



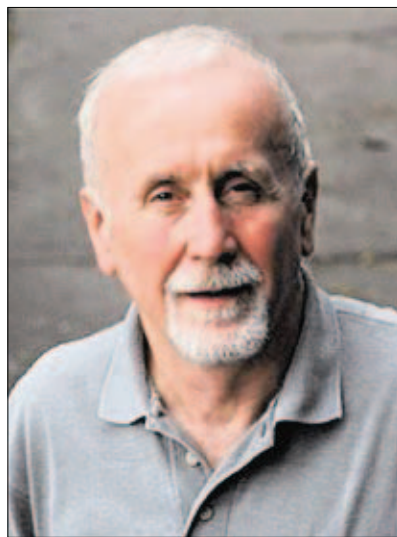
Linda Oberhaus, the executive director of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples, is the first speaker for the Progressive Voices Speak Out series that starts Feb. 4 at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greater Naples.



James Morrow



Vic Walczak



Lars Osberg



Brian J. Soden

PROGRESSIVE VOICES

COMMON GROUND, UNITARIAN CHURCH BRINGING MORE THOUGHT LEADERS TO NAPLES



FILE PHOTO

Jim Marcinkowski, a former CIA operative, is seen speaking at a previous year's Progressive Voices speaker series at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greater Naples.

By John Osborne
Citizen Correspondent

A popular lecture series that has been a community staple for more than a decade will kick off its Winter 2015 program 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 4 at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Greater Naples.

For the past 15 years, "Progressive Voices Speak Out" has featured leaders from around the country discussing the most pertinent issues of the day in an effort to move the national conversation forward.

This year's slate of speakers includes Linda Oberhaus, executive director of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples, who will present on a topic titled "The War Against Women," on Feb. 4. She will be joined by Judith Gates, an international management consultant and former entrepreneur, university lecturer, school inspector and school principal.

"Featuring (this subject) is a wonderful way to raise the consciousness of our community about the state of women worldwide," Oberhaus said. "This session will also provide community members a glimpse of what The Shelter is doing locally to address issues resulting from gender inequity and oppression, specifically domestic violence and the trafficking of women and girls."

Jim Swonk, who serves on the committee for Progressive Voices, said the lecture series is made possible through a joint effort between the Unitarian church and Common Ground, a local nonprofit.

"We try to bring thought leaders to the community, and we try to do this in a progressive way," he said. "We want to take out any bias to the right or left of the political spectrum and try to get the facts out as they are by bringing in experts in various areas."

Easier said than done, however, Swonk said, noting that delivering progressive ideas often proves difficult in Collier County.

"Collier County's fairly conservative, and we're trying to put out a message that's a bit more progressive and more in line with the general country and where younger people are headed," he said.

Progressive Voices Chairman Frank Kolhatkar echoed those sentiments.

"Each year, we reach out to high schools in the community and ask one of the teachers to bring 15 or 20 students to listen," he said. "There's a question-and-answer session at the end of each lecture, so if they have any questions the next generation is welcome to ask them."

The reason for reaching out across the generational divide is simple enough to understand, he added.

"Younger people think differently and we want to listen to them and have them listen to the thought leaders to see if any of us can answer any questions," he said.

Each of the six scheduled lectures on tap for this year cost \$15. The entire lecture series can be purchased for \$75. Swonk said the fees underwrite all costs involved with putting on the lecture series.

"We usually have 130 to 200 people come to each lecture," he said. "We serve wine and hors d'oeuvres at 6:30 p.m. and the lectures begin at 7 p.m. So, for 15 bucks, you get wine and appetizers and lectures, too. That's a bargain — in Naples, anyhow."

Other topics in this year's lecture series include income inequality, historical fundamentalism, climate change, race relations and the changing world order.

"We want to rethink partisanship on important issues and topics the world is facing," Kolhatkar said. "Our second purpose is to promote intellectual curiosity on those topics. Our speakers are great speakers, but they don't necessarily have solutions to the problems."

And lest anyone think the lecture series is closed to the greater community, he added that most guests come from outside the Unitarian church.

"About 30 percent are church members, but about 70 percent of people come from outside the church to listen to experts and thought leaders talk about the important issues of the day," he said.

As for what Progressive Voices has up its sleeve for next year, Kolhatkar said the lecture-series schedule remains fluid in order to adapt to changing world events.

"We always make changes to the schedule based on what's happening in the world," he said.

For more details, visit www.uunaples.org and click the "Programs" menu at the top right-hand side of the homepage.

Progressive Voices Speak Out Winter 2015 program

■ Feb. 4: Dr. Judith Gates and Linda Overhaus, "The War Against Women: There is Oppression, Suppression and Repression of Women Worldwide. What Can be Done?"

■ Feb. 11: Dr. Lars Osberg, Dalhousie University economics professor, "Increasing Extreme Income Inequality: What Has Happened to Social Justice?"

■ Feb. 18: Jim Kenney, co-founder of Common Ground, "Historical Fundamentalism — The Tea Party and the Nation's Founders."

■ Feb. 25: Dr. Brian J. Soden, University of Miami professor of meteorology and physical oceanography, "Climate Change and its Future for South Florida."

■ March 4: Vic Walczak, ACLU Pennsylvania legal director, "Rodney King, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Beyond: Race and Policing."

■ March 11: Dr. James Morrow, University of Michigan world politics professor, "Changing World Order and the Challenges for U.S. Foreign Policy."