

Keep Your Brain Active With "MICL"

BY BETTY STEWART | PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MICL

It all started three years ago when my friend Kathy asked if I wanted to go to a MICL class with her. I said, "Who is Michael?" She explained that MICL is the acronym for Modesto Institute of Continued Learning, a program for local residents who are seniors or retired, but don't want to stop learning. Classes are held at the El Capitan Building on the west campus of Modesto Junior College and are conducted by the class attendees themselves, but more about that later.

The idea for the organization came when George Pettygrove, a local teacher, principal and school superintendent, visited his sister in San Diego. There was an active educational program for seniors in her area, and Pettygrove thought, "Why not in Modesto?" He collaborated with Odessa Johnson, a Modesto teacher, MJC dean and UC regent, to create a Modesto program under the auspices of MJC. The first classes were held in 1986, and MICL has been going strong ever since.



Classes are not for credits, but for the simple joy of learning and having fun with like-minded individuals who want to keep their brains active and engaged. And no, you don't have to be a college graduate to be a MICL member. If you live locally and are at least 50, you are eligible to enroll. You can enroll not only during the registration days before each session, but at any time during the year.

There are fall, spring and summer sessions. The fall and spring sessions are divided into three segments (A, B & C) and individual classes are held for two hours each week. When you enroll, you can go to as many classes as you like. Classes are held Monday through Friday, either 10 a.m. to noon or 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., with a 20-minute break per class with refreshments brought in by attendees. Registration is less than \$100 and covers all the classes in each session. You go to the classes you want and if you leave early, there is no "hall monitor" to check your attendance. We're all too old for that, so you come and go as you please.

If you just want to attend classes and learn, this is your space to do that. It's a great place for discussion, because class members are older, they bring a wealth of experience to their opinions, which can be quite diverse. And it's a safe space to explore new ideas while expressing your own.

If you want to teach and you have a subject you are passionate and knowledgeable about, you can share it with others by leading a class. Class topics have included: The fall & rise of China; propaganda; travels around the world (attendees tell the class where they've traveled and what they've seen); all things considered (covers diverse subjects that lend themselves to a one-time class); the art of the documentary; law school



for everyone; writing it down (come and present your own writing or just listen that of other students); book club; understanding Russia - A cultural history; Rome In the movies; everyday engineering; birding; biographies of artists; and favorite books, where MICL members discuss their own favorite book.

Some courses continue into the next semester, but courses are also developed every semester, with new ones coming up in 2024 on gardening; Lincoln; plant-based eating; history of the alphabet; great decisions (exploring foreign affairs and how they affect us and the world); insects; and social welfare. The course on China also continues into 2024.

Some courses offer an even greater opportunity for social interaction. Social Zoom is available when you want to connect with fellow students but cannot attend in-person classes. Friday at the Movies shows a variety of films, including fresh, hot popcorn. Members get to talk about their own life story in MICL in Meet Your Past. In current events, students bring in topics in the news and discuss them with others to try to make sense of what is going on in the world.

Independent of the regular courses, MICL also offers several field trips during the year. Members sign up, hop on a bus and are treated to a day exploring new places and activities. Field trips have included: Elkhorn Slough, the San Luis Wildlife Refuge and Double T Ranch, Old Sacramento River Cruise, John Muir House Tour, Castle Air Museum, Hilmar Cheese, Roaring Camp, Santa Cruz Boardwalk, and many more.

At the end of each semester, a potluck is held at the El Capitan building to announce the courses for the upcoming session. A monthly birthday luncheon is also held to celebrate those members who have had a birthday that month.



Since its inception in 1986, the Modesto Institute For Continued Learning has been a dynamic center for learning, discussion and socialization for those over 50, retired or not. Some comments from members attest to that:

"I joined MICL after retiring 20 years ago," said Dave Froba. "I've been a student and a teacher, and at 84, am still pretty sharp. I attribute that to the mental and social stimulation I get as a member of MICL."

"Joyce Starkey's writer's workshop promotes a feeling of closeness, like family, through writings that reveal much about the author's life experiences," said Andrea McGhee. "A great place to keep our brains stimulated and our imaginations inspired. Excellent class!"

"I retired three years ago, and joining MICL made my transition from work to retirement seamless," said Bob Droual. "I've made many new friends from diverse backgrounds, and we're all eager to learn something new."

"During COVID, the Social Zoom class provided a critical link, a lifeline really, for homebound people to stay connected with content and friends," said Lynn M. Hansen. "MICL is a great way to enlarge your circle of friends and is, in my life, indispensable for my continued learning."

If you're interested in joining the Modesto Institute For Continued Learning, you can register at micl-online.org or call 209-575-6063. The next in-person registration for the spring semester will be on January 11 at 9 am at the El Capitan building, MJC West campus, 2201 Blue Gum Avenue.

If you want to attend a class to try to see if MICL is a fit for you before you register, call Annette Olsen, MICL president, at 916-215-6967. ⁵_N