

The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

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Positive Atheism in Action

Volume 13 Number 1

January 2003

"Religion is riddled through and through with nonsense and fanatics, like anything else." - Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, Catholic priest



Getting ready to march at Godless American March on Washington (GAMOW) are (from left) Steve Petersen, Chris Aspelund, Rachel Wilson, August Berkshire, Shirley Moll, David Mallinder, Cameo Cramer, and Brian Westley.

March on Washington a perfect day to be heard

By Doug Cramer

On Saturday, Nov. 2, 2002, my wife, Cameo, and I arrived on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D.C., and saw an impressive sight: a large group of godless Americans, all in one place (about 2,400, by official counts), marching together for the first time.

You could see the desire everyone at GAMOW (Godless Americans March on Washington) had to get their message out. They'd been ignored, demonized, and marginalized for so long and this was finally the time to be heard. It seemed like everyone arrived with a sign and a big smile. Among the marchers were a dozen Minnesota Atheists.

We joined the procession, clambering to prepare our signs for display. Up ahead, we could see the line of religious protesters, mostly Christians with a few Jews mixed in, bordering the path of the march and shouting various prognostications. Their professionally made signs mounted on leather belt-straps made it apparent that they'd done this before. Their presence only served to encourage the crowd. After all, it's better to be openly hated than to be completely ignored. Some marchers gravitated towards them to "discuss" matters. Sometimes confrontations got heated, but, for the most part, both sides were civil.

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Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:

- Create a community of atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

Membership Meeting

Sunday, Jan. 19, 2003
1-4 p.m. (speaker 1:30-2:30 p.m.)
Southdale Library (2nd floor)
7001 York Ave. S., Edina 55435

From Highway 62, take Xerxes Ave. south (Xerxes becomes York). Go to 70th St., turn left.

From I-35W Southbound, take 62 West, then Xerxes exit south (as above)

From I-494, take France Ave. north to 70th St. Turn right. Cross York (first traffic light) and enter library lot.

30 years after Roe v. Wade: Status Report

January 2003 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing a woman's right to choose whether or not she wishes to continue a pregnancy. Thirty years later, what is the status of this right? What is the status of reproductive rights (contraception) in general?

How is sex education being taught in schools? What progress have abstinence-only sex education programs made in public schools? Are such programs truly educational and effective? What effect has the Bush administration had on family planning programs domestically and abroad?



Teresa Nelson will discuss Roe v. Wade. Photo by August Berkshire

Teresa Nelson will discuss these issues and answer our questions. Nelson has been legal counsel for the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union since 1997. She previously served on the City of Winona Human Rights Commission.

January Business Meeting: Nominations for Board

Following the speaker, we will have our January business meeting. One order of business will be the nomination of Minnesota Atheists board members for the coming year. To be nominated, a person must be a member in good standing (dues paid) for a full calendar year preceding the election. The nomination must be made by another member in good standing with no requirement for length of membership. You need not be present to be nominated.

Each candidate must sign a statement saying he or she is an atheist. Candidates should submit short biographies (no more than 150 words) to the newsletter editor (ssodonn@aol.com or call 952-937-0481) by January 23, 2003, so that they can be published in the February newsletter.

Board Elections: February 16, 2003

The Minnesota Atheist

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Charlie French: a man to remember

When Paul Heffron opened the memorial service for Charlie French (1917-2002), he told the crowd of more than 100, "We are here to form a memory, a final image of Charlie French."

That image included French as a champion of human rights, a person who fought for fairness for all, a man of intellectual integrity who had the courage of his convictions – and the courage to re-examine his convictions. The image also showed French as a beloved father, stepfather, grandfather, great grandfather and husband.

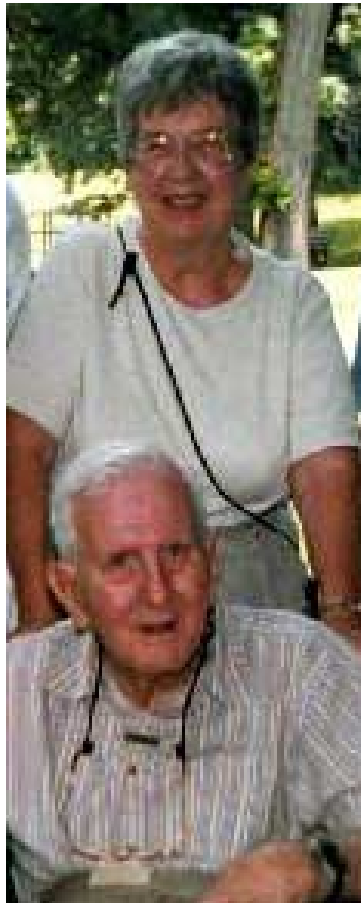
French grew up in a Baptist family that was more concerned with the here and now than with heaven and hell. By the beginning of World War II, French was a passivist, convinced by the teachings of Jesus and Gandhi. He was determined to stay out of war no matter what the cost, but it turned out that a physical condition kept him out.

