

Hershey All Things Diversity Event Shares Perspective of Citizens from Diverse Backgrounds

Continued from May 25, 2018 Derry Township eNews

Supervisor Cort expressed appreciation to the members of the panel for their willingness to talk about their experiences and to have open dialogue with the audience. %Open and honest discussions on these issues will help us better understand each other so we can continue to foster an atmosphere in our community that is welcoming and inclusive,+said Cort.

Sarah Ramirez, MD, Assistant Professor in Family and Community Medicine for Penn State Health, was born in Dominican Republic and grew up in a New Jersey neighborhood where she was exposed to drug dealers and gun fire. Despite the lack of support to continue her education from her family and her school's administration, she attended college and graduated from Ross University School of Medicine.

Dr. Ramirez was bullied and was on the receiving end of discrimination. She encouraged community members to stand up for other members of the community if you see that they are being treated badly or unfairly. %Inaction sends a message of acceptance. Silence supports it,+she explained.

Dr. Ramirez said that she knew that to deal with discrimination, she %needed to be successful, be the voice, the example.+

If you have not been a victim of discrimination, you may not fully understand how it feels or even have an awareness of when it occurs. Dr. Ramirez explained the microaggression that groups outside of the majority feel, and said that she dealt with it daily in comments that she found to be offensive.

Microaggression is defined by Merriam-Webster as %a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group.+It is a term coined by Harvard University professor and psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce in 1970. (Microaggression . Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microaggression>)

Every member of the panel stressed the importance of having a support system and someone you can talk to. When Shivani Gupta, a native of Delhi, India, moved to Hershey 14 years ago, she was worried about how her children would be accepted by others in the Derry Township school system. She said, %Kids feel that they are different.+ She understood that some people live in their hometown their whole lives and are not exposed to other cultures. She felt strongly that she needed to be a part of her children's education and was involved in the PTO and school programs and activities. %Parents need to be their children's safety and to know what's going on,+she said. She recommended talking to your children about their day and communicating with your children's teachers.

Shivani said, "Children should not feel that being different is bad." She has had a positive experience in Hershey and feels that the school and PTO are doing an awesome job, and are supporting those where English is a second language, and are promoting international awareness.

As a student at Hershey High School, Joseph Chubb struggled with coming out as a homosexual, but found that his friends and loved ones didn't care about his sexual orientation. He used his experience to become a support system for others and has been a proponent of groups and events that support and celebrate our differences.

He told the audience about a time when someone had a negative opinion about his sexuality and said something disparaging. He was aware that there were people who were uncomfortable with it, but he said, "If you can't love yourself, how are you going to love someone else. Be true to yourself and live your best life."

Assistant professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences at Penn State College of Medicine, Alicia McDonald, PhD, experienced bullying as a child and racism as the only African American woman in her college dorm. She told the audience about events in her life when she was discriminated against. Dr. McDonald said that it was important for her to have confidence in herself and to have a support system she could share her feelings with because there are always going to be insensitive people. She calls on citizens to act when they observe someone being discriminated against, to say something, and stand up for them.

Each of us can make a difference, set an example, and be the reason for change in others. The Hershey All Things Diversity series will be offered again starting in the fall through spring 2019 in a continuing effort to create awareness, educate, and to strive to become a community where we embrace and enjoy the many ways that our differences enhance and enrich our lives. The series is free for the public to attend and is organized and supported by The Township of Derry, Downtown Hershey Association, The Hershey Story Museum, Penn State Health, The Hershey Company, Hershey Entertainment & Resorts, and the Derry Township School District.

Visit the Township's website, <http://www.derrytownship.org/community/hersheyallthingsdiversity> for articles on each event of the 2017-2018 series and on the Hershey All Things Diversity efforts.

Mark your calendar for Saturday, June 23 for downtown Hershey's first celebration of cultures. The Downtown Hershey Association will hold Culturefest from 12:00 to 8:00 p.m. in ChocolateTown Square Park. It's a celebration of art, food, and music from nationalities around the world and is free and open to the public.

This cultural event will bring the community together to experience global arts, music, dance, ethnic dishes, fine crafts, and local flavors. Children's activities will feature interactive programming highlighting a variety of cultures.

Visit the [Downtown Hershey Association's website](#) for more information.