

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association Spring 2010

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

4314 Bancroft Drive
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www.nosha.info

(a 501c3 corporation)

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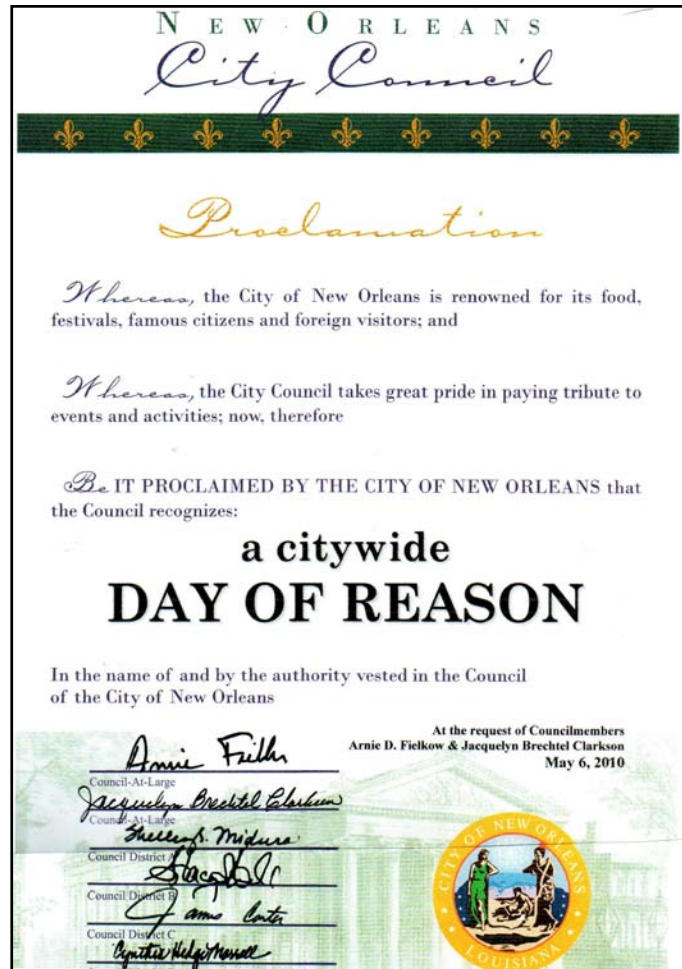
MEETINGS

3rd Saturday of month, 2:00 pm
Dominion Learning Center
Audubon Park Zoo

N.O. COX CABLE TV

CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"
Sat. midnight, Sun. noon
CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Tues. 10:30am; 10:30 pm

May 6 Declared National Day of Reason (at least in New Orleans)



For the second year in a row, the New Orleans City Council has declared the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Reason, thanks to the efforts of NOSHA president Harry Greenberger.

The National Day of Reason is a secular celebration within the United States. It was instituted several years ago as an alternative to the government's declared National Day of Prayer.

Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association said: "The National Day of Reason is the nontheist's response to this annual abuse of the U.S. Constitution. It's for all those who value reason over dogma and expect their government to do the same." For more on this annual celebration, check out <http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/>.

NOSHA MEMBER AND “POLITICAL LOBBYIST!”? Doug Stewart

I recently visited Washington DC to attend the “Civic Days at the Capital” event put on by the Center For Inquiry’s Office of Public Policy. The Center for Inquiry advocates for science, reason, freedom of inquiry and humanist values, and the Office of Public Policy hosts Civic Days to bring non-believers, secular humanists, and skeptics from across the country to Washington DC to engage in citizen lobbying on important issues, and also to have a little fun!

I flew in to DC the afternoon of Saturday, April 24th and met that evening with all the CFI staff over pizza, salad, and beer. Matt Sapara, CFI Policy Analyst, gave a “Welcome to DC” presentation, and the Director of Public Policy, Toni Van Pelt, gave us an overview of the lobbying we were to be doing the following Tuesday. An added bonus was that a friend of NOSHA, Sean Faircloth, the Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America, was in attendance. As you will recall, Sean was the guest of honor at NOSHA’s 10th



Anniversary Banquet last year. He reminded me how much he enjoyed visiting New Orleans and asked me to convey his thanks again to NOSHA for the opportunity.

