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Staff Council speaker coaches on 'undoing oppressions'

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By MARTY LEVINE

This year's Staff Council Spring Assembly on March 9 featured Hill District native and Pitt alumna Felicia Savage Friedman, who passed on her practice of facing "the legacy of racism" and "undoing oppressions in systems and undoing oppressions in ourselves."

While everyone has encountered, in life, "folks showing up as their ugliest self ... it is our job to meet them with unconditional love," she said. "I am not saying that anyone should stay in abusive relationships, but there are ways to dance with folks" to achieve understanding, she added.

Friedman grew up in East Liberty and Lincoln-Lemington-Larimer, attended Pittsburgh Public Schools and a Catholic high school and earned Pitt degrees from the College of General Studies and School of Education, then worked for the School of Public Health as a researcher, health coach and yoga instructor for the Healthy Black Family Project, 2005-21.

To have "authentic, honest relationships," she said, both sides must "listen to understand, not to respond. Speak your truth. ... If you're a talker, hold back a bit. If not, speak up.

"We don't grow unless there is some stress applied," Friedman continued. "We don't grow unless we stretch our understanding of others. How to stay in an uncomfortable space? How to stay in a space to have these connections that really knock you off your center? It's a slow process. Do I feel a sense of urgency? Yes. People are dying while we're figuring this out."

She teaches raja yoga, with its practices of restraint and self-discipline, but emphasizes that other practices may be just as fruitful. "Remembering who we are in the legacy of racism and oppression" is to notice how you are affected and affecting other people, she emphasized.

Asked to give advice to people who might be intimidated when attempting to make changes in a large institution, such as Pitt, Friedman suggested that you “choose a space where you have some level of influence ... and speak your truth in that space. You must practice some discernment ... because we need our jobs. Systemic racism is huge. It would take all of us to shift this. But in your sphere of influence, (try to act upon) what you have power over.”

Book Fund Award

Staff Council also announced the winners of its Book Fund Award, with each recipient — Pitt students whose parent or guardian is a Pitt staff member — receiving \$500 toward school supplies:

- Hanna Alamo, pursuing a B.S. in emergency medicine in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, whose father is Max Alamo of Pitt IT.
- Natalie Mittereder, working toward a B.A. in Spanish and business, whose mother is Joanna Mittereder in Student Affairs.
- Belqis Rahim, earning a B.A. in economics, whose father is Khalid Rahim in the Program Evaluation Research Unit of the School of Pharmacy.

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