

NEWS

NEUROSCIENTISTS TALK BENEFITS OF MEDITATION, MINDFULNESS AT SYMPOSIUM

In 1992, two neuroscientists, Richard Davidson and Clifford Saron, trekked into the hills around Dharamsala in north India to measure the brain waves of Tibetan Buddhist monks. Although the journey did not yield empirical data, it was a turning point in the careers of both men, and they went on to become leaders in the science of meditation.

On Feb. 9, they will be guest speakers at the Second Annual Symposium for Mindfulness and Society at the University of Oregon. Davidson, a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Saron, a research scientist at University of California-Davis, will share the latest results from their respective research projects.

Davidson, author of the best selling book *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, uses the methods of neuroscience in his research to distinguish different emotional styles and to illustrate a path towards a healthier, more meaningful life.

“The core focus [of the talk] will be that well-being is a skill and it can be cultivated,” Davidson tells *EW*. “I’ll illustrate how we can transform these emotional styles into well-being.”

Saron helps lead the Shamatha Project, a large-scale, long-term study of the effects of meditation on the brain. “People are experiencing a lot of psychological stress without relief,” Saron says. “It’s not that meditation is so special; it’s like it’s permission to do something natural.” Saron has pinpointed some of the empirical effects of meditation on the brain and, though he says the results are probabilistic like any study, the data shows clear trends.

Cris Niell, co-organizer of the event and professor of biology at the UO, says that the university is not known for meditation research, though that is beginning to change. “A lot of it is driven by students instead of faculty,” he says. As the scientific evidence gathers for the benefits of meditation, Niell says, more people are beginning to take meditation seriously as a way to combat the stress of modern life. “There’s a lot more need for it now,” he says. “It’s not something you have to do for mystical reasons.”

For a long time, the tradition of science was considered to be separate from ancient contemplative practices, but Davidson says that the latest research is beginning to change that. “We are now living in a unique time where these traditions are complementing each other,” Davidson says.

Saron’s lecture, “Minding Mindfulness: Findings and Issues in the Scientific Investigation of Contemplative Practice,” starts at 1 pm Monday, Feb. 9, in the Lee Barlow Guistina Ballroom at the Ford Alumni Center. Davidson’s lecture, “Change Your Brain by Transforming Your Mind: Neuroscientific Studies of Meditation,” follows at 7 pm in the EMU Ballroom.

In addition to the lectures, the symposium will feature a series of workshops as part of the Mindfulness Showcase on Feb. 10, including yoga, a sitting group and cognitive therapy in the EMU from 10 am to 5 pm. All events are free and open to the public. — *Daemion Lee*



The weather has been hitting us with record-breaking warm and dry temperatures recently. It would be nice to greet the recently blooming flowers with joy, but there’s reason for trepidation. These warm, dry days mean, as Julie Koeberle, a hydrologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Services puts it, that “the snow has been elusive.”

Overall, the state snowpack is below normal, Koeberle says in a NRCS video viewable at wkly.ws/1xd. The “water year” started Oct. 1 and has us at near average, but the precipitation has mainly fallen in the form of rain, and January has been dry, she says.

Last year at this time in western and parts of southwest Oregon, we were setting records for low snowpack, and now Koeberle says we are replacing those records.

There’s still time for improvement, she says, but the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is calling for a warm and dry El Niño year. NRCS is encouraging water users to “proceed with caution” and brace for low water supplies if February remains dry.

This forecast doesn’t just worry the farmers in dryer parts of Oregon who rely on the snowpack for irrigation. Warming temps affect beer drinkers, too. On Feb. 26, the UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History is hosting “Craft Beer + Climate,” a beer tasting of local craft brews, dinner and a talk featuring Oregon State University hops expert Shaun Townsend.

The event will encourage “a needed dialogue about climate trends and our collective future,” according to Ann Craig, director of public programs at the museum.

“Craft Beer + Climate” will take place from 5 to 8 pm in the Lee Barlow Guistina Ballroom, Ford Alumni Center, 1720 E. 13th Ave. Seating is limited. Advance reservations are required. The deadline is Feb. 18. Go to natural-history.uoregon.edu for tickets, \$45 for museum members and \$55 for the public.

EUGENE STREET FOOD APP CONNECTS HUNGRY DINERS WITH NEARBY FOOD CARTS

Eugene’s food carts and trucks are sprinkled down West 11th, dotted around downtown and parked at Whiteaker breweries — their transitory nature means they’re not always easy to find. Once again, technology is here to save the day: The Street Food Eugene app for iPhone and Android debuted last month, making it a cinch to pin down your favorite food cart, check out new carts or find nearby carts.

“This app could be a pivotal tipping point in the Eugene mobile food scene,” says KC Brooks, owner of Sammatch. As of press time, the app has been downloaded about 800 times.

“It’s free, easy to use and, as far as apps go, I think it’s a really useful one,” says Dave Wagenheim, owner of Viva! Vegetarian Grill.

Wagenheim says he wanted an app that serves the Eugene community while keeping things simple — just the basics of location and hours. The idea came to him during last year’s Eugene Street Food Roundup, when a bevy of food carts and food trucks congregated near Territorial Vineyards on 3rd Avenue to show Eugene what they had to offer.

“Last April, we had about 10 carts and food trucks come together, and that experience started showing me there’s a need for community and information,” Wagenheim says. “The public wants to support food carts, but we need to bridge that gap of how to find them.”

Wagenheim browsed an assortment of food cart apps from around the country, but didn’t find the perfect fit for Eugene until he saw a simple app from Canada. Most of the cities registered to this app weren’t in the U.S., but Wagenheim “saw no reason why it couldn’t be used here, too.”

He contacted the developer and before long, the Street Food Eugene app was born. Food cart owners register their cart and update their location as necessary. Wagenheim says the app serves a similar function to the street food roundups in that it shows the community that food carts are a viable part of the dining scene.

“On your way to work you may only pass one or two carts, but with an app like this, it really shows you that we have a scene here,” he says.

Wagenheim adds that Springfield food carts and food cart diners are welcome to use the app as well, and he’s hoping word of the app will spread throughout town — although it’s already gotten some traction.

“I was at jury duty last week, and the woman at the counter recognized me as a food cart owner,” Wagenheim says. “She said, ‘Did you know that there’s a food cart app out there?’ So it’s nice to see that people are excited about it.”

Download the free app for iPhone at appstore/StreetFoodEugene and for Android at wkly.ws/1xf. — *Amy Schneider*

ACTIVIST ! LERT

- Noted **historian Randall Balmer** of Dartmouth College will speak on “Jimmy Carter, Progressive Evangelism and the Religious Right” at 7 pm Thursday, Feb. 5, at 110 Knight Law Center on the UO campus. Ballmer is considered a leading expert on the role of religion in American life. Sponsored by The Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics. Find more upcoming Morse Center lectures at wkly.ws/1xe.

- Lane County Administrator **Steve Mokroshisky** will speak on “Facing Lane County’s Challenges” at City Club of Eugene at noon Friday, Feb. 6, at the Downtown Athletic Club, 999 Willamette St. \$5 for non-members. See cityclubofeugene.org.

- **A major rally at the Capitol** in Salem for single-payer health care will begin at 11 am Wednesday, Feb. 11. Buses will be leaving Shopko on Coburg Road at 9 am. The cost for the bus ride up and back is \$15, but no one will be turned away. A carpool caravan is also being organized. Sponsored by Health Care for All-Oregon, which estimates 2,500 people will attend from all over the state. See hcaorally.net or find the event on Facebook.