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The Bigger Table series aims to build community connections

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The Bigger Table series, co-hosted by the Alpine Achievers Initiative and the local chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice, held its first event Jan. 14, the second iteration will be from 5-7 p.m. Feb. 18 at Tres Litros Beer Co., 118 N. E St. at Salida United Methodist Church, 228 E. Fourth St.

The first event is titled "Where Am I in This Work," and the series aims to connect the community and build skills for healthy relationships with family, coworkers, neighbors and the broader community.

Megan Strauss, executive director of Alpine Achievers Initiative, said the reason for hosting the series is because divisiveness and argumentativeness within the community is “counter-culture to our mission, and it doesn’t feel like it’s getting better.”

“For a lot of people, we’re tired of the anger and ... the cancel culture. We’re wanting to move in a more healing way. ... We’re trying to find a way to get us back to where we can talk with people who may not agree with us on everything. That doesn’t mean we have to forget our values, but how can we still hold a conversation with people and hold boundaries around our values, without it meaning we can’t be in relationships with other people,” Strauss said.

Each session will be facilitated by three community leaders, including therapists, teachers and executive directors. All evening sessions are potlucks in an effort to build community, and each session is meant to be interactive. There will be facilitated discussion and information provided during each session.

“We have seen time and time again that ‘othering’ people is not effective. We don’t realize how much, and how often, we other people whose actions and values align with ours because they’re doing it differently than we would,” Strauss said. “This is about saying we need to stop putting so much energy into tearing down how other people are showing up.”

Maren Miller, representing SURJ, said the group is “a network of white people working to end racism and build a multiracial democracy rooted in dignity, care and collective liberation.”

Examples of that include asking white participants to examine their conditioning, privilege and patterns, staying grounded and accountable, having difficult conversations without causing harm and showing up in solidarity in ways that are sustainable and effective.

Miller said SURJ decided to co-host The Bigger Table series “because it aligns closely with (SURJ) values: inviting people into the work rather than shaming them, practicing real skills for difficult conversations and building connections across differences.”

“The Bigger Table series is a four-part community gathering focused on connection, learning and practice. It is an invitation – not to be perfect, but to be present. Rather than centering ‘right’ answers or polished performances, the series encourages people to show up honestly, practice together and learn through real conversation. The goal is to build the kinds of grounded, trusting relationships our community needs right now,” Miller said.

Session 2 will be from 5-7 p.m. Feb. 18 at Tres Litros Beer Co., 118 N. E St., session 3 will be 9 a.m. to noon April 4 at A Church, 419 D St., and the final session will be 5-7 p.m. May 6 at Episcopal Church of the Ascension, 349 E St.

All sessions are free and open to the public, but advance registration is encouraged at AlpineAchievers.org/the-bigger-table. For more information, Strauss can be contacted at Megan@alpineachievers.org.

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