He went to a seminary that took a liberal approach to the Bible, and became a Baptist minister in Warren, Ohio. Even in the '50s, French took a strong, public stand for civil rights, chairing the NAACP fundraising effort. In 1960, he moved to Calvary Baptist in Minneapolis. It became clear that they didn't want a liberal, social justice minister. French resigned after 15 months. He worked in sales for IDS and in 1963 began working for Minnesota's Human Rights Department.

In 1967, another change came in French's life. He went to Duluth to investigate the firing of an atheist's wife from her job. He and the atheist became friends and their conversations led to a change in French's beliefs.

French was married for 30 years to Helen Chapman and they had seven children. The oldest of the children, Jane Bovard, spoke of a

father who saw beyond race and gender stereotypes, a man who lived life fully and passionately, and a man whose intellectual integrity and courage was evidenced even in his approach to his death.



Charlie and Dorothy, Summer 2002

French's granddaughter Ariana, 13, said there was no one she would rather spend time with. "I'm happy with the memories we shared."

French married Dorothy in 1979 and added four stepchildren to his family. The oldest of the four, Clay Oglesbee, a Christian and a pastor-to-be, said he was grateful for French's character and values. "I felt a bond with his values and with his concerns for others."

Dorothy French talked about life with Charlie. "I had the joy and warmth of sharing the last quarter of Charlie's life." She talked about his

vegetable garden, his cooking, calligraphy, photography, and woodworking. In his later days when he couldn't indulge his hobbies, French turned to the computer to write letters to editors and the clergy, and make birthday cards.

"Age and Parkinson's never took away his ability to think," she said. Even in his final days when communication was almost impossible, he watched the Wellstone memorial with tears on his face.

Friends in and out of the freethought community shared their memories of Charlie French. Steve Petersen reminded the crowd of French's active involvement in the atheist and humanist community of Minnesota: "Charlie French was a good friend and a great supporter of Minnesota Atheists and many other freethought organizations. His support for atheism goes back many years, as one of the founders of Friends Free of Theism, as a charter member of the Twin Cities Chapter of American Atheists and as a charter member of Minnesota Atheists.

"Charlie was a role model for many of us. He was comfortable with his atheistic views and presented them in a manner that dispelled the myth that atheists are not likeable or honorable. All of us were better persons to have known him over the years," Petersen said.

Paul Heffron, a long-time friend and a board member of Humanists of Minnesota, closed the service by saying of French: "His was perhaps the best answer to death, namely his wholehearted affirmation of life and his efforts to make life better for others."

Charlie French died peacefully at home in Brooklyn Center surrounded by family Nov. 4, 2002. His memorial service was at the First Unitarian Society, Nov. 29, 2002.

-- Sue O'Donnell

And a very merry Solstice it was!

On Sunday, Dec. 15, 2002, atheists, humanists and freethinkers gathered to celebrate the return of light, both in terms of nature (the days start getting longer after the Winter Solstice) and in terms of the informed mind.

The evening began with a social hour – meeting new friends, renewing old acquaintances. Then there was dinner with lots of congenial conversation.

Next was the highlight of the evening — Freethought Follies. Singers, dancers, writers, producers and actors had worked for months to create fun entertainment especially

suitable to freethinking minds.

There were songs like "The Christians and the Pagans" and "The Solstice Carol" The audience sang along to "Old Time Religion," a favorite song that describes lots of fun religions like Zoroastrianism, Druids, followers of Aphrodite, and more. Yes, that old time religion!

Then there was "Trouble in the Church," a skit that found four clerics wondering what to do about those atheists – among their many other problems. "Speaking Freely at Freethought Toastmasters" had guest speakers who claimed to be a very feminine (but certainly not feminist)

Phyllis Schlafly, a singing and spying John Ashcroft, and a boisterous, boawearing Jesse Ventura.

Taking a tune used to memorize the periodic table of elements, Dale McGowan rewrote the lyrics into a periodic table of freethinkers. The "Talibanished" skit showed two Muslim women who had turned the rules around on their (many) husbands. "The Galaxy" explained the universe with singing and dancing.

