AND ENDOWMENT



So many people and organizations invest in the work of The Mountain. We extend our heartfelt and enthusiastic “Thank You!” to everyone contributing their time, talents, and finances in support of this work. Together, we continue transforming The Mountain and enriching the lives of many adults and youth.

Volunteers Share Their Skills and Make Connections

Volunteers shared 3,255 hours of their time on a multitude of projects supporting The Mountain.

Infrastructure Improvements

The Capital Campaign and the Southface Good Use Grant have completed projects which are transforming The Mountain.

Capital Campaign

The Capital Campaign, launched in 2023, has raised \$1,858,436.43 in cash and pledges toward our goal of \$3.2+ million. These projects support our efforts for extending the variety and quality of programming..

“The year 2020 bears significance for a group from the UU Columbia Church, as it was the year of our first Volunteer Work Week at The Mountain. This past February we completed our sixth week of support for this amazing place.

Those of us who know The Mountain well cherish all the gifts it brings to us. We wish for the peace and joy we find here to be experienced by others now and into the future. Our annual Volunteer Week is our way to do what we can to help keep the dream alive. The UUCC Volunteer Week is our way to show others that our congregation supports the work done here and, in turn, we experience the benefit of getting to know one another better and building new bonds within our own community. We highly recommend it to others.”

— Ginny V.



Since 1979, improved staff housing has been a major goal. Weve come a long way from the trailer demolition to beautiful new housing and it means so much that this has become a reality.



The Crafts Barn with five bedrooms, full kitchen, two bathrooms, and a laundry room.



The tower renovations included upgrading the structure, providing a new meeting space, office, and a new roof.



Beginning renovation on cabins 9 and 10



Lodge siding replacement on the east and north sides, a much-needed project to protect the integrity of this building.

Grant

The Southface Good Use grant of \$75,000, the \$23,846.54 cash match, and additional in-kind services provided the following upgrades.

- removal of baseboard heaters and installation of mini-splits in family cabins;
- added a transformer and electrical cables on Ring Road for additional power needed to transition from gas to electric for heat and water heaters. The expense for this electrical work was split between the Southface grant and the Capital Campaign.

The 2024 grant supplements the 2022 Southface Good Use grant of \$60,000 match which provided for new HVAC in the Commons and Rec Hall, mini-splits in duplexes, and LED lighting.

This work is aligned with The Mountain's principle of “Respect for the interdependent web of life,” as we reduce our carbon footprint. We are immensely grateful for the Southface Good Use grants, making a significant difference for increasing energy efficiency across The Mountain campus.

“Giving is not just about making a donation, it is about making a difference.”

— Kathy Calvin

Endowment

Message from Erin Thompson

Greetings from your Endowment Board! The purpose of The Mountain Endowment Fund is to support the long-term stability of The Mountain, as well as to enhance the Mountain's mission, programs and activities.

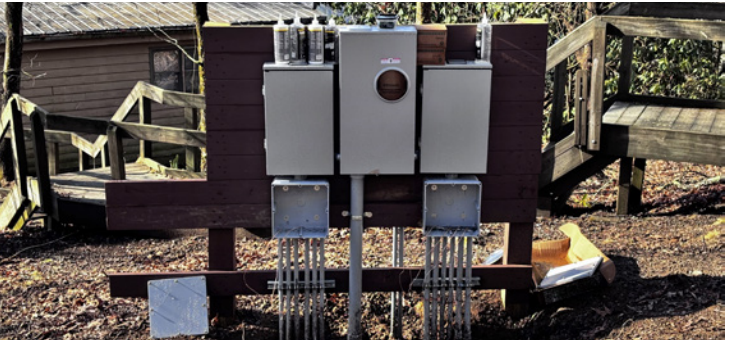
To achieve this, the Endowment Fund is invested with the Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund, reflecting UU socially responsible investing goals. This fund generated an approximate return of 9% in 2024. With that increase in the UUCEF investment, combined with donor contributions of \$47,982, The Mountain's Endowment Fund ended 2024 at \$787,647.

We are so happy to see this growth in our Endowment fund, please join us! Contributions of all sizes are genuinely appreciated and may be done through:

- Planned-giving arrangement • Direct donation • Stock transfer • Donations in honor or in memory of someone.

We are grateful to our donors that keep the fund healthy and growing! With input from Staff, the Mountain Endowment Fund gifted The Mountain \$28,321 in 2024 to be used to help refurbish duplex cabin #8.