The following Sunday and Monday were packed full of things to do. With interesting presentations by people such as Maggie Garrett of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Marissa Brown from the Alliance for Justice, and Dr. Stu Jordan, CFI’s Science Adviser. CFI also had “real live politicians” come speak to us. One of these speakes was Doug Crandall, Director of Legislative Affairs for the US Forest Service and now Acting USDA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations for the Obama Administration, who told us how Washington really works. Also, the very charismatic, likable, advocate for church-state separation, Congressman Brian Baird, (D-WA) <http://baird.house.gov/> talked about “The Importance of Citizen Involvement in Government.”

But that was just the half of it. CFI organized a tour at the Smithsonian Museum Hall of Human Origins where I got to meet all my distant cousins, my favorite being Lucy, otherwise know as *Australopithecus Afarensis*. It had been about 3.2 million years so we had a lot to catch up on. This was followed by an exhibition in honor of Charles Darwin called The Evolution of Evolution that focused on the significant role that



Darwin’s theory has played in explaining and unifying all the biological sciences.

A very entertaining walking tour was provided by Steve C. Lowe, a Director of the Washington Area Secular

Humanists (WASH) on “The Great Agnostic” Robert G. Ingersoll. He was the best-known orator and a political speechmaker of 19th-century America on subjects such as politics, ethics, human freedom, and he spoke against slavery and opposed the religious right of his day. Part of the tour involved reciting some of Ingersoll’s quotes. My favorite was “*Is there an intelligent man or woman now in the world who believes in the Garden of Eden story? If you find any man who believes it, strike his forehead and you will hear an echo. Something is for rent.*” Information about the walking tour can be found at <http://www.ingersoll.wash.org/>.

There was also a guided tour of the Capitol Building, which included both the United States House of Representatives and the Senate. It was quite awe-inspiring.

The Monday evening culminated with a formal dinner attended by Dr. R. Elisabeth “Liz” Cornwell, Executive Director of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.

Tuesday April 27th was lobbying day! CFI had previously instructed us on how to set up appointments with the Legislative Offices of our choice. I chose Congressman Steve Scalise, representing the 1st District of Louisiana, (including the Northshore, where I live), and Louisiana Senator David Vitter. David Vitter’s office never even acknowledged my e-mails and voice mails, but I did get an appointment with Scalise’s Legislative Assistant, Caitlin Songy. Assisted by CFI’s Matt Separa, we discussed a number of issues, starting with the Louisiana Science Education Act, something dear to my heart, which allows school teachers to teach creationism along side evolution in schools. I tried to point out the national embarrassment that this bill spotlights on Louisiana. I was told that this was a gubernatorial issue, but I did ask that my impression be conveyed to the Congressman. Other issues ranged from the faith-based Initiatives to repealing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy concerning gays in the military. Congressman Scalise has a 100% “pro family” (read that “pro religion”) voting record, so there is little or no hope of budging his opinion. However, being able to vent my point of view so close to his ear gave me a real sense of achievement.

However, I would say that the highlight of the visit was when I went to the National Archives Building to

see the actual Constitution of the United States of America. I approached the Bill of Rights and, leaning over the case (you're not allowed to touch the glass), I put on my reading glasses and read out loud, slowly and clearly the complete First Amendment. It bought a tear to my eye. I now have personal proof that it exists! This is in spite of legislation such as that for the engraving of "In God We Trust" at the Capitol Visitor Center. In July 2009, the House and Senate overwhelmingly approved a resolution (Senate by voice vote and in the House by 410-8) to compel the Office of the Architect of the U.S. Capitol to prominently engrave this religious motto at a cost of about \$50,000 of taxpayers' money. In addition to being discriminatory against me, it's in direct violation of those *ten tortured words*, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion". Maybe the politicians in Washington should do as I did **and read them?**

(*Editor's Note:* Doug is a very busy humanist. On May 16 he joined over 300 others on the steps of the Texas state capitol at the "Texans for Truthful Textbooks" rally to protest the Texas Board of Education's recent decision to inject conservative politics and personal agendas into the state's textbook curriculum by changing the standards in very detrimental ways.

On several Sunday mornings, Doug parks his car across the street from churches. Atop Doug's car is a sign which declares "I am an atheist. As me if you have questions." In this endeavor, he calls himself an evangelical atheist.)

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PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter by **Robert Carver** appeared in the *Houma Courier* on April 6, 2010:

I read the stories in the paper about Good Friday with interest, especially the one about the reenactment in Dulac.

