

Thursday, Nov 09, 2017

OU Soundings Series to highlight importance of community engagement

Oakland University's popular [Soundings Series](#), which features examples of faculty successfully taking their research out of the classroom and using it to make a positive difference in the world, will return on Monday, Nov. 27 with a special presentation by [Ali Woerner](#), associate professor of dance and co-founder of "Take Root," a contemporary dance company-in-residence at OU.

The event will take place from 3-4:30 p.m. in 242 Elliott Hall. Woerner will be presenting information about Take Root's [Dance for Parkinson's Disease Program](#), why it's important and ways higher education can be used to improve the lives of others in the community. She will also be highlighting her own community engagement efforts in Oakland County.

"Community engagement is so important to what we're doing," she said. "It's the way we started, and it's the way we've survived. We let people know what's going on. Not only that, but we get them to tell others about the program, or come to the class themselves. Sometimes the hardest part is just getting them in the room."

Based on the Mark Morris Dance Group's "Dance for PD" program, the Dance for Parkinson's Disease program at Oakland University was developed to empower those living with Parkinson's Disease (PD), as well as their caregivers, spouses and family members, to explore movement and music through a program that engages their minds and bodies in an enjoyable social environment.

"We try to give them a space that's safe," Woerner said. "That's really important, especially for this group of people who are dealing with being vulnerable every minute of their lives. They worry about being able to cross the street in time, about getting to the phone when it rings, etc. It's just a constant thing for them. To give them an hour where they don't have to worry, where they can just have fun, it's great. Sure, we talk about how the movements are going to help them physically, but we don't harp on it. That's not our purpose. We're there to make them feel good."

According to Woerner, the classes are currently offered in three locations in Oakland County:

- Oakland University, 201 Meadow Brook Road, Rochester, Mich.
- The Older Person's Commission, 650 Letica Drive, Rochester, Mich.
- St. Joseph Mercy Oakland, 44405 Woodward Ave., Pontiac, Mich.

"What I think is really interesting about this work is that the basis of it is dance, but it's also dealing with a medical issue and a neurological disease," Woerner said. "So it really cross-pollinates because you're dealing with education, health sciences, nurses, physical therapy, dance therapy, music, etc. It's really exciting because you're touching all those groups. I think that's why we've been as successful as we have been with the program."

For more information about the Soundings Series, contact Leanne DeVreugd, program assistant for Women in Science, Engineering and Research (WISER), at ldevreugd@oakland.edu, visit the Soundings Series website at Oakland.edu/research/soundings-series.



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