

Bringing RSF Technology into the 21st Century

After spending 38 years developing software programs in private and public sector startups and established companies, Joe Friedman retired. Shortly thereafter he became a Rossmoor Scholarship Foundation (RSF) trustee. At the time, the board was mostly composed of tech-challenged members. Because of his skillset Friedman immediately became the Foundation's technical lead, and in his mind formulated a five-year plan to update RSF's software business processes. "It was not an easy transition," he recalled. "Several trustees had no idea what Google was, and a few didn't even use email."

As he added new software and modified business practices, Friedman wrote instructional documents, scheduled training sessions, and collaborated on documents that profiled RSF timelines and activities. But most important, he involved, encouraged, and educated board members by creating small committees to choose new donor and student application software, by crafting training sessions on best practices, and by reworking and updating the website. By the time Friedman left the Board in 2024, trustees were much more computer savvy and much more comfortable learning and managing the software infrastructure that now supports the RSF mission. Because of his efforts RSF's communication with donors, students, counselors, and board members has dramatically improved in recent years.

Current RSF trustees Steve Batill, Peter Yang, and Barb Walker have been able to build on the foundation Friedman laid between 2019 and 2024. Each recalled moments in their life when they took an interest in information technology.

"As a sophomore studying aerospace engineering nearly 60 years ago, a teacher introduced me to FORTRAN, an early programming language. I was hooked," recalls Steve Batill. Throughout his career as an engineer and professor he has used computers. In retirement, he volunteered at the Exploratorium and wrote "games" for his grandkids. "As an RSF Trustee, I not only work with a dedicated group, I also learn something new every day." Batill is primarily responsible for managing the RSF website.

In graduate school in North Dakota Peter Yang was assigned to write a computer simulation program by harnessing FORTRAN. "Back in 1970s, paper punch cards were the only mechanism to develop the computer program," he remembered. He spent hours at the punch card machine and regularly brought his box of cards to the computer room window to test his program. "My biggest worry was dropping the box of cards on the snowy and slippery pavement during wintertime." Reassembling them, he realized, would be "a huge task. Fortunately, this never happened, and I completed my graduate work in time." Yang is primarily responsible for managing RSF's Google shared drive (a digital file repository) and the Kaleidoscope program through which students process their RSF scholarship applications.

"When my son began middle school in the 90s," Barbara Walker notes, "I started taking computer classes at Diablo Valley College." She was especially fascinated with Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access, which led to a job working for a non-profit. "At RSF, I eagerly volunteered to learn a new graphic design software program called Adobe InDesign, a professional page layout software. With outside help and lots of YouTube videos, I was able to create the 2024 Scholarship Awards Program, school posters illustrating our scholarship winners, and event invitations."

These four dedicated trustees have brought RSF technology into the 21st century, but the Foundation is always in need of new members facile in information technology.

Submitted by: Wayne A. Wiegand, RSF Trustee