They act as if the story of Jesus becoming the resurrected Christ was unique in history, which leads them to conclude this myth must be the literal historical truth. Their belief is misguided as even a cursory examination of history clearly shows how the early church created and evolved this myth.

The word Easter itself is likely derived from Eostre, the Saxon mother goddess, whose name in turn was adapted from Eastre, an ancient word for spring.

The Norse equivalent of Eostre was the goddess Ostara, whose symbols were an egg and a hare, both denoting fertility.

Festivals honoring these goddesses were celebrated on or around the vernal equinox, and even today, when Easter has supposedly been Christianized, the date of the holiday falls according to rather pagan reckonings, i.e.

on the Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

Throughout recorded history, the focus of spring religious festivals was a god whose own death and rebirth symbolized the death and rebirth of life during this time of the year.

Many pagan religions had gods who were depicted as dying and being reborn.

In some legends this god even descends into the underworld to challenge the forces there.

Attis, consort of the Phrygian fertility goddess Cybele, was more popular than most.

Attis was simply the latest manifestation of earlier resurrection myths, like those of Osiris, Orpheus, Tammuz and Dionysus, who were likewise said to have been born of virgins and resurrected three days after their deaths.

In areas where Christian beliefs later took hold, these already existing tales were grafted onto the story of Christ, and continue to be retold to this day as evidenced by those who "recreate" this myth this Easter in our region.

They have every right to practice their faith thanks to the separation between church and state enshrined in the Bill of Rights even if said faith has no basis in reality.

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ISN'T IT TIME FOR AN ATHEIST ON THE COURT?

Although President Obama has already made his nomination to replace retiring Justice John Paul Stevens on the SCOTUS, he may get another opportunity to make another nomination before his term in office is over, and it's time an atheist was considered.

An article that addresses that very subject appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 4, 2010, under the title, "To replace John Paul Stevens, an Atheist." It was written by Marc Cooper who is also a contributing editor to *The Nation* magazine. His article is excerpted here.

"Though the court without Stevens will be left with six Catholics and two Jews, the open seat should not go to either denomination. Nor should it go to a Presbyterian, a Lutheran, a Methodist, a Muslim or even a Zoroastrian. If it did, that would make nine people who all have one religious principle in common: a belief in religion.

Clearly, the next person to take the bench should be an atheist.

While few sitting politicians have the political courage to name a declared nonbeliever, it is something that Thomas Jefferson (and several others among the founders) might well have done.

In an 1823 letter to John Adams, Jefferson was forthright about his views of religion, and Christianity specifically, ‘And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerve in the brain of Jupiter.’ Jefferson wrote. ‘But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors.’

In other words, Jefferson like what Jesus, the man, stood for, but could definitely do without the rest of the bunk.

That’s right. Bunk. There aren’t a lot of us, but something like one out of six Americans calls himself a nonbeliever. Holy moly! That means we would still be underrepresented with just one justice. But those of us who refuse to subscribe to any religious hocus-pocus would be happy to take what we can get in a country where seemingly no politician, from either party, can resist the temptation of ending a speech with the empty phrase ‘God bless America.’

It’s rather staggering to consider that more than two centuries after our Constitution codified the absolute separation of church and state, we’ve never had a single top court justice who was an atheist. The closest we ever got were a handful of Unitarians. Close but no cigar.

Having an atheist justice, however, would not primarily be a matter of identity politics and some sort of equal representation. Rather, a nonbeliever justice would be a mighty blow in favor of the secular principles of ‘reason and freedom’ of which Jefferson spoke.

Heaven knows we could use some more of that stuff. Religion plays far too influential a role in our political and civic life as is. I personally don’t care what sort of superstition makes you sleep better at night, but I think we would all benefit if you left it behind closed doors and kept it as far away as possible from public policy. How about a policy of don’t ask, don’t tell?

We’ve got quite a way to go to get even close to the stark separationism that is constitutionally enshrined but far too often ignored. We’ve recently been humiliated by a spate of local school boards dominated by fundamentalist Christians, undermining the teaching of science and inching us back into the shadows of ignorance.

While the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1961 that atheists cannot be denied elected office, there are currently seven states—including Pennsylvania, Texas and Tennessee—that retain laws keeping infidels out of government. These moldy statutes are indeed,

unconstitutional, and when challenged eventually fail. But ‘eventually’ can be a long time. . .”

