

RAD goes deeper with all-day conference

By Mike Wood

Staff writer

Rossmoor Advocates for Diversity has not shied away from big concepts. So RAD offering its first all-day conference should come as no surprise.

The RAD Vision Conference came to the Fireside Room on May 21. It featured four presenters, coming from different areas of professional expertise, focusing on ways to better understand one's own unconscious biases, stereotypes and



Lynne Thorner speaks at the RAD Vision Conference on May 21. *News photo by Mcmesiah Vinoya*

assumptions. The workshop format gave audience members the opportunity

Vision Conference draws perspectives on fostering greater understanding

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to give input, share personal reflections and perhaps figure what they personally can do to grow diversity.

“It feels like people want to get involved and want to help, but I’m not sure they know what to do and where to go next,” said Michele Huff, one of the presenters.

Huff is a negotiator, author and instructor who also happens to live here. Huff’s 2015 book “The Transformative Negotiator” was updated last year with three new chapters.

“It’s nice to have an umbrella organization that’s kind of guiding where things might go, giving people the tools,” Huff said. “I think that’s the most important thing: giving people the tools to have those kinds of conversations and engage in the kind of behavior that will encourage diversity.”

The keynote was given by Amy Jin Johnson, executive director of the nonprofit Proj-ect Implicit, a global network of researchers focused on understanding hidden cognitive processes that shape people’s judgment and behavior. Johnson spoke about how everyday biases shape both justice and injustice, often when there’s no harmful intent.

Huff shared her impactful visit to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama. Among elements that moved her was text on a huge video screen, noting that 2 million people died on ships during the Middle Passage, while being transported to be slaves.

“I’m standing there, and I’m thinking, ‘OK, I used to swim in the Atlantic Ocean when I was a kid,’ ” Huff said. “We used to go there sometimes in the summers when the city got too hot ... I had no idea that so many people lost their lives in that ocean. It was mind-boggling.”

She described how she cried for about 10 minutes, upon that realization.

“I almost thought I can’t go on. ... This is too much. ... I’m going to leave. But the guard came over and handed me a tissue,” she said.

RAD, which celebrated its sixth anniversary in March, has produced other types of big events. Looming is the Diversity Film Festival on July 28 and 29, followed by the Diversity Festival on Oct. 13. RAD partners with the Diversity Consciousness Committee (DCC) of the

Lynne Thorner, a Rossmoor resident who teaches film appreciation through Acalanes Adult Education, discussed how film can educate about culture, race, gender and ethnicity. After showing the short film “The Graffiti of Mr. Tupaia,” she engaged in a give-and-take discussion with audience members about what they found impactful in the film.

Thorner runs the RAD Reels film program, and facilitates film programs and discussions for several other Rossmoor clubs and organizations.

“A short film can be used to teach culture and history,” she told the audience. “It can address issues relevant to what’s going on – not just the time when the film was released, but the time when you see the film.”

Much can be conveyed in even the shortest of films, she added.

“I have a three-minute film that we could talk about for an hour,” Thorner said. “And the point is, it doesn’t matter the length. It’s the ideas, the values that are trying to enlighten and enhance the viewer.”

Joe Lurie, director emeritus of UC Berkeley’s International House, described how to foster intercultural respect, and how understanding and misunderstanding happens across cultures.

International House was the first interracial co-educational living center west of New York City in the United States. It has around 600 students from 75 to 80 countries, living together and discovering each other’s humanity, beyond their differences, Lurie said.

He pointed to the cover of his book “Perception and Deception: A Mind-Opening Journey Across Cultures.” It shows a person with no hair with the words “Militant? Monk? Punk? Patient?” shown on the back of their head. Experiences – a bad one with a skinhead, or going to meditations with monks, for example

– often reshape one’s perspective and can lead to making errant conclusions about someone new, he said.

Rossmoor Interfaith Council and Rossmoor Recreation for both of those big events.

For this initial all-day conference, having presenters who spoke from different angles was important.

“We didn’t want it to sound preachy,” said RAD board member Rae James, who introduced the speakers. “It was meant to be something that people could just say, ‘Yeah, that’s how it is for me.’” It could be said RAD members bear similarities to International House students: on a quest to better understand others, regardless of differences.

“Here is a group of people (in RAD) that is interested in learning about other people, people who are different, and who want to encourage an exchange of views, exchange of understanding, about what I may not understand,” Lurie said.

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Michele Huff speaks during the RAD Vision Conference. *News photo by Mike Wood*