UPGRADING STAFF HOUSING



Mini-split installation and transformer to increase electrical capacity.

UPGRADING GUEST HOUSING



Cabin 8 Renovation

2024-2025 Endowment Fund Directors:			
Erin Thompson	- President	Joy Irwin	- MRLC Trustee Liaison
Linda Sterner	- Vice President	Beverly Cree	-
Rob Marcy	- Treasurer	Ex-Officio, Development	
Teresa Falzone	- Secretary	Kerry Keys	-
Bonnie Gramlich		Ex-Officio, Interim Executive	
Lois Lee			



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2024

Overview of Financial Position

As the Board's Financial Advisor, I'm pleased to once again report that the Mountain's financial health remains strong. Our balance sheet continues to remain strong as Net Assets increased from \$3.6M to nearly \$7.6M, and we remain debt free (other than typical operating payables)! This substantial increase was primarily driven by a Property Donation, as well as generous donations to the Capital Campaign.

Back around 2008, The Mountain raised needed capital by offering 82 acres of our property to a third party who placed it into a conservation easement with the Highlands Cashiers Land Trust, and leased the property back to us for a nominal fee. In 2024, the property was generously returned back to us, adding over \$4M in revenue.

The Mountain has Total Assets of over \$7.7M, which are comprised primarily of Property & Equipment of over \$6M and Cash and Cash Equivalents of nearly \$1.1M, well exceeding total liabilities of \$185,854.

Summary of Revenue and Expense

In 2024, Total Revenue was over \$6M, which includes the \$4.2M Property Donation, \$471K Capital Campaign contributions, \$860K in Operating Revenue, and \$273K in Contributions. Total Expenses were nearly \$2.1M, resulting in nearly \$4M Net Revenue. Again, this tremendous result was primarily driven by the Property Donation as well as generous donations to the Capital Campaign.

Removing the Property Donation, Capital Campaign, and all other "Restricted" donations, Unrestricted Revenue was over \$1.26M and Unrestricted Expenses were \$1.31M, resulting in a \$49K Net Operating Loss. This result is better than anticipated, due to the impact of Hurricane Helene, cancellation of some programs and a downsized summer camp, as well as Executive Director transitions.

Overall Observations

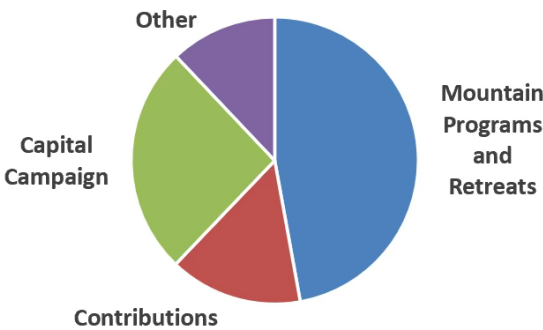
The Mountain's 2024 financial results continue to remain strong, and The Mountain is thriving and vibrant, with smiles, music, and activity. The Capital Campaign is well-underway, and has already funded much needed Staff housing, Crafts Barn housing, as well as significant upgrades to the Lodge, Tower, several Cabins, and more. Net Assets continue to grow, and The Mountain remains debt-free. There is much to celebrate!"

Scott May

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES						
December 31, 2024 & 2023						
	2024 (Unaudited)			2023 (Unaudited)		
	No Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	No Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
Revenue and Support						
Retreats and conferences	543,882		543,882	473,420		473,420
Youth programs	244,770		244,770	298,303		298,303
Mountain designed programs	19,378		19,378	79,178		79,178
Personal retreat guests	31,889		31,889	28,683		28,683
Store revenue	6,027		6,027	7,771		7,771
Contributions	180,164	65,688	245,852	164,356	128,372	292,727
Memberships	1,315		1,315	1,945		1,945
Interest income	35,373		35,373	23,741		23,741
Gifts in Kind		26,568	26,568	14,463		14,463
Grants and Bequests				176,372		176,372
Capital Campaign		471,408	471,408		1,322,346	1,322,346
Other	191,982		191,982	40,609		40,609
Gain/loss on Investments	7,776		7,776	(183)		(183)
Property Donation		4,253,780				
Total Revenues and Support	1,262,556	4,817,444	6,080,000	1,308,659	1,450,718	2,759,377
Expenses						
Program and services	939,739		939,739	879,359		879,359
Management and general	296,708		296,708	270,640		270,640
Fundraising	75,168		75,168	63,174		63,174
Capital Campaign		774,966	774,966		25,676	25,676
Total Expenses	1,311,615	774,966	2,086,581	1,238,849	25,676	1,238,849
Change in Net Assets	(49,060)	4,042,478	3,993,419	69,810	1,425,042	1,520,528