All agree that it was the best Solstice banquet ever – until the one already being planned for Dec. 21, 2003. Don't miss it.



Above left: Gary Webb, Steve Petersen, and Jeff Dahl (seated).
Above center: Jeanette Link and Grace Lamusga
Above right: Hiero Russell and Wendy Russell
Below right: Tim Lamb and Michelle Losey.

Photos by Vern Young



Marilyn Nienkerk and Angie O'Neill



Above: Dale McGowan, Connor McGowan and Leah Rettke sing the Periodic Table of Freethinkers.

Above center: Rhonda Arkley and Marilyn Nienkerk are Talibanished.

Above right: A surprise visit from the Governor.

Right: Freethought Band, John Annen, Leah Rettke, Larry Syverud, Jerry Rauser, Paul Heffron, Jodin Morey (seated).

Below: Bonnie Ploger, aka John Ashcroft.

Below right: Trouble in the church with Cynthia Egli, George Kane, Tim Lamb and David Mallinder.



More photos from the Solstice Banquet



George Kane and Scott Lohman

Photos by Vern Young

Above: Bonnie Ploger and Cynthia Egli

Right: Cynthia Egli (left) is the Table Topics Master asking questions of George Kane, Bonnie (John Ashcroft) Ploger, and Tom (Phyllis Schlafly) Riddering.



Below: George Kane and Tim Lamb open for Jodin Morey's (pictured below right) song and dance about the Galaxy .



AAI president spends busy week promoting organized atheism

By Sue O'Donnell

When Bobbie Kirkhart, president, Atheist Alliance International (AAI), came for a week-long visit to Minnesota (Nov. 15-21, 2002), her calendar was filled with speaking engagements and interviews. She made and renewed friendships with several local groups and gained positive publicity in the press.

In meetings with atheist organizations (Lake Superior Freethinkers, Duluth; Minnesota Atheists, Twin Cities; Central Minnesota Atheists and Friends Free of Theism, St. Cloud; University of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists) Kirkhart talked about the who, what, where, when, why and how of AAI.

The "who" of AAI, she said, are atheists whether they call themselves atheists, humanists, freethinkers, or some other name. The "what" are 42 independent, democratic AAI organizations around the world.

The "when," Kirkhart said, began 100 years ago when Gora was born in India. His concept of positive atheism resulted in the founding of The Atheist Centre. (India recently issued a stamp in Gora's honor.) It was 10 years ago that AAI had its charter board meeting.

"Where?" There are 33 AAI groups in the U.S., two in Canada,

and one each in Finland, Germany, Iceland, Russia, Nigeria, India and Australia. (Minnesota Atheists is a member of AAI.)

There are many "whys" for AAI. Some whys are incidents like a young Nigerian woman who was sentenced to be stoned for having a baby out of wedlock. Other whys are

UMAHA, Kirkhart also gave a talk on campus that included Christian students curious about atheism.

Kirkhart was interviewed by the Minnesota Women's Press, taped a cable TV program for Minnesota Atheists, and was on Minnesota Public Radio's "All Things Considered" program.



Bobbie Kirkhart, Tim Lamb, Karri Silventoinen, Cynthia Egli and Jean Riddering stay after the Freethought Toastmasters meeting to chat.

Photo by Sue O'Donnell

At the Freethought Toastmasters meeting, Kirkhart gave the same speech she delivered at the Godless March on Washington – "Morality Begins with the Truth." (See Godless March story on page 1.)

During her visit, Kirkhart stayed with August Berkshire and Rachel Wilson. Berkshire arranged her demanding schedule including her press interviews.

government support of religion. Another why is the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance.

The "how," Kirkhart said, is to make ourselves heard. "The whys are an opportunity to educate people. It is our job to show that atheists are part of the nation."

One example Kirkhart gave of educating the public came when California had a school voucher vote. Her home group, Atheists United, Los Angeles, told the press, "If vouchers come in, we will open an atheist school." The vouchers were defeated.

In addition to meeting with

In one small block of time left unscheduled, Kirkhart wandered the skyways of Minneapolis and saw the Mary Tyler Moore statue. On her way to the airport, she managed a quick look at the Mall of America.

Most of her visit, though, was spent with fellow atheists (and many different kinds of food) – having dessert with the Minnesota Atheists board one night and the Lake Superior Freethinkers the next night, pizza with university students, Thai food in St. Cloud, Mexican and Somali food in the Twin Cities.

Letters from the in-box...

