

Unite Fest Opening Statements

3/11/2017

Trenda Loftin

This gathering is one I've been looking forward to for forever. That may seem like an exaggeration- but it is not. I continually become more and more aware of the ways money, race, gender & gender expression, sexuality, religion, citizenship, education, and physical and mental abilities affects one's access and ease with which they move through the world. My understanding of the systems in place that stifle the strength and resilience that, I believe, is in every person, continues to deepen. And I realize, that I have always needed opportunities to be in community, intentionally celebrating the various identities we hold and committing to growth and learning.

My name is Trenda Loftin. I am a political theatre artist and teacher, homework support teacher, advisor to the Black Student Union and the Interim-Diversity Coordinator here at PVPA. It is in these roles, as well as through my work on the board of the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), that I have had the distinct opportunity to work with many of you! To the Diversity Committee and Identity/Affinity groups, thank you for the work you do everyday. Thank you for the work you've put in to help this event happen. To all of you, thank you for showing up today.

Today, I want to speak to the concept of Showing up. It's more than physically being in a particular place at a particular time. It's about being here now. For real. It's about listening for understanding. It's about making the choice to not let cell phones take you away from that being here now or listening deeply. It's about noticing your physical and emotional reactions. It's about noticing when self- judgement or the judgement of others is trying to stop you from fully being present or trying to stop you from participating. Please don't let those things stop you. Please don't let anything stop you.

That being said- please take care of yourself today. We are here to celebrate and learn and that can be both exciting and uncomfortable. So if, in noticing your physical and emotional reactions, you realize that the sometimes uncomfortable feeling of growth

has shifted into feeling unsafe- please take a break, drink water, journal, connect - connect with a friend or volunteer, connect with nature. And come back to the work when you're ready.

We have 3 workshop sessions today with lunch after the first one. You will notice in your program that there are 3 workshop sessions with 6-7 workshops offered in each session. In an effort to incorporate a variety of voices, accommodate a range of needs, and encourage tiered and creative learning- we are asking that each workshop hold no more than 15 participants with the exception of workshops oriented around performance. The more we spread out amongst the workshops, the more opportunities we will have to share our learning with each other and with those who could not or would not make it to this conference.

If you have come with friends, try to plan so each of you can come back with a different experience to share. Talk to each other. Lunch will be 1 hour long and will be an opportunity to chat with each other and check out the wonderful exhibitors. Lunch will be set up and available at 12:10, in the hallway between the annex and the main hall. There will be specialty food items and original artwork (including Evy's face-painting) for suggested donations in the small theatre room 129. We will have people to guide you. This lunch is provided through the generosity of community. Special thank you to River Valley Market Co-op and India House of Northampton and Family Pizza of South Hadley for their donations. Thank you to the many folks here for your contributions as well. There are posters and volunteers around the first floor to assist with finding where to go.

This Unite Fest, is free of charge but not free from resources. If you find yourself with monetary resources to share, please consider making a contribution. If you find yourself with the resources of time and energy, please consider staying after the event to help with cleanup.

We will be gathering back here in the theatre after the 3rd session for closing performances and a participant share out. So today, if you learn something, make something, write something, consider sharing it with us at the end. If you don't share it here today, even if you do, share your learning and/or creations with someone else. Because it is in that sharing, in that creating, in that envisioning other possibilities that positive change has always and continues to happen.

So again, thank you for sharing your time and your resources. Thank you for being here now. And I encourage you to continue showing up today. Enjoy your workshops and see you back here at 3:15!