“When it comes to some Sunday soul-searching introspection, or when faced with a personal crisis that haunts your nightmares, it’s your constitutional right to ask yourself, ‘What would Jesus do?’

When it comes to deciding who will be the ultimate arbiters and defenders of the most advanced and enlightened governing document in history, we would all be a lot better off if, instead, we asked ourselves, ‘What would Jefferson do?’”

* * * * *

YOU WIN SOME, YOU LOSE SOME

Two important establishment clauses have been decided within the last couple of months. One was a victory for separationists, the other a sad loss.

On May 7, the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit dismissed a challenge to prayer and the use of “so help me God” in the oath used in the Presidential inauguration. The case was *Newdow v. Roberts*.

In his opinion, Judge Brown wrote that the challenge to religious expressions at the 2009 Presidential inauguration was moot. He said that the plaintiffs failed to appeal the district court’s denial of a preliminary injunction, and therefore the case was moot.

So at least this one challenge to the separation clause in the First Amendment will have to wait until another opportunity reveals itself.

Just a few weeks earlier, however, Annie Laurie Gaylor and the Freedom from Religion Foundation won a small victory. U. S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled that the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional. The suit, filed in 2008 was against the federal government alleging that the day violated the separation of church and state because it endorses prayer and encourages citizens to engage in prayer. In court documents, President Obama and his press secretary argued that the statute simply acknowledged “the role of religion in American life.”

While this ruling was a small victory, there was no significant absence of Day or Prayer acknowledgements across the country.

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Personal problems? Philosophical issues?
 Stress? Unexplained fatigue? Depressed?
 Let’s talk about it.
LISA SUAREZ, MEd, LMFT
 Systemic Therapist at CARE Institute
 EMail: LisaS@carenola.com
 Phone: (504)896-1000, VoiceMail x82

WHAT NOSHA’S BEEN UP TO

Since the last newsletter in mid-April, there have been two regular meetings, as well as several other events.

Our April 17 meeting featured an “unlikely” guest speaker. **Dr. David E. Crosby**, pastor of First Baptist church of New Orleans led a discussion of the relationships between secularists and Christians.

On Thursday, May 6, several members and friends gathered at our favorite watering hole, the Monkey Hill Bar to celebrate a National Day of Reason. Celebrants enjoyed a cake, camaraderie and fun, and those who dared took a National Day of Reason quiz. Three people answered 14 of the 16 questions correctly, and there was only one grand prize. Of the three, Kevin Bladsacker, Katie, Picone, and **William Gautreaux**, the lucky winner was William. His prize was a copy of the book, *Supersense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable* by Bruce M. Hood. Pics of William and other partygoers may be seen on page 7 of the newsletter.

That same day, of course, **Harry Greenberger** attended the New Orleans City Council meeting where he was awarded with the proclamation pictured on the front of the newsletter. Congrats again, Harry.

With no scheduled speaker for the regular May meeting, Lanny Goldfinch volunteered to lead a discussion, which he called “Getting to Know You.” There were informal surveys of those in attendance on various topics and much discussion on those topics. We discussed how many had grown up in secular homes and how those who didn’t came to be freethinkers. Other discussions ensued regarding national issues such as abortion rights, capital punishment, end-of-life choices, and decriminalization of drugs. There were also belief questions discussed including ethics without religion and political party affiliations.

After the meeting, several participants said it was one of the most enjoyable and enlightening meetings they had attended, with a call for more “open discussion” type meetings in the future.

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OUR BILLBOARD IS BACK

The NOSHA billboard has returned to I-10, seen coming from downtown going toward Metairie on the left side between Broad Street and the Carrollton overpass. It will remain throughout the month of June and through July 4. Take a drive and check it out.



This billboard is a part of a nationwide effort by the **United Coalition of Reason** to raise the visibility and sense of unity among local groups in the community of reason. Created by **FreeThoughtAction**, billboards like this have appeared in communities across the country, letting humanists, atheists, freethinkers and nontheists of all stripes know that they are not alone, and that there are millions of Americans who think like they do.

One particularly observant NOSHA member, upon hearing of the return of the billboard, mused, “If we were a religious group, it’s appearance could be called ‘The Second Coming’ . . .”