Dear Minnesota Atheists,

I want to thank all of you for your kindness and hospitality during my first visit to Minnesota. Minnesota Atheists has long been a mainstay of the Alliance, perhaps our most active group. Having seen all the talent you have, I not only understand why this has been the case, I have good reason to hope for even more from you in the future.

I find Minneapolis to be an interesting, attractive and intellectual city, like the people who live in it — at least like the ones I met.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you in Tampa this April for the AAI convention and seeing all of you this August at your state conference.

Yours in freethought,
Bobbie Kirkhart

Thank you all for the beautiful flowers. You were all a big part of Gordon's life.

Fondly,
Pat Morris

Nice work, folks. Your Minnesota Atheist is first class. I am a subscriber, thanks to Tom Riddering. He has been a friend for 20 years -- a great guy. At his Secular Summit last summer he told me about your paper. So I subscribed. Now you know why an Ohioan is on your list.

By the way, I was born and raised near Lake Harriet. Minneapolis was and is a fine city. Keep up the good work there. I am proud to have been a Minnesotan and I am proud to be an atheist and to be a subscriber to your fine paper.

Doug Tracy
Toledo, OH

We were saddened by the recent deaths of our friends Gordon Morris and Charlie French. Both were excellent examples of positive, friendly neighborhood atheism and, like many others who knew them, we will miss them very much. We would like to donate \$200 to Minnesota Atheists in their memory.

August Berkshire
Rachel Wilson

Great Web site! You have all done wonders on making atheism so much more accessible.

Amy Neilsen
Hovland, Minn.

Dates to save: August 22-24, 2003

The very first Minnesota Atheist Conference will be the weekend of August 22-24.

We'll be meeting at the Marriott Hotel near the Mall of America to talk about freethought issues with guests from around the nation.

Mark your calendar now and watch for more information in your newsletter.

Our very own Minnesota Atheists Online Store!

Shop online for a wide range of Minnesota Atheists goods. T-shirts ... mugs ... mousepads ... hats ... aprons ... boxer shorts ... tote bags ... and MORE

Go to our own website at www.mnatheists.org or go directly to the store at the following address:

www.cafepress.com/mnatheists

Or to place a phone order, call David Mallinder at (651) 639-8646

All products are high quality, reasonably priced with a 30-day, money-back guarantee. Profits will go right to work to improve Minnesota's oldest and largest atheist group.

Shop now and show your atheist pride!



David Hume: A long way from Calvinism

By David Mallinder

The next in our series of sketches of the lives and thoughts of great freethinkers is dedicated to the Scottish philosopher David Hume.

Hume was born in a middle class family in 1711. He attended the local church of Scotland as a youngster, where his uncle was the vicar. He entered university at 11 and left for private study at 15, still convinced of Calvinist moral thought.

He soon became deeply engrossed in the question of the proofs of God's existence and grew increasingly secular. His first major work, the *Treatise on Human Nature*, is concerned more with morality, free will and causality than these proofs, but a skeptical approach in the recurring



David Hume

theme is strongly evident in this work and the following *Essays – Moral and Political* too. He was refused the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University in 1745 because of his anti-

religious views, and became a military aide and private secretary.

Hume kept writing though, and in 1751 published *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* – the forerunner of Bentham, who acknowledged Hume's deep influence, and Utilitarianism as a whole. Criticized immediately as a godless work, it cemented Hume as a favorite target for denouncement by the clergy. His later works were more fodder, especially the posthumously (1779) published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

Not solely concerned with esoteric philosophy, Hume published texts on politics and history in the 1750s and '60s, influencing the likes of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus.

He found time to secure refuge and a government grant for the exiled Rousseau, who ungratefully accused Hume of slander some years later, of which he was exonerated.

Hume died of chronic internal disorders at age 65. His works had rarely been popular except among enlightened intellectuals, and had often been controversial at best and vilified at worst. However, soon after his death and to this day he became acknowledged as a towering and original innovator in many disciplines. Nothing sums up his overwhelming influence better than a line from the British 19th Century Idealist philosopher J.H. Stirling: "Hume is our Politics, Hume is our Trade, Hume is our Philosophy, Hume is our Religion"



Atheists Talk has a brand new desk

After many years of use, the old Atheists Talk cable TV desk was looking pretty beat up. Vern Young built us a new one. Sarah Homrich and her dad Joe seem to think it works just fine.

Photo by August Berkshire

Keeping Jefferson's Wall strong

How to influence legislative action

By Steve Petersen

This past election was a wake-up call for each of us, but how we react is a destiny we ourselves will write. From the view I have, a majority of the U.S. Congress and our state legislative offices are controlled by persons sympathetic to Religious Right positions on many issues. Our backs are up against Jefferson's Wall of Separation and it is a test for each of us to resolve to keep the Wall from collapsing.

