

A Banner Kirk Center Year

2024 in Review

This past year was one of the most successful in the Kirk Center's thirty-year history. Our 36 programs and events had a notable impact on thousands, with more than 95% of participants reporting increased understanding of American conservatism and finding the experience of Kirk Center events beneficial, even transformational. All participants said they would highly recommend visiting the Center. The Russell Kirk Center effectively fulfilled its mission to preserve and promote the enduring norms and principles known as the Permanent Things.

36 programs
and events

100%
of seminar participants
recommend a visit to
the Center.



Some highlights from the 2024 program

February:

We took our Kirk on Campus program to Hope College and Calvin University, featuring political economist Samuel Gregg. We were fortunate to collaborate with Dr. Sarah Estelle's Markets and Morality program at Hope College and groups led by Professors Micah Watson and David Urban at Calvin University.

April:

Hillsdale College Honors Program students attended a long weekend seminar at the Kirk Center in Mecosta.

April:

The Roots of American Order at 50 seminar at Calvin University.

June:

We continued a series of seminars with state legislators to secure the foundation of their core political principles, discussing the best of American conservative thought and the connection between first principles, history, statesmanship, and public policy.

July:

Our annual intellectual retreats for interns of the Acton Institute and the Mackinac Center were terrific this year—highlighted by a debate re-creation between the Federalist and Anti-Federalist sides of an important American debate, as well as a seminar on the thought of Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson.

July:

We worked closely with several national networks of classical-Christian schools, notably with the CiRCE Institute, which awards their annual Russell Kirk Paideia Prize to the best classical-Christian school teacher in the country.

August:

"Writing and the Moral Imagination" four-day intensive seminar held at the Center for young professionals.

October:

The DC-based Fund for American Studies and 20 of its public policy fellows came to Mecosta to explore the future of conservative "fusionism."

October:

Our new School of Conservative Studies ran a pilot webinar on "Kirk's Ten Conservative Principles"—the essay most accessed on our website.

November:

Rusty Reno, editor of *First Things*, spoke on "The Conservative Paradox: Mourning and Gratitude" for the Gerald Russello Memorial Lecture, held at Fordham University in New York.

December:

The inaugural McLellan Prizes free speech celebration was held in front of a packed Grand Rapids house with grand prize winner Greg Lukianoff receiving \$50,000, the largest cash award dedicated to free speech and expression, and Dr. Samuel Goldman and Stanford's Josiah Joner each awarded \$12,500 for free speech writing fellowships.

December:

Our program year concluded when the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville, led by Kirk Center Senior Fellow Dr. Gary L. Gregg, came to the Center's campus for an undergraduate seminar on "Imagining the Afterlife." It was an appropriate way to close the year with a unique study on the theme through the prism of literature, philosophy, and theology—engaging Shakespeare, Vergil, Dante, Hawthorne, Eliot, Hemingway, and Kirk.

What participants are saying about their Kirk Center experience

Each of our programs aims to recover, conserve, and enliven those enduring norms and principles that Russell Kirk called the Permanent Things. Our seminars and lectures reached state legislators and policymakers, undergraduate students, high school teachers, young professionals, and the general public.

From students:

“The opportunity to interact personally with scholars, important figures, and written materials was truly unique.”

“Come ready to learn and appreciate timeless things.”

“Listen closely and intently and you will experience an incredible time with wonderful people.”

“I found this seminar to be very helpful as a political science major/history minor. I found clarification on things I have studied previously and it helped me make connections to things I’ve learned.”

“Everyone should visit at some point.”

From professionals:

“I appreciated the caliber of the discourse and participants. It engaged in elevated thought, informing, and inspiring growth in terms of Christian, moral, conservative, and professional development. Networking and hospitality offered a genuine sense of warmth, belonging, and encouraged investment in our shared bonds.”

“The Kirk Center is marvelous! It embodies the ideas and principles so many other outfits treat only as ideals.”

“Discovering the Kirk Center has been one of the most beautiful things that has ever happened to me. Your commitment to the Permanent Things shows the world that sanity is both possible and preferable.”



“I first read *The Conservative Mind* as an undergraduate on a visit to the Kirk Center in Mecosta, Michigan. I remember reading about Kirk’s vision for rooted communities and his high regard for the imagination, but my impression of the work has always been inseparable from discussing the book with peers and professors in Kirk’s own study and sharing meals and music together at the Kirk family home, Piety Hill. I think these memories illustrate the legacy of Kirk’s work and his vision for conservatism as a living tradition, integrated into the real lives and conversations of persons committed to the flourishing of the communities in which they live.”