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A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Unlike many other non-profit organizations, NOSHA does not have any major benefactors, financial grants nor any paid employees. With our available resources, we continue to afford out-of-town speakers of note as well as recent advertising campaigns, but need to regularly replenish our bank account.

If you can pay the modest 2010 membership dues, you can help in that way. Extra contributions in any amount toward the Advertising or Speakers fund or simply for general expenses will keep NOSHA financially viable and able to consider new projects which are often proposed.

Send a check to our Treasurer (see form at end of newsletter), bring your contribution to the next meeting, or use PayPal through the NOSHA website at www.nosha.info.

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ADOPT A NEUTRAL GROUND WITH NOSHA

Is there a better way to show your support for your community as a secular humanist than to join in a project with NOSHA to beautify the community?

We’re looking for a few good people to be part of the “Adopt-a-Neutral Ground” program that will bring recognition to our organization. And it doesn’t require that you have experience with landscaping—all you need to provide is a little elbow grease and some time on a pretty day to help keep a public green space trimmed and free of debris.

When we have a small committee of people who would be willing to help with this effort, we will submit our application and find out more. If you are interested, please contact NOSHA board member, **Charlotte Klasson**, at charlotte@noshalinfo who will be our point person.

To learn more, you can check out the website at: www.parkwaypartnersnola.org/neutralground.html.

SECOND ANNUAL NOSHA BANQUET

Our first ever banquet in August 2009 was such a success, that we’ve decided to give it another go. Our second annual banquet is scheduled for August 21, 2010. It will, again, be held at Smilies Restaurant on Jefferson Highway in Harahan. More information will be forthcoming in the next month.

We are happy to announce our speaker for this year’s banquet is **Ellen Johnson**.

Ellen is the past president of American Atheists. She has twice testified before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. In 2002 she organized the **Godless Americans March on Washington** and she was the organizer of the November 11, 2005 “Atheists in Foxholes” March on Washington. In 2003, she established the **Godless Americans Political Action Committee**, now called EnlightenTheVote.com, and serves as it’s Executive Director.

She is also a frequent guest on national radio and television shows and is an honorary board member of “Scouting for All,” a nationwide group that seeks to end discrimination against atheists and gays within the Boy Scouts of America.

In May of 2008, Ellen and Ken Loukinen completed the thwarted 1963 Freedom Walk of Atheist Bill Moore, who attempted to carry a letter of racial harmony from Tennessee to the Governor of Mississippi and was murdered two days into his walk. Ellen and Ken walked the letter from Attalla, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi and completed Bill Moore’s walk.

Ellen Johnson should have much of interest to share with us at the banquet. We hope to see many of you there.

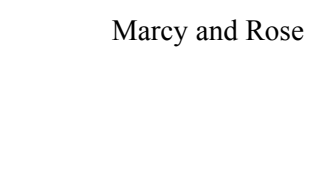
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NATIONAL DAY OF REASON PARTIERS

This is William. He won the quiz. Congrats, William.



Rita and Gloria



Marcy and Rose



Amber, Thomas, Joseph



Rose and Mike



Jimmy



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NOSHA HAPPY HOURS

We are adding another secular happy hour to our calendar each month. Now you can join our merry band of skeptics on the **FIRST** and/or **THIRD** Wednesday of every month at 6:00 pm.

You’ll find us at the Monkey Hill Bar located at 6100 Magazine Street Uptown, just three blocks from the Audubon Zoo and Park.

As always, we will continue to encourage stimulating conversation and to provide a welcoming place for our freethinking friends to stop by and say hello. See you there.

The New Orleans Secular Humanist Association (NOSHA) was formed to provide an opportunity for like-minded people to meet and exchange ideas and to promote awareness of secular humanist viewpoints in the community. We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to explain the world in supernatural terms and to look outside nature for salvation. We strive to make the public aware of the importance of the separation of church and state, to oppose the teaching of creationism and other religious doctrines in the public schools, and to provide a voice of reason when superstition is presented in the media. We believe in enjoying life here and now, and in cultivating moral excellence. We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

To become a supporter of THE NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION, complete, clip, and mail in the following form:

Please check: New Member Renewing Member Newsletter by e-mail only Other contribution

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone and/or e-mail: _____

2010 Annual dues are \$20.00. Make checks payable to “NOSHA” and mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

NOTE: For those of you who receive the newsletter by standard mail, the year for which you have last paid membership dues is reflected in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

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