For Minnesota Atheists: We will lobby each part of government where we feel we can have an impact. In the state Legislature we may do this in a quiet but effective way. Legislators have thanked us in the past for being providers of information on state/church issues. We have a unique perspective and some elected officials will sit down and listen. For the public at large, we will continue our public visibility through letter writing and press releases.

For our members: Each of us has a role to play in protecting Jefferson's Wall. Each of us as individuals must actively write our

legislators and voice our opinions. Many of the current elected officials will not agree with us on many issues, but do not stereotype them, as they will see our way on some issues. Each issue must be treated on its own merit including abortion, birth

control, sex education, creationism, the Pledge of Allegiance, school vouchers, prayer in school, and other separation issues. We cannot afford to lose everything just because opponents to separation of state and church won a majority. We have to fight each issue as it comes up.

A well thought out personal letter has more impact than several

computer-generated response letters. At the state or local level, most elected officials will read each piece of personal mail. Keep your letter to one page, clearly state who you are and the issue that concerns you.

Request to know how they will vote. Tell them a personal story. If you have reference material, add it as an enclosure and make sure the source is properly identified. Thank them when their vote is correct and educate them when their vote is incorrect.

We are at a crossroads in our state and national history. We will uphold Jefferson's Wall if each of us makes it our personal responsibility. So many of our rights are on the table and each right that is lost will take years to restore, if ever.

Mother Jones said, "Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living." The dead are gone, and we know prayer is just talking to yourself. Join the fight for our rights so we do not live in hell!



“Atheists Talk” Cable Show Report

If you would like to sponsor the program in your town, please contact Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277 or sp175@aol.com.

“Atheists Talk” schedule

Minneapolis: Ch. 17 Sat. 8:30 p.m.
Sponsor: Art Anderson

St. Paul: Ch. 32, Wed. 10:30 p.m.,
Sponsor: Steve Petersen

Rochester: Times vary. See rochath.tripod.com/tv. Sponsor: The

Cramers
Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton: Ch. 15 Tues. Midnight.
Sponsor: Art Anderson

South Washington County Community Access: Ch. 14, Tues. 7:00 p.m.:
Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, No. St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Ch 15, various times: Sponsor: Art Anderson

Stillwater: Ch. 16, Tues. 7:00 p.m. and Wed. 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury

MCN Channel Six metro wide: Sundays 4:30 p.m. Atheists Talk 1st and 3rd Sundays alternating with the Humanists of Minnesota on the 2nd & 4th Sundays.

Cable Coordinator: Steve Petersen
Advisor: Jerry Rauser
Crew: Art Anderson, August Berkshire, Bill Burleson, George Kane, David Mallinder, Shirley Moll, Russ Samdahl and Brett Stembridge. New crew members are always welcome; contact

GAMOW...

(Continued from page 1)

It was a great day for the march; a perfectly nice, clear, sunny day. The U. S. Capitol loomed large in the distance, getting closer and closer. What an amazing building it is, both in its architecture and significance. Eventually we arrived at the "rally point" and everyone started to take positions to view the stage. Even though it took about 30 minutes, the march seemed to be over way too soon.

Ellen Johnson, president, American Atheists, began the rally with an impassioned speech calling for activism and announcing the formation of a godless political action committee. The next speaker was Michael Newdow, atheism's current hero. Ever controversial, he proposed that we classify our beliefs as a religion for partially philosophical and mainly legal reasons. Then he led the crowd in the "Godless Pledge," much to everyone's delight.

Bobbie Kirkhart, president of Atheist Alliance, said in her speech: "We are here today not just to protest the disrespect our government, and too often, our friends and neighbors show us, but also to celebrate the joy of living free from the gods, to show our fellow Americans that the limited actual power of individual effort is much greater than the unlimited imaginary power of prayer, that the relative morality of honest evaluation stands high above the absolute morality of ancient edict, that the worldly pride and pleasure of free-thought far exceed the tutored bliss of groupthink."

Most of the religious protesters simply stood on the sidelines holding their signs or passing out literature. Only a couple of them tried to disrupt the rally in any way. One man quite a distance away kept shouting something unintelligible at the top of his lungs. He had also

obviously done this before, because he shouted for practically the entire program and never seemed to lose his voice.

