

Vail Daily

Vail Symposium's Active Minds series kicks off Wednesday

A discussion on the future of Pakistan will take place in Edwards

Daily Staff Report
Vail CO, Colorado
January 13, 2008

Knocking around ideas about the framework and future of Pakistan, the future of Cuba, and Social Security in the ol' noggin once a month is the mental equivalent of climbing one 14-er. Countless studies illustrate the importance of continued active intellectual stimulation as a major key to sustained health and longevity. By now most of us know that exercising the brain helps fight the onset of Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and other forms of cognitive impairment. And hey, it's also fun.

If you go ...

What: Active Minds series, the future of Pakistan with instructor John Henderson
When: Wednesday, 5:30 to 7 p.m.
Where: Singletree Community Center in Edwards
Cost: Free
More information: Call 476-0954

With an emphasis on perspectives on world events, the Vail Symposium and Eagle County's Active Minds programs are designed to provide an impartial, wide-spectrum understanding of historical, timely, and sometimes controversial subjects. The 2008 Active Minds series is free to all participants.

"Active Minds programs foster one of the Valley's best platforms for members of our community to come together, expand their minds, and engage in dialogue together. American National Bank is proud to be supporting this free community program," said Bret Hooper, president of American National Bank in Edwards. The program has expanded to 10 months of programs and two county locations, now alternating between the Singletree Community Center in Edwards and the Golden Eagle Community Center in Eagle.

The Active Minds initiative was launched in the winter of 2006 by the Vail Symposium and Eagle County's Adult Services as response to a growing awareness regarding keeping the minds of older adults as healthy as their bodies through continued stimulation.

"Our valley is not alone with its growing senior population," says Fraidy Aber, executive director of the Vail Symposium. "In our quest to provide and stimulate lifelong learning, we began reaching out to seniors with our the Active Minds series. As a result, we hooked the whole community with these captivating programs," and she said, "I look forward to the third Wednesday of each month because of Active Minds."

Vail Symposium's five Active Minds programs this winter are: "The Future of Pakistan" on Wednesday in Edwards; "Social Security" on Feb. 20 in Eagle; "Democratic Socialism in Europe" on March 19 in Edwards; "Buddhism" on April 16 in Eagle and "Cuba" on May 21 in Edwards. Lectures run from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

The line-up:

Formed in 1947 by partitioning what was then British India, Pakistan has a brief, but colorful history characterized by periods of growth, instability and regional conflict. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a military coup, and was later elected President in a process that many denounced. With the world's second largest Muslim population, internal strife intensified as Musharraf aligned with the United States in the wake of 9/11.

“Pakistan is a nation in the midst of political transition. The United States finds itself in a tough position after six years of supporting Musharraf, a leader who does not support democracy,” said John Henderson, founder and instructor for Active Minds. “I am looking forward to this program because of all the elements of Pakistan's 60 year history that make its present and future look like a powder keg. The United States has to be concerned about the resurgence of the Taliban, as well as the stability of Pakistan as a nuclear nation, a world fear.”

In the recent aftermath of Benazir Bhutto's assassination, the world is re-focusing its curiosity to the future of Pakistan.

“Benazir Bhutto was making strides to rejuvenate democracy in Pakistan, and her assassination makes what was already a dangerous situation and makes it even more so,” Henderson said. This program on Wednesday will set the context and explore the seeds of the current situation and describe the ongoing political struggle in this important country.

Here is a preview of the other programs featured in the coming season of Active Minds:

Buzz or bust? As the nation buzzes with commentary and structural recommendations about maintaining Social Security, this Active Minds program will help contextualize and propagate the current debate. On Feb. 20, Active Minds will review the history and future of social security, as well as focus on the status and details of various proposals to “save” social security, as well as the political perspectives in play in the debate.

The Active Minds program on March 19 will focus on the history and current challenges facing democratic socialism in Europe. The program will examine Sweden in particular as we seek to understand how this tradition developed and how it compares to the U.S. Issues such as the European Union, population growth, immigration, Eastern European integration and international trade will be examined to understand their potential impact.

On April 16, Active Minds will examine the origins, teachings and practices of Buddhism, the sixth largest religion in the world with estimates of over 350 million followers. Discussion topics will include the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), as well as the various types of Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and others.

Less than 100 miles from the United States, Cuba remains a mystery to many in the U.S. On May 21, Active Minds will look at the past, present and future look of our communist neighbor to the south. The program will cover Castro's revolution, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Guantánamo Bay and ongoing property disputes. It will also look at what the future ultimately holds for the transition of power after Fidel Castro.

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