

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association Summer 2010

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

4314 Bancroft Drive
New Orleans, LA 70122

www.nosha.info

(a 501c3 corporation)

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism
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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 99 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Tues. 10:30am; 10:30 pm

ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET BEHIND US LOOKING FORWARD TO NUMBER TWELVE

On August 21, 2010, NOSHA celebrated its eleventh anniversary with a banquet at Smilie's Restaurant in Harahan. Forty members and guests enjoyed the evening with inspiring remarks from NOSHA president Harry Greenberger and Vice President David Schultz. Following a delicious meal, all were treated with more inspiring words from our keynote speaker, whose talk also doubled as challenge of sorts to secularists everywhere.



Once again, we were lucky to have acquired as our keynote speaker, someone on the national stage of secularism in the United States. **Ellen Johnson** is the past president of American Atheists, has twice testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in 2002 was an organizer of the Godless Americans March on Washington and of the November 2005 "Atheists in Foxholes" March on Washington. In 2003, she established the Godless Americans Political Action

Committee now called EnlightenTheVote.com and currently serves as its Executive Director. In her keynote address, she challenged us with "Let's Play Hardball." Her challenge was to be open about who we are, to let our friends and neighbors know that the good people they already know we are, are non-believers. And she challenged us to get involved, politically, as secularists. That is the challenge of her new political action committee, EnlightenTheVote, which backs openly secular political candidates.

Harry's opening remarks had actually also issued a challenge of sorts. He reflected on where we had been, having first come together eleven years ago at a Metairie bookstore, weathered Katrina, and the rebuilding afterward to swell our mailing list to over 500 names. And today, we have a national billboard campaign in our city and are recognized as an organization locally. He then challenged us to tomorrow using the words of New Orleans new Mayor Mitch Landrieu, to "stop thinking about rebuilding the city we were and start dreaming of the city we want to become," saying that those words are true of NOSHA as well. Photos from the banquet and the reception the night before are at the end of this newsletter.

Special thanks to the banquet planning committee Charlotte Klasson, Ricky Adams, and Beth Deitch.

THANK YOU FROM ELLEN JOHNSON

Harry Greenberger received the following note from Ellen Johnson the week after NOSHA's eleventh anniversary banquet:

Thank-you again for the kind invitation to speak at your 11th annual banquet celebration dinner. It was an honor to share the evening with your members.

Thank-you for the hospitality you extended to me. Everyone made me feel very welcome. I am astonished by all of the lovely gifts. Thanks for giving me the beautiful little fleur de lis that was on my name tag. I had my eyes on it all night! What nice mementos of my enjoyable visit to 'Nawlins.'

You and the board of directors and officers are doing a great job. There are but a handful of local groups who have done so well or lasted so long.

Congratulations!

Regards,

Ellen

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A POST-KATRINA MEMOIR FROM FORMER NOSHA MEMBER

Founding NOSHA member, **Sally Mooney** has recently self-published her story about loss, destruction and rebirth following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Sally's book, written under her maiden name, Sally Cole, is titled *Leaving New Orleans. An Unsettling Tale*. It is available only from www.Amazon.com.

The following quote from the book says everything: "To live in New Orleans is to leave New Orleans at regular intervals, traveling light: three days of clothes, a cell phone and insurance papers, maybe a lap-top, a six-pack, a pet. The car, kept perpetually gassed up from June through September, encounters gridlock and inches on, west through Baton Rouge or north to Jackson, creeps through the night to whatever friend or room awaits. When the storm makes landfall, the car returns on roads less dense, its load even lighter as, once again, the storm has veered, has left New Orleans high and dry. Except for this time: August 29, 2005. This time we left light (too light) and ended up carrying the weight of the world. This time we left for weeks, some of us for seasons. When we came back, we left again and then returned. We scrambled, we panicked, we moved in with friends, we wore out our welcomes, we moved into trailers, we camped out in gutted homes, we rewired, we rebuilt, we tried to forget. I left forever."

Sally now lives in Tucson, Arizona.

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BOOK REVIEW

Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists by **Dan Barker**

Dan Barker is a wonderful writer, and writes in such a clear and very comprehensible manner ... and he is often funny! He was a "You need to come to Jesus!" evangelical preacher for 19 years, so he knows the arguments religionists use to defend everything from "The Bible is the word of God" to "Atheists are immoral and have no meaning in their life."

His story of how he went from blind faith as a preacher to a humanist using his mind and reason is fantastic. Dan says "I finally realized that faith is a cop-out, a defeat -- an admission that the truths of religion are unknowable through evidence and reason."

Here are some of my favorite quotes: "We atheists believe in life BEFORE death. Before we were born, there was a very long time, perhaps an eternity when we did not exist, and it did not bother us one bit. The same will be true after we are dead. What matters is that we are alive NOW." Given this, he says that "Atheism actually enhances the value of life" instead of living for some uncertain better after-life in heaven. I love what he says about religious hell: "Hell is an incentive to a phony morality."