“As an outsider, a foreigner who was exposed to Russell Kirk in a different language and with a different conception of conservatism, the experience at the Russell Kirk Center was a marvelous and enriching growing adventure. I am very thankful for this opportunity!”

From public policy participants:

“What a fantastic organization keeping the legacy of a great American thinker alive with grace, care, and intellectual rigor. I could not recommend the Kirk Center more highly!”

“Regardless of whether you are a Kirkian or even a conservative, there is no better place to gain a deeper understanding of American conservatism than at the Kirk Center.”

“I found the seminar to be so helpful in both understanding Kirk’s works and forming my own beliefs on conservatism. Genuinely, I would not have a firm grasp on my schema of conservative thought and its traditions without this experience.”

“I would absolutely recommend it! There is so much history that came alive at the Kirk Center and I would warmly encourage anyone to come visit and learn.”

From legislators:

“I loved the interactions. Such great people. And I thought the conversations helped me refine and better develop/articulate my ideas.”

“Having common texts are significant for deeper conversations concerning policy and the legislature. Having Kirk texts in common provide the best platform to formulate deep discussions around.”

“10 out of 10. Excellent reading selections and well-guided discussion. Great group of participants.”

“Would absolutely recommend.”

“ Fascinating conversation, great company, and a truly one-of-a-kind legendary setting.” – seminar participant



The Kirk Center's *University Bookman*

The University Bookman has established itself as a prominent publication of conservative thought, offering insightful commentary and analysis on various topics. It is the Kirk Center's book review journal, and its pages have featured contributions from some of today's most esteemed writers. Its influence extends well beyond the United States.

Founded in 1960 by Russell Kirk, each week the *Bookman* reviews books in areas such as history, politics, religion, and humane letters, while offering an imaginatively conservative perspective. The publication is edited by Dr. Luke Sheahan, with David Bonagura serving as Religion Editor, Darrell Falconburg as Humanities Editor, and Isabel Dobbs as Managing Editor.

Engagement with *Bookman* reviews and related content was robust over the past year. In 2024, *The University Bookman* published 131 reviews and essays authored by 80 writers. Its widely-read weekly e-letter boasts an open rate approaching nearly 20% higher than the industry average, with approximately 20,000 individuals reading *Bookman* posts annually. The journal reaches readers across 12 countries, with Sweden being the most prevalent. Furthermore, *The Bookman* maintains an active social media presence.

Longtime reader Jack Fowler remarked: "As our culture faces challenges from Marxists, ideologues, and opponents of civil order intent on undermining the American Project, conservatism urgently requires a meaningful and reasoned examination of the principles that underpin a free society. *The University Bookman*, an enduring and invaluable platform, is more essential now than

ever. It provides a dedicated space for discussing new books worthy of public discourse, embodying sanity, intelligence, and honesty."

For more information, please refer to the *Bookman* campaign

2024 details [here](#) and on [this page](#). *The Bookman* is offered free of charge and without advertisements to all readers, sustained entirely by donations. In the fall of 2024, *The Bookman* conducted its first annual campaign, aiming to raise \$20,000 for operating costs. These funds cover payments to reviewers, website hosting, email services, platforms, and production software expenses. The editors volunteer their time to maximize the journal's resources so that all donations directly support essential expenses.

This first campaign successfully concluded in December and in gratitude the Kirk Center released a new audio recording of a story by Russell Kirk.

~20,000
Bookman readers
in 2024

Archive, Researchers and Translators

The Center is also the repository for the extensive Russell Kirk archive, which consists of essays, reviews, letters, speeches, columns, manuscripts, photos, and audio-visual materials. It is a cultural treasure and an important collection of the American intellectual record. Researchers came from around the country and world to access the Russell Kirk archives.

Scholars and journalists visited the Center from China, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, Hungary, Argentina, and Spain. Subsequently, a new foreign language translation of Kirk's *Rights and Duties*, with an introduction by Agostino Carrino, was published in Italy, and a new edition of *The Politics of Prudence* was published in Spain.

The archive's "About Kirk" section contains articles in newspapers, journals, and online sources, by others related to Kirk and his thought. As part of the Center's digitization project, two interns working over the past year have successfully completed the digitization of this collection totaling 824 pieces.

One of the archival interns, Dan Brand, who learned about Kirk during his internship, wrote an article for an emerging association of young conservatives:

"Kirk's impact on the modern day, three decades past his death, is still apparent to intellectual conservatives, both budding and old. His mountain of works gives us some guiding principles, vices to avoid, virtues to pursue, and even the name that we call ourselves. Kirk shows us both a logical and imaginative sense of conservatism through his fundamental truths and powerful stories. Both of these live on in his works, keeping him as an essential staple in any conservative studies. On this day of remembrance, we honor Kirk in promoting him among those who have not heard of him, providing them the opportunity to learn both from his chivalrous example and his enduring words."

