

Conversation series seeks to start a dialogue on community topics



More than 30 individuals discussed homelessness during a Brazen Conversation event Nov. 6, 2015, at Brazen Architecture, 1800 S. Industrial Road, Suite 200C. The next discussion is planned for 7 p.m. Jan. 8, 2016. Caitlyn Belcher/Special to View

By Caitlyn Belcher Special to View

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For business owner **Monica Gresser**, life is about being bold.

Whether it's through physical work or plain conversation, she invites the community to make a difference.

Gresser launched Brazen Conversations, a program that allows residents to discuss difficult or controversial topics, in November. More than 30 people attended the first meeting to discuss homelessness.

“We’re creating yet another way for people to learn about social issues that affect Las Vegas,” Gresser said. “I can only focus on one city at a time, but we all know what’s happening here is happening in other cities.”

A Texas transplant, Gresser founded Brazen Architecture in 2011 after moving to Las Vegas.

“I’ve always been interested in community design or, as my friend calls it, ‘Architecture for Advocacy,’ ” she said. “I feel closer to people when we do smaller projects that are more meaningful to the end user. That’s where I feel that we’re needed more.”

As Gresser worked on community and nonprofit projects, she began noticing “things happening in the city that weren’t often talked about.”

“Issues like homelessness are usually things you see on TV or driving in your car. It’s not typically affecting someone you know,” she said. “I figured if we start talking about these kinds of things, more and more people might start doing something about it.”

Brazen Architecture’s job captain **Ashley Allard** attended the program’s first event because of his personal interest in helping homeless individuals.

As an architect student at Mississippi State University, Allard worked in Pass Christian, Miss., as a relief volunteer when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. About a year later, he and some classmates spent a semester in Biloxi, Miss., to help with revitalization.

“We were meeting with people who lost their home and redesigning them,” Allard said. “We helped FEMA establish new guidelines for structural design and assisted in body revitalization so the next storm surge wouldn’t be so devastating.”

While volunteering, Allard slept in tents, warehouses and on friends' couches. Although he acknowledged he worked with people who lost their homes, he said he didn't consider himself or the individuals homeless until he attended the Brazen Conversation.

"I always looked at it as them being without homes because of the disaster," he said. "I never thought of myself as being homeless either. It was just something I had to do in order to help others."

Throughout the conversation, Allard said he realized society can do a lot more for the homeless if we start seeing them as one of "us."

"We view the homeless as 'they' and 'them.' The homeless population isn't considered as part of 'us' by society," Allard said. "If we can think of it as a 'we' problem, then we as a community can come together and solve the problem."

The next meeting is set to discuss transgender youths at 7 p.m. Jan. 8 in Gresser's office, 1800 Industrial Road, Suite 200C. To RSVP, visit tinyurl.com/jzftffm.

"I think these conversations are important because they're topics we don't want to admit are uncomfortable for us to talk about," Allard said. "It's important for people to come and get uncomfortable so we can figure out how to help. Anything we can do to gain traction to help is a step in the right direction."

Visit facebook.com/brazenarchitecture or email bebold@brazenarchitecture.com.

Brazen Conversations

Topic: Transgender youths

7 p.m., Jan. 8

Brazen Architecture, 1800 Industrial Road, Suite 200C

RSVP: [BRAZENconversations](#)

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