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TACAW presents 'good challenges' with MANAUS equity programming

By Jeanne Souldern
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On July 26, Adriana Alvarez, Ph.D., will present the second installment in the Equity Speaker Series at The Arts Campus at Willits (TACAW).

The series is an initiative of MANAUS' Equity Action Project and, according to the website, "is a seven-week, anti-racism and race equity and inclusion training aimed to forge a region that practices cultural humility and where positions of power are more representative of the region's diversity."

In her "Cultivating Equity, Trust and Belonging: Latinx Families' Experiences of Trust and Distrust in Schools" presentation, Alvarez will share findings from a research study that examined the experiences of families from immigrant backgrounds in Roaring Fork Valley schools.

Through the personal narratives (testimonios) of one family, told through artistic visual representations, the audience is invited to step into deeper understanding of how schools can cultivate trust and a sense of

belonging.

Ryan Honey, TACAW executive director, said of Alvarez's work, "She's done some fascinating research. What was so appealing about it is that the research was based in the Roaring Fork Valley."

Based on responses so far, Honey said parents and students want to learn from her. He said, "I think it's a great opportunity to hear from an expert in the field whose data points are from our community."

A press release states, "This session will also discuss a partnership with Glenwood Springs Elementary School to provide examples of how classroom learning can integrate and honor students' identities, families and life experiences."

The series is a first-time collaboration between TACAW and MANAUS. Honey said of the partnership, "I just want to thank MANAUS for making it possible and acknowledge them as the wonderful partners they are."

Honey explained that TACAW



At the upcoming Equity Speaker Series event, Dr. Adriana Alvarez, will discuss a partnership with Glenwood Springs Elementary School to provide examples of the ways classroom learning can integrate and honor students' identities, families and life experiences. Courtesy photo

intends for this collaboration to be more than a one-and-done series. "The topics discussed are extremely relevant, not only locally, but regionally, nationally and globally," he said.

Honey recognizes the importance of educational and entertainment offerings for the Valley's Spanish-speaking population, as reflected by TACAW's efforts to promote bilingual programming and intentional community outreach. He shared, "It's wonderful for the native Spanish speakers

in our community to hear their language, but it's also great for those of us who are English speakers to be hearing Spanish on a regular basis on our stage, and hear the fluidity of it going back and forth," he said.

Honey praised Kendall Smith, director of programming at TACAW, for his consistency in maintaining a diverse offering of events. Smith joined the TACAW team at the end of 2020, leaving a stint as Colorado Public Radio's event manager.

Honey continued, "One of the beautiful things about TACAW is that you may come here one night and laugh at comedy or dance to music, and you may come here another night and learn something from a documentary or a speaker, so it's not just all about entertainment. There's also this community-building aspect and this enrichment aspect."

In the summer of 2020, TACAW broke ground to build The Contemporary performing arts center in Willits. The building cost \$7 million, of which the organization raised \$5 million from private donations. At the end of September 2021, the newly-minted 10,000-square-foot, net-zero facility opened its doors for the first time — and it has been sailing successfully ever since.

As for TACAW's popularity, Honey gives some credit to its location, saying, "People are now coming to this geographic center of the Valley, for shopping and other things, so they're acclimated to doing that. I think it allowed us to take off, and now our job is to meet the demand to give people the content that they want to see, challenge them with content that they may not know about and give them the chance to make an artistic discovery."

Designed to be an inviting space, The Contemporary offers a sense of intimacy and, as Honey explained, "is one of our strongest selling points to artists and audiences."

Recently, TACAW hosted two sold-out events — 5Point Film's screening of the documentary "Fire of Love" and a performance by singer-songwriter Todd Snider.

Honey said, with TACAW's success, "The sell-outs are starting to become more and more common." He suggests you RSVP and buy your tickets to TACAW events well in advance.

Tickets are free for Dr. Alvarez's July 26 event. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., with the talk beginning at 6:30 p.m. To RSVP for the seated show, go to tacaw.org