

Three Cups of Tea, FLC talk offer community inspiration

It has become clear to me that there is a thirst in our community for substantive discussion and action about how each of us can help bring about world peace.

The overwhelmingly positive response to the appearance by Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, who will speak at Fort Lewis College this Thursday, Sept. 18, is evidence of this need. Everywhere I go, on campus or off, I am told that Mortenson has added insight and depth of knowledge, and some degree of hope to people who are despondent and discouraged about the prospects of peace in our lifetime. Everywhere I go, people ask if there are tickets available for the evening talk, and though disappointed that there are not, laud the college for its decision to invite Mortenson to campus.

The decision by the college's Reading Board to select *Three Cups of Tea* for its Common Reading Experience and to give each incoming freshman a free copy of the book was made in June 2007, well before Mortenson's book became so popular. As the book became a bestseller, we realized we needed to share with the broader community the opportunity to hear from Mortenson himself. In order to help strengthen our relationship with the community and provide a quality program, we became partners with La Plata County's branch of the League of Women Voters. As global outreach and education is part of the League's mission, a perfect partnership was formed.

Endorsed by the president of the college and supported by the faculty and staff, the Common Reading Experience and the selection of *Three Cups of Tea* has provided energy and buzz to our campus now in the second week of classes.

Students are toting the book everywhere and conversations are thriving about the pros and cons of the ideas in the book: the book's style and tone, the role of non-profits, and the political, economic, and social unrest in Central Asia, our military, their military, the peacekeepers, the Taliban, the Muslim faith, music, issues of gender and the way the country looks, smells and feels.

This is all good, if not bittersweet that the difficult situation existing in Pakistan today can cause this kind of excitement.

But what is next? Besides giving *Three Cups of Tea* to friends, studying Central Asia, and giving money to the Central Asia Institute, (all positive and constructive acts) what can we do?

We have seen positive steps taken on our campus and in our community as a direct result of the first Common Reading Book selection, *Folding Paper Cranes: An Atomic Memoir*, by Leonard Bird. Fort Lewis College changed the name of Hesperus Park to Hesperus Peace Park.

This beautiful spot, with peace now in its name, invites us to contemplate the subject of peace when we go there. It has created an atmosphere in which ideas and plans for peace can be thought through. Another action taken is that Joslin Roderick, a community member, was inspired to write a column for this paper about global peace and is helping produce Durango's version of International Peace Day (Sunday, Sept. 21 in Rotary Park.) Leonard "Red" Bird will be the primary speaker at this event.

Fort Lewis College also recommitted itself to offering a Peace Studies minor, which will allow students to study the history of peace movements, a variety of diplomatic principles, and conflict and mediation principles. This is a vital and important addition to our liberal arts curriculum.

Let's not let today's enthusiasm end with Greg Mortenson. He really has done his job – and still is.

This is a call to action to build on the energy Greg has sparked and an invitation to keep talking, listening, and building relationships.

Let's find three concrete things to do to make a difference in this town.

Please e-mail me, talk to your local groups, book clubs, Rotaries, etc. to find a way to continue the fine work of Greg Mortenson after the star is gone. Let's make our own difference.

Bridget Irish is assistant dean of Enrollment Services and General Education at Fort Lewis College in Durango. Reach her at irish_b@fortlewis.edu.

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