Narrator:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University

Nicki Donnelson:

Bridging the Divide: the 2021 Public Affairs Conference at Missouri State University, held September 27th through 30th. I’m Nicki Donnelson. Today, we will be speaking with Stacey Trewatha-Bach and Dr. Elizabeth Walker to talk about the free conference. Walker talks about the theme.

Dr. Elizabeth Walker:

This year, the theme of the Public Affairs Conference is Bridging the Divide. In-in today’s world, we all think we’re alone. And people only seem to look at ideas and opinions from one side, but what we have to realize is, Bridging the Divide is about coming together, and we may not all see things the same way, but we have so many things in common. We have that commonality of who we are, where we’re from, what we’re all about, our hearts that really bring us together. And I think that’s what the theme is trying to emphasize, is that we can see things from different perspectives and just have that, that love and respect for each other to help bridge that divide, help move this country forward, help move ourselves forward. We cannot wait to get started with our conference. One of our keynote speakers is going to be Mr. John Quinones from the uh, tv show “What Would You Do?”, and we are really excited to have him with us this year.

Nicki Donnelson:

This year’s conference will be a mixture of in-person events and live, virtual programming as we explore the various facets of Bridging the Divide. Trewatha-Bach tells us about the plenary speakers and presentations.

Stacey Trewatha-Bach:

Some of the plenary speakers that we have, um, are nationally known and, um, one of them will be Shereen Marisol Meraji. She will actually be a virtual presentation via Zoom webinar. And we also have Dr. Bill Doherty. He will be speaking about, um, his organization: Braver Angels. But they look at trying to depolarize the dinner table and he looks at the differences in perspectives that we have regarding our politics and bringing us more together on that. So, we have Shereen, we have Bill, we also have Daryl Davis in-person Thursday evening. Daryl is very well-known as an award-winning musician and conflict negotiator. He is speaking about race and how we bridge that divide through civil conversation. So, we do have a very interesting mix of speakers and one of our preliminary presentations is actually going to be called “Songs from the Street.” That will be an in-person film screening. Our students here at Missouri State put together a documentary about Springfield's homeless choir and how that Springfield homeless choir has brought together our community as far as those who are homed and those who are not, and the benefits that have come out of that meeting and that choir. So, we will actually be doing that screening in full, it’s an hour. And then we’ll have a 30-minute panel of some of our students who worked the film, as well as the choir director and some others. And so, we have a good mix, um, there are things for people to do, they can come on campus, or they can view many different events that will be live streamed via Zoom webinar.

Nicki Donnelson:

As an agriculture professor, Walker is especially pleased to involve the student panel in this Public Affairs Conference. She and Trewatha-Bach tell us more.

Dr. Elizabeth Walker:

One of the panels that we’re really excited about this year is “Dispelling Food Myths,” bridging the divide between consumer and producer. And this is a unique event in which our students are going to be the experts. And so, they will be taking questions from our live audience, live and in person at Missouri State University. Uh, questions related to what are GMOs, what does “grass finish” mean, what does “organic” mean. And so, the students are very excited about doing this. This is the first kind of student panel we’ve ever had at Public Affairs, and we’re really excited to be bringing that to you.

Stacey Trewatha-Bach:

And one of the special events we have is our president's local spotlight. President Smart will be leading a panel discussion of Bridging the Divide alongside community partners. So, he is bringing in several organizations that partner with Missouri State University, and other higher education institutions and seeing how those partnerships are helping to deal with the issues of our community.

Nicki Donnelson:

It is a diverse roundup of topics and perspectives for this year’s conference. You can check out specific topics, as well as the time and location at publicaffairs.missouristate.edu/conference. I’m Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Narrator:

For more information, contact the office of University Communications at 4 1 7 8 3 6 6 3 9 7. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.