Another protestor took offense at the speech by the "Reverend" from Landover Baptist Church (imagine that!) and started to bellow something through his megaphone. Some of the godless crowd gleefully headed in that direction to confront him. A mounted police officer quickly moved in to settle the issue. To paraphrase Ron Barrier, national communications director, American Atheists: "The only reason we need police is because Christians are here!"

All in all, the rally was extremely well orchestrated and the speeches (audio of which is available at godlessamericans.org) were very



A marcher from Pennsylvania makes his point.



St. Clair Mellard, Red River Freethinkers, works security at the march.

entertaining. It was a great program and everyone involved should be applauded for their efforts. Ellen Johnson closed the program and we all went our separate ways, knowing that we had been part of the most important godless event to date and hoping for even bigger and better events in the years to come.

Minnesota Atheists who attended the GAMOW were Rhonda Arkley, Chris Aspelund, Jim Barri, August Berkshire, Cameo Cramer, Doug Cramer, David Mallinder, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Sean Van Dyk, Brian Westley and Rachel Wilson. A Fargo resident, St. Clair Mellard, represented Red River Freethinkers and Military Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers.

Other articles about Minnesota Atheists members at the Godless March appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune and Pulse of the Twin Cities.

Photos by August Berkshire

Need a ride? Share a ride?

Do you need a ride to a Minnesota Atheists event? Are you willing to give a ride to someone? If either is the case, contact Minnesota Atheists at info@mnatheists.org or call (612) 588-7031.

News and notes...

Halloween's bad rap

This letter was published Nov. 4 in the Star Tribune

In an Oct. 31 article regarding Halloween festivities in schools, one parent says, "We feel like Halloween is the most secular, the most satanic holiday there is."

Well, which is it? It can't be both. And if Halloween is a secular holiday, what is the problem with organizing events for it in school? Nobody has problems with schools observing other secular holidays, such as Presidents Day.

Michael Wyman

Quatrefoil Library honors founders

On Dec. 11, Quatrefoil Library honored its founders, David Irwin and Dick Hewetson, with a celebration at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis. The library, founded in 1985, exists to collect, preserve, and



David Irwin and Dick Hewetson

Photo by August Berkshire

share materials and information relevant to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and other sexual minority communities. The library takes its name from the 1950 novel, *Quatrefoil*, by James Barr. The novel is historically important as one of the first gay novels to portray homosexual characters positively.

Irwin and Hewetson have been early and continuing supporters and members of the atheist movement

in Minnesota since it began in the mid-1980s. Hewetson, now living in San Francisco, is an honorary member of Minnesota Atheists. Irwin is a life member of Minnesota Atheists.

For more information about the library, including membership, hours and directions, contact: Quatrefoil Library, 1619 Dayton Ave., Suite 105, St. Paul, MN 55104-6206, (651) 641-0969, www.quatrefoilibrary.org.

Boy Scout protest

The following letter was sent to the Seattle Times.

Darrell Lambert is being kicked out of the Boy Scouts because he is an atheist? Why, because he doesn't believe in miracles? Because he doesn't believe the ancient superstitions that gave us the Crusades and a flat earth around which the sun revolved, or because he won't genuflect before child-abusing priests? The Boy Scouts is an awful organization without which Darrell will prosper. It is better that he tuck his Eagle Scout Award away in his drawer and celebrate his public library card instead.

Peter N. Holste

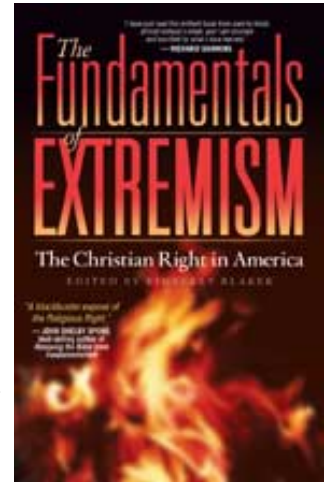
Extremism fundamentals

Looking for a book on the Religious Right? New Boston Books offers *The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America*, edited by Kimberly Blaker with chapter contributions by Blaker, Edward Buckner, Edwin Kagin, Bobbie Kirkhart, Herb Silverman, and John Suarez.

The Fundamentals of Extremism is an in-depth examination of the causes and characteristics of Christian fundamentalism and its effects on women, children, African-Americans, gays and lesbians, politics, education, and American society. The book has received endorsements from Richard Dawkins, Gerald A. Larue, Nadine

Strossen, and John M. Swomley.

Presale orders placed through Feb. 12, 2003, will be auto-graphed by editor and coauthor Kimberly Blaker and shipped by February 14, 2003. Visit www.NewBostonBooks.com for online ordering or call toll free (866) NEW-BOSTON. The price is \$24.95 (hardcover) and \$15.95 (soft cover) plus \$3.25 shipping/handling. The book will be in bookstores Feb. 28, 2003.



