

History: The Sierra Renaissance Society of El Dorado County

The Sierra Renaissance Society (SRS) is a group of older adults who want to learn about new topics, meet new people, and have fun!

Some in El Dorado County were familiar with California State University Sacramento Renaissance Society, an enrichment program for older adults dedicated to lifelong learning.

Would there be enough interest in our county to start a similar organization here?

Carol Heape extended a public invitation to explore the possibility. Yes, there was interest.

In collaboration with Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center, a public meeting was held on the EDC campus in January, 2015. Robert Heilman, co-founder of the CSUS group, along with several board members, traveled to our local campus in Placerville to inform us. There was standing room only because the room was so full of enthusiastic El Dorado County residents.

Immediately, a steering committee formed. By September, 2015, we became a 501c3 non-profit organization under the El Dorado Community Foundation. Tom Beauchamp, of Monster Design Co., donated his talents and created the SRS logo you see on our website, brochures, correspondence, and more. With a name, a mission, a board of directors, and a set of bylaws, we launched with 91 charter members.

SRS began offering large monthly presentations in January, 2016. Presentations soon expanded to include workshops where members shared knowledge and experience with each other in smaller groups. Membership grew to over 240 as more presentations were held and workshops expanded. Then COVID-19 struck and activities were suspended.

As COVID-19 restrictions were lifting, SRS scheduled monthly presentations once again. We worked hard to bring back current and former members. It was a slow start with membership starting at a disappointing level, around 60 active dues-paying members, not enough to meet our financial needs. We applied for a grant, and thankfully, in 2023, the Latrobe Fund generously boosted our efforts, awarding us funds for the improvement of our SRS website.

We are an all-volunteer organization with a board of directors and committees to carry out the various functions of SRS. Our speakers and workshop leaders donate their services. SRS collects modest yearly dues from members to help pay for our website (srsedc.org), venue rent, and other expenses. Membership is open to all older adults who share our enthusiasm and curiosity for lifelong learning. No college degree is required— just the wisdom that comes with experience and the curiosity to keep learning.

Now, thanks to the hard-working spirit of all our unpaid volunteers (our organizers, board of directors, committee personnel, monthly presentation speakers, and workshop organizers), our membership list is growing again.

Members continue to study topics proposed by peers. We find qualified speakers who volunteer to give our monthly presentations and workshops. The subjects constantly evolve based on the interests of our members.

Our monthly presentations and workshops are limited only by the imaginations of our members!

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