Wilbur Fellow Spotlight

Thomas Philbrick, a lawyer, writer, and composer, for a residential Wilbur Fellowship. As a lawyer and legal scholar, Thomas' law review scholarship has focused on issues of administrative law, constitutional law, and the First Amendment. During his time at the Kirk Center, Thomas completed a law review article that analyzes several recent Supreme Court decisions that deal with the intersection of religious education and First Amendment rights. He also continued his work as a fiction writer, finishing the draft of a second novel and editing several other works-in-progress.

"Piety Hill is a wonderful, almost magical place. The combination of scholarly rigor, contemplative solitude, and warm familial friendships—all within the almost tangible aura of Russell Kirk's astounding life and work—are quite unlike anything I've ever experienced. My time there was the highlight of my academic career."

—Thomas Philbrick,
Wilbur Fellow Fall '24

Communication Statistics

Website users: 151,000 users visited the RKC website

The Kirk Center's monthly email updates reach an audience of over 5k+ subscribers, who open our emails at a rate more than 16% higher than the average for nonprofit as benchmarked by Mailchimp. In 2024 we delivered over 222k emails to our subscribers via 73 unique email campaigns. Forty-six of those emails have been under the auspices of our *University Bookman* and have directed significant traffic back to the *Bookman* reviews and essays.

151K
visited
kirkcenter.org

Video Creation and a new YouTube Channel

In 2024, the Kirk Center migrated our video collection from Vimeo to YouTube, which will allow us greater discoverability over time as YouTube suggests similar content. In our early days we've had 500+ views of our content there, and several dozen subscribers to our channel. We continue to produce Book Gallery conversations, turning Zoom webinars into featured content, and we published full length videos of Kirk on Campus with Dr. Samuel Gregg and the inaugural McLellan Prizes award gala.

Our monthly
e-letter reached
5K+
subscribers



Endorsements from Scholars

“The Russell Kirk Center is unusual among American conservative organizations in the capacious character of its programs, focusing not on current events but on what Ronald Reagan once called ‘the ancient truths of our civilization.’” **Dr. George Nash**

“The whole experience [of participating in a Kirk Center seminar] has reinforced my conviction that there can never be anyplace quite like—or even remotely like—Piety Hill, as a venue for educating the young and keeping alive the traditions of liberal learning and moral imagination. As I’ve often said, reading Russell Kirk’s work is itself a civilizing experience, and one can only say that is doubly true of a visit to Piety Hill. So it really is terribly important to keep the Russell Kirk Center going, and to make it ever stronger.” **Dr. Wilfred McClay, professor and author**



The Kirk Center opened a business office this past year in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Our new business address is P. O. Box 1953, Grand Rapids, MI 49501. Donations and correspondence may be directed there.



Russell Kirk Legacy Society Honor Roll

Finally, the Kirk Center founded its essential new Russell Kirk Legacy Society Honor Roll.

We extend a special thank you to founding members of the Russell Kirk Legacy Society:

H. Lee Cheek

David Hein

Michael Maibach

Richard D. McLellan

**Dr. W. Wesley McDonald
and Dr. Alice Baumgart**

From Russell Kirk:

“It is by no means certain that our present moral and constitutional order is providing sufficiently for its own future. Modern men pay a great deal of attention to material and technological means, but little attention to the instruments by which any generation must fulfill its part in the contract of eternal society.”

From program participant and writer Michael Lucchese:

“At the heart of Kirk’s conservative vision is a conviction of the spiritual continuity in Western civilization. He believed that certain ‘permanent things’—freedom, justice, love—transcend history. Our forebears struggled to preserve them for us, and now their restoration, renovation, and repair is our obligation.”

In 2024, the Kirk Center designed a certificate of membership with a lovely sketch of the Russell Kirk library, where the names of Russell Kirk Legacy Society members will be permanently inscribed. We also created a lapel pin with a logo to exclusively indicate RKLs membership.



If you have already included the Kirk Center in your will or would like to receive a packet of information about doing so, please let us know by contacting us at rklegacysociety@kirkcenter.org or 616-726-0195.

The Kirk Center embodies this truth by linking generations in an educational journey to discover and nourish the roots of America’s political, religious, economic, and cultural inheritance. By designating a legacy gift, members become an integral part of the continuity that Dr. Kirk envisioned.

THE RUSSELL KIRK CENTER

Strengthening America’s Tradition of Order, Justice & Freedom
kirkcenter.org