Gay 'conversion' report

On Nov. 19, August Berkshire attended a presentation of the Lutheran Roundtable in Roseville to hear Richard Cohen discuss how it is supposedly possible for homosexuals to become heterosexuals. One criterion is to accept the love of Jesus. When it came time for questions, Robert Halfhill, a gay atheist, pointed out that with Christian "love" like this, he didn't need enemies.

Berkshire asked the speaker why the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Medical Association rejected his claims. Cohen's response had something to do with conspiracies and political correctness.

Fortunately, the questions were as much against the speaker's position as for it, led by a contingent from the Minnesota Human Rights Commission.

Dowser fails skeptic's test

By Joe Dunsmore

A few months ago, I was looking for people who claimed they had paranormal powers and were willing to let me scientifically test them. I found a man who said he was a dowser. He believed he could find buried metal objects (among other things) with only bent metal rods to guide him.

For a test site we chose an area on the Mississippi River bank at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. We first did a pretest to ascertain that his dowsing would work there. He buried an object under the ground, then walked over it and dowsed for it to make sure he could detect it.

We chose a plot of land where there were no "background signals" from other objects under the ground. We determined how far apart the lines in our grid had to be so he didn't mistake an object at one intersection for another at a nearby intersection. He assured me he would be 75% right when dowsing under



Joe Dunsmore

Photo by August Berkshire

these conditions.

When the real test came, I marked off four rows and four columns in our dowsing area, for a total of 16 potential places where I could bury an object. I decided to run the test 10 times and that the conditions for success would be finding the object in seven out of those 10 trials. The probability of his succeeding by

chance would be about one in 2.5 million.

In our tests, the dowser turned away while I buried the object in a randomly selected place. He then came to dowse for it. I changed the location for each trial.

In our first run, he failed to find the buried object. In our second run, he also failed to find it. During our third run, he said he had no idea where it was and gave up altogether. He was very surprised he failed this simple test and said he'd ask his dowsing buddies why this happened and maybe get back to me for another test, possibly of a different type.

I'm still continuing my skeptical research. If anyone you know claims to have a paranormal power and is willing to let me test it, please contact me at education@umah.org.

Joe Dunsmore is the Education Coordinator of UMAH (University of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists).



Bobbie Kirkhart shares pizza and ideas with UMAH members. See page 7.

Photo by August Berkshire

Keeping current on state-church issues

By August Berkshire

The primary purpose of a local atheist newsletter such as ours is to provide you with information about what our group is doing. This is news you can't get anywhere else. Ours is such an active organization that by the time we finish reporting on our own activities, there is little room left for reports on the latest state-church events. Fortunately, there are other sources for such information that far exceed what any local group currently provides.

The local newspaper can sometimes be good, but this is usually only true in headline cases (such as Supreme Court decisions). Instead, I would recommend the following publications.

Voice of Reason newsletter (quarterly). Excellent in its coverage of state-church issues and political analysis. Added bonuses are international news and book reviews. The only drawback is that it's not published more often, though atheists already overwhelmed with reading material may appreciate this. Cost: \$25 individual, \$30 families. Americans for Religious Liberty (ARL), 1777 T St. NW, Washington, DC 20009. (www.arlinc.org)

Church & State magazine (11 issues per year). Also excellent in its coverage of state-church issues and political analysis. Their year-end index makes it particularly useful for research purposes. Cost: \$25/year. Americans United for Separation of Church and State, 518 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. (www.au.org)

Freethought Today newspaper (10 issues per year). Probably the best overall atheist publication in the country. It contains information on state-church issues, articles and essays on freethought in general, as well as stories about the lives of

atheists. It also contains the infamous "Black Collar Crime Blotter," listing crimes committed by religious people. Cost: subscription-only \$20/year; as part of membership \$40 individual, \$50 couple. Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701. (www.ffrf.org)

American Atheist Newsletter (10 issues per year). Very good in its coverage of both national and state state-church issues. Cost: subscription-only \$35/year; as part of membership \$25/year student or senior, \$35/year or \$60/two years individual, \$60/year couple or family. American Atheists, PO Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733. (www.atheists.org)

Free Inquiry magazine (quarterly). Good discussion of state-church issues, mostly in the form of essays and articles rather than news reports. Many other issues discussed that are closely aligned with atheism. Published by the Council for Secular Humanism. Cost: \$31.50/year, \$53.50/two years, \$72.50/three years. Free Inquiry, PO Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664. (www.secularhumanism.org)

