Healing a Divided Country *Starts with Trust*

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Monday, March 20, 2023 | 5:45-7:30 p.m.
Simon and Rose Mandel Theatre | 4250 Richmond Road | Highland Hills, Ohio 44122

James Encinas
Thornton, Colorado

James Encinas rode his bike across the U.S. — from Los Angeles to New Jersey — twice. The first trip, in his mid-20s, was fueled by anger. The second, at age 56, was in pursuit of healing from a painful childhood. The journeys offered him peace and hope as he met people who had lived through trauma and overcame it. He wrote *Wheeling to Healing…Broken Heart on a Bicycle* about understanding and healing from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). A former actor and grade school teacher, Encinas is now a parent education specialist, teacher trainer and speaker inspiring people to build community as the answer to isolation and pain.

Panelist

Arica Gonzalez
Baltimore, Maryland

Arica Gonzalez grew tired of the drug-dealing, illegal dumping and trash that seemed to define and depress her Panway neighborhood in West Baltimore. So she and some neighbors started small. After cleaning up an alley and a single vacant lot, Gonzalez persuaded the lot owner, who didn't live there, to donate it. They turned it into a community park with a stage for celebrations. More and more neighbors joined. Now you'll find the park brimming with teenagers picking up trash, mowing lawns, designing murals and planting gardens. People gather for Sunday dinners and community festivals, while Gonzalez continues to inspire change by leading the nonprofit Urban Oasis.

Panelist

S. Renee Mitchell
Portland, Oregon

After a career as a reporter and an award-winning columnist for *The Oregonian* newspaper, S. Renee Mitchell quit journalism to focus on her art — which she says saved her life and reconnected her to her purpose. "I have survived poverty, depression, sexual assault, domestic violence, racial trauma, bullying and other heartbreaks. However, each time I create art, I move further away from the pain that at one point made me think about ending my life." She later became the only Black teacher at Oregon's most diverse high school, where she founded I Am M.O.R.E. (Making Ourselves Resilient Everyday) to help students, community members and teachers heal from trauma through profound love, art and building skills.

Panelist

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LB Prevette
Wilkesboro, North Carolina

Laura Beth "LB" Prevette grew up in a trailer on a chicken farm "in the middle of nowhere," she says. "It was a landscape and way of communal living that I deeply loved. But growing up as a queer woman got progressively harder." After a violent attack when she was 17, Prevette left home and moved to the West Coast, but her heart eventually called her back to North Carolina. Towns like Wilkesboro are often judged as backward and ignorant. She wondered if people who are different keep leaving, how will neighbors ever learn to accept others and love better? Prevette now weaves community and works to create safe and inclusive spaces for minority and LGBTQ youth in Appalachia.

Panelist

Frederick Riley
Saginaw, Michigan

Originally from Saginaw, Michigan — once voted one of the most miserable places to live in the U.S. — Frederick Riley's early childhood memories include food insecurity, evictions, poverty and more. Yet there were always people at home, school, church and in the neighborhood who showed him strength and love. Riley's life was stitched together by those people and, for him, is a testament to the power of community, relationships and mutual caring. He spent much of his career working to lift up young adults through community programs at YMCAs around the country. Now he leads the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project, which connects, supports and celebrates the people who are building trust within their communities, weaving a strong and inclusive social fabric.

Facilitator

Learn more and start weaving your community at

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