2024 Revenue Sources

(without Property Donation)

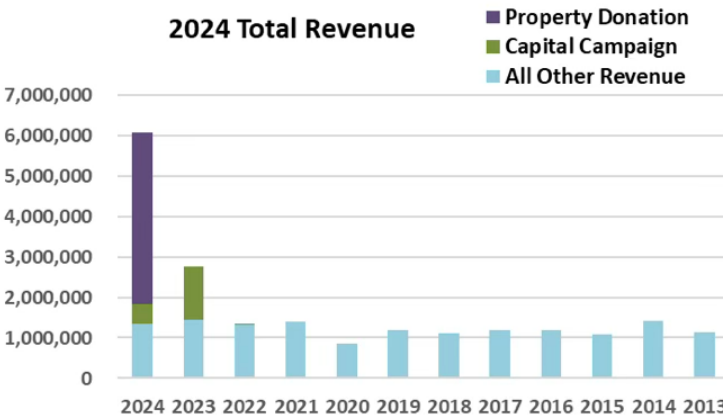


STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

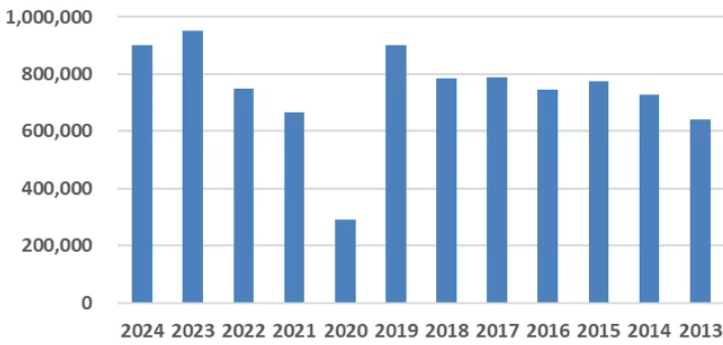
December 31, 2024 & 2023

Assets	Unaudited 2024	Unaudited 2023
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,099,499	942,868
Promises to give, net	285,716	310,849
Accounts receivable	(500)	
Grant receivable		74,500
Sales tax receivable	5,605	11,334
Inventory, net	9,911	9,914
Prepays	10,547	9,198
Undeposited Funds	42,685	
Total Current Assets	1,453,463	1,358,663
Other Assets		
Long-term promises to give	271,399	246,528
Certificates of deposit		297,711
Property and equipment, net	6,042,485	1,843,250
Total Other Assets	6,313,884	2,387,489
Total Assets	7,767,347	3,746,152
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts payable	42,003	58,310
Accrued expenses	36,555	34,062
Deferred revenues	107,296	21,633
Total Current Liabilities	185,854	114,005
Total Liabilities	185,854	114,005
Net Assets		
Without donor restrictions	3,632,147	2,939,809
With donor restrictions	3,949,346	692,338
Total Net Assets	7,581,493	3,632,147
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	7,767,347	3,746,152

2024 Total Revenue



2024 Operating Revenue (Mountain Generated)



In 1982, when I was 11, I spent three weeks at Youth Camp. For several summers until 1993, I was part of MountainCamp as a camper, a counselor, and adventure leader. In addition to having exciting adventures and cementing powerful friendships that persist to this day, those summers taught me about trusting others, trusting myself, and listening to the world around me.

Even now, I can easily recall sitting silently in the woods as the trees and rocks and the waterfalls reached out and enfolded me in their deep embrace. My favorite trips to lead were hikes into the woods where we practiced paying attention to all the wonder going on around us. You never know where life will take you or what a simple path you choose will come to mean, but I am so glad I was open to visiting The Mountain that summer over forty years ago. Now, from across the country, my wife Cathy and I continue enjoying our Mountain relationship by keeping updated through newsletters and financially contributing to The Mountain.

- Erik Gallun

If you are proud of The Mountain, become its advocate.

If you are concerned for its future, share its message.

If its values resonate deep within you, give it a measure of your devotion.

This place cannot survive without your faith, your confidence, your enthusiasm.

Its destiny, the larger hope, rests in your hands.



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