American Atheist magazine (quarterly). Most state-church issues are put in the *American Atheist Newsletter* (see above). This publication contains many other things that might be of interest to atheists. Cost (available as subscription-only, not connected with membership): \$20/year, \$18/year for members. American Atheists, PO Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733. (www.americanatheist.org)

The Humanist magazine (six issues per year). Thought-provoking articles on a wide variety of topics including state-church issues, politics, war and pacifism, privacy, economics, and the environment. May be too broad a range of topics for some, while others may appreciate the variety. Cost: \$24.95/year, \$46.95/

two years, \$67.95/three years. (Special introductory rate is \$19.95 for the first year.) American Humanist Association (AHA), 1777 T St. NW, Washington, DC 20009-7125. (www.AmericanHumanist.org)

Secular Nation magazine (quarterly). This group and publication are in a state of transition, but the results so far look promising. Their coverage of international atheism is something that makes them different from most other groups. Of particular interest is news from their local member societies. Cost: \$25/year, \$20 for additional years. Atheist Alliance International (AAI), PO Box 6261, Minneapolis, MN 55406. (www.AtheistAlliance.org)

People For the American Way newsletter (quarterly). This organization publishes news and alerts concerning separation of state and church and other civil liberties. Cost: \$35/year, \$20/year student. People For the American Way, (PFAW) 2000 M St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. (www.pfaw.org)

American Civil Liberties Union bulletins (quarterly). The coverage of state-church issues is good, but not as lengthy or as often as other publications. This is the major organization fighting for separation of state and church, free speech, and human rights, and is worth joining for that reason alone. Cost: \$20/year. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 125 Broad St., 18th Fl., New York, NY 10004. (www.aclu.org)

Tastes and opinions differ, and you may rank these publications differently than I have. Fortunately, you can't really go wrong with any of them. Many of these groups also offer excerpts or their entire publication, as well as breaking news, free on their Web sites.

Things to do, places to go: A calendar for atheists

1st Sundays: **Reel and a Meal**

Times and locations vary, see AWE or call Michelle Losey, 952-736-1739

1st Sundays: 3-5 p.m. **Freethinking Families**

Potluck at members' homes. Rich Sinda, 952-380-0688.

2nd Sundays: 6 p.m. **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**

Location varies. All members welcome. George Kane 651-488-8225.

3rd Sundays: 1-3:30 p.m. **Minnesota Atheists Membership Meeting**

(See page 2 for program and address)

1st and 3rd Mondays: 6 p.m. **Freethought Toastmasters Club**

Muffaletta Cafe, 2280 Como Ave., St. Paul. Private room. George Kane, 651-488-8225.

2nd and 4th Mondays: 5-7 p.m. **Happy Hour North**

Free food. Ol' Mexico Restaurant, on Lexington, one block north of Larpenteur, Roseville. George Kane, 651-488-8225.

2nd and 4th Mondays: 5-7 p.m. **Happy Hour South**

Chi Chi's Mexican Restaurant, 7717 Nicollet Ave., Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, 612-866-6200.

1st Tuesdays: 11:30 a.m. **Lunch Social**

Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, 612-866-6200.

3rd Wednesdays: 11:30 a.m. **Lunch Social**

Old Country Buffet, Holly Shopping Center, Hwy 47 and Mississippi St. NE, Fridley. Private room. Bill Volna, 612-781-4273.

1st Thursdays: 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**

MTN, Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, 651-484-9277.

3rd Saturdays: 1-3 p.m. **Religion-Free Families**

Galaxie Library, Apple Valley. Rhonda Arkley, 952-322-1003.

4th Saturdays: 8:30-11 a.m. **Breakfast Social**

Old Country Buffet, Holly Shopping Center, Hwy 47 and Mississippi St., Fridley. Private room. Fern Wodtke, 651-784-2307.

"Atheists Talk" TV Broadcast

First and third Sundays, 4:30 p.m., Metro Channel 6.

Get a free weekly list of atheist activities by subscribing to AWE (Atheist Weekly E-mail). Send request to George Kane at nup@minn.net

CHECK THE WAYS YOU WANT TO HELP ATHEISM GROW

Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax deductible.

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- \$600 - Life Membership

All memberships include newsletter

- \$15 - Newsletter subscription only

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**Nominations for the board of directors on January 19, 2003
Election on February 16, 2003**

**How much reverence can you have for a supreme being
who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as
phlegm and tooth decay in his divine system of creation?**

-- Joseph Heller

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