

Vallejo Times-Herald (<http://www.timesheraldonline.com>)

September 8 Vallejo A&E Source: Co-authors take on cultural etiquette with new book

Readings in Vallejo, Vacaville

By *Richard Freedman, Vallejo Times-Herald*

Wednesday, September 7, 2016



Connie Payne and Patricia Kutza have known each other 45 years. That's a long time. Enough to understand each other, especially at gatherings.

"We'd be at family events," said Kutza, "and situations happen and we would say to each other, 'What just happened?' and the other would say, 'Don't get me started.'"

Though the two "have different backgrounds, certainly, with distinct views on life, we did have a lot of similarities," said Kutza, a Vallejo resident while Payne lives in Brentwood near Pittsburg.

"We have a similar sensitivity about where we think culture is in our world and its challenges," Kutza said.

Since Payne is African American and Kutza white, "we offer an interesting blend of perspectives," Kutza said.

So the two put their thoughts together, coming up with "The Don't Get Me Started! Toolkit — Strategies for a Culturally-Challenged World," drawing from their experience in psychology, ethics, law, sociology and technology.

"It's a concept we're passionate about," Kutz said.

The co-authors get two chances at sharing the book this month, with a reading and signing at the Springstowne Library in Vallejo this Thursday and a visit to the Vacaville Unified School District office on Sept. 14.

In Vallejo, there will be a reading and "a little bit of a background about the book," said Kutza, followed by a question-and-answer with librarian Heather Cummins and questions from the audience.

"And, finally, a huge queue of people who want to buy the book," laughed Kutza.

In Vacaville, the school district board room talk is a joint presentation with American Jobs Center of California.

It's all part of getting the word out there about the paperback the duo believed was needed because of the "rapid advancements in technology, gender identity, mass immigration patterns and shifting personal space and personal behavior in public spaces challenging our traditional mores about etiquette," Kutza said.

The book, she noted, discusses cultural confusion, and the need for people "to be culturally savvy. It's necessary in the job place now and necessary within families. We have to get along. There's a real lapse of how to relate in a way where it doesn't produce a negative outcome."

Cultural situations "can be so different and complex," Kutza continued. "We not offering a recipe for etiquette. We are offering a set of skills, a set of abilities to practice over time."

The book includes a "cultural IQ test," Kutza said, "where people get a sense of where they are on the spectrum. Someone may be 'culturally clueless' or 'culturally tuned in.'"

There are 20 scenarios presented about various cultural subjects, the author said.

"People can see the vignettes in life where they could have handled (the situation) better," Kutza said.

The authors present a "tool kit" that helps reactions to situations "become easier and second nature," Kutza said.

Though writing the book was "a grind" at one point, Kutza said she's thrilled with the results after 18 months of collaboration with Payne.

"We still like each other. We really love each other," Kutza said. "I feel very fortunate."

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