

Simi Valley Acorn

Spiritual Expo to honor 9/11 by creating united community

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By Carissa Marsh

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Dr. Jim Lockard Yudit Ecsedy wants to spark a spiritual awakening in Simi Valley.

The UCLA-educated mother of four, pointing to people like Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, Marianne Williamson, Dr. Michael Beckwith and the Dalai Lama, says global spiritualization is taking place and she wants her neighbors to be a part of it.

“(Those figures) and many others are generating a new consciousness about what is possible for human beings on this planet,” said Ecsedy, who called Ojai home for 30 years before retiring with her husband in Simi in 2009. “I believe that Simi Valley is an ideal place to give space to these ideas and to become part of this spiritual culture.”

But beyond just starting the dialogue, she wants to get past societal fragmentation and connect the community on a deeper level.

“What if people came out of the closet as spiritual human beings, so to speak, and became a part of this spiritual conversation?”

To her, there's no better time for the community to join the conversation than on the 10th anniversary of 9/11. In pursuit of her aim, Ecsedy is organizing a multifaceted Spiritual Expo at the Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center.

Although Sept. 11, 2001 was a tragic day in the nation's history, Ecsedy believes it was also a spiritual event. In the face of crisis, people from all walks of life together dropped their barriers and pulled together.

Ecsedy hopes the expo will recapture that feeling of unity.

"This whole event is about changing the consciousness of human beings. What is possible for us. . . . What can we do for the greater good for a world that works for everyone?" Ecsedy said.

Since the Chumash Indians were Simi's first inhabitants, the daylong event will open with an American Indian Circle Dance followed by an invocation performed by Maxiwo, a Chumash Shan of the Dolphin Clan. A Buddhist blessing will also be given.

During the midday program, an interfaith panel will discuss the commonality among religions and the possibility of coexistence.

The panel will consist of a Buddhist monk; a Catholic priest; Rabbi Michele Paskow, leader of Congregation B'nai Emet in Simi Valley; -and Rev. Sarah Kitch, a deacon with St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church in Simi Valley.

"It's always very important to be able to have open dialogue, to share openly about our faith traditions and to be able to learn more about one another and to be able to find what is common," said Kitch, a Northridge resident. "What are the things that we share with one another as human beings?"

Later, Dr. Jim Lockard, spiritual director of the Center for Spiritual Living in Simi Valley, will deliver the keynote address. He will speak about recognizing our own humanity and similarities to transcend divisions and create a world of less conflict.

"Peace through the recognition that everybody really wants the same thing. I think the problem is we really haven't understood each other very well. I think the religions are more alike than different, but the differences are what gets focused on," the Oak Park resident said, noting the issue is the same with different races and ethnicities.

"It leads to misunderstanding, it leads to conflict, it leads to fear."

During the afternoon program, Shamanic healer Rev. Esther Jenkins will shine a light on how people are connected with the environment and with each other. Klaudia Kovacs, a Hollywood-based success consultant, will talk about individual and collective power and success and how they may be used to contribute to the community.

In addition, the expo is linking up “synergistically,” Ecsedy said, with a similarly focused event in Seattle called “ONE: The Event”—a three-day, globally webcasted gathering to recognize the anniversary of 9/11 and “shift from fear to love.” Ecsedy hopes to stream video from the Seattle event to the expo.

Throughout the day there will be musical performances and lively dances. There will also be a unique remembrance of 9/11, to be announced at the expo.

Food will be provided by Panda Express and a vegan chef. Vendors will sell crystals, art, jewelry, incense and candles, Tibetan artifacts and more. A tarot card reader, a numerologist and a masseuse will also be on hand.

Lockard said Ecsedy’s vision is “ambitious” but timely, and he hopes people will attend out of a desire to make things better—or just out of curiosity.

“We have a lot of looking at (Sept. 11), for good reason, from a patriotic standpoint . . . but I think the spiritual aspect is something that can lead us more quickly to healing and can lead us to a world that’s more at peace,” he said.

Kitch agreed, saying it’s good to remind oneself to work from a place of understanding and unity— and a day of remembrance more keenly focuses that intent.

“We do this for the nation and certainly for the idea of us being able to be a nation that is earnestly seeking that openness and dialogue,” she said. “It is kind of calling us back to what we were founded on.”

Ecsedy’s hope is that people will drop their walls, come together and fill the seats of the Cultural Arts Center.

“I want people to feel it was elevating, it was fulfilling, it was informative . . . and I hope that our Simi Valley culture will continue this kind of conversation.”

The expo is Sun., Sept. 11, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center, 3050 E. Los Angeles Ave. An all-day pass is \$25 before the event and \$30 at the door. Tickets can also be purchased to attend just one or two programs.

Part of the proceeds will go to the Ojai-based National Disaster Search Dog Foundation, which sent dogs to ground zero in the days following 9/11.

For full details and ticket information, visit www.spiritualexposimivalley.com.