In other words, if the only reason you want to be a "moral" person is that God is threatening you with hell, what kind of morality is that? Dan says "Be good for goodness sake!" A great read for all those interested in reason with respects to religion.

- **William Gautreaux**

(The above review first appeared on the NOSHA website in July 2010. For more reviews, go to www.nosha.info.)

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IN MEMORIAM

Former NOSHA member **Doug Trotter** passed away on April 6, 2010. Doug was an early member of NOSHA and continued to be active in Community Church UU in Metairie where he lived.

Former NOSHA member **Rip Anderson** passed away on July 6, 2010. Rip, who had been a NOSHA member for several years had also been retired from the beauty industry and was the owner of several hair salons in Metairie and Covington.

PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter by **Patrick Murphy** appeared in the *Houma Courier* on July 14, 2010:

Raylan Alleman's insistence in a recent letter to the editor that discussion should end when Rome speaks is insulting.

Let science and reason be the arbiter of truth.

During the trial of Galileo, Cardinal Bellarmine (who had a decisive part in it) wrote: "To assert that the earth revolves around the sun is as erroneous as to claim that Jesus was not born of a virgin."

Reality proved Bellarmine's dogma to be in error and the Earth was given permission to be a planet.

For too long, human understanding and Christian faith were violated by the false doctrine that the sun revolves around the Earth.

An optimist, I look forward to a married clergy, female and male.

The following opinion piece by **Barbara Forrest** appeared in the *Shreveport Times* on July 18, 2010:

In his June 28 response to Charles Kincade, the Rev. Gene Mills, executive director of the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF), portrayed the 2008 Louisiana Science Education Act (LSEA) as "landmark" legislation – a "bold step" to "promote critical thinking skills" in public school science classes.

Decrying "censorship over academic freedom," Mills credited "the courage of our policy writers" for Louisiana's "cutting-edge, beneficial law." He added that "the LSEA passed the Louisiana House of Representatives and Senate with near unanimous bipartisan support."

Of these assertions, only the last is consistent with the facts. The Legislature did pass the LSEA, but their doing so had nothing to do with courage. It had everything to do with Family Forum's aggressive lobbying and cultivating legislators for almost 10 years. Most important, the LFF finally got a governor, Bobby Jindal, who would sign a creationist bill. The fact that a largely new Legislature was scared to death of crossing Jindal made 2008 the right year for the LFF to strike.

Nor did "our policy writers" write the Louisiana Science Education Act, as Mills claims – unless one considers the LFF a policy writer, which is precisely the status that this organization enjoys under Bobby Jindal's administration.

The LFF announced on their website that they wrote the bill. They were assisted by the Discovery Institute (DI), a creationist think tank in Seattle that has hawked "intelligent design" for almost two decades. The LSEA is a variant of DI's creationist "Model Academic Freedom Statute," variants of which the Discovery Institute was peddling in six state legislatures

in 2008, as it did again in 2009. Only Louisiana has enacted this piece of rubbish into law.

Denying that the Science Education Act permits teaching creationism, Rev. Mills asserted that the bill's prohibition of "discrimination for or against religion or nonreligion" was included at "LFF's insistence." However, religion disclaimers are an old creationist tactic.

The Science Education Act's disclaimer is part of DI's model bill and was included in all of the various state versions in 2008-2009. Such disclaimers were used in "creation science" legislation in the early 1980s. The act's disclaimer is merely a transparent, pre-emptive attempt at legal self-defense against the accusation that the LSEA promotes religion.

But legislation that is about real science education need not include religion disclaimers. Disclaimers are typically included in creationist laws, which are precisely about promoting religion. Moreover, only creationists complain, as Mills did, about "Darwinian dogma in our schools." As recently as October 2009, the LFF's Family Facts newsletter was bashing "evolutionist propaganda" while presenting "Design Theory" as reflecting "the text of the Bible."

Rev. Mills' denial that the LSEA is a creationist bill is also belied by the fact that the only people that the Louisiana Family Forum brought forward to testify for it were creationists, including a Discovery Institute operative. Only two groups promoted the LSEA: the LFF, which featured creationist materials on their website at the time the LSEA became law, and the Discovery Institute, whose chief project is hawking "intelligent design," which has been thoroughly documented as creationism – including in federal court. Public school science teachers did not request this law. On the contrary, they opposed it.

Finally, Mill's referring to public schools as "our schools" is sheer hypocrisy. Mills considers himself qualified to manipulate the education of other people's children in public schools to which he doesn't send his own. In this 2008 Christmas newsletter, updating readers on his children's activities, he revealed that they don't attend public schools. They are home-schooled and attend a private Christian school. Yet this man is dictating educational policy.

For the truth about the creationist LSEA, see the Louisiana Coalition for Science website at <http://labsciencecoalition.org>.

Barbara Forrest is a Louisiana professor and a member of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Science Education.

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"Gods are fragile things; they may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense."
--Chapman Cohen

ATHEIST BILLBOARDS PLACED ACROSS GREATER NEW ORLEANS

In August, the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) based in Wisconsin, began a campaign to place large billboards across the south. Their first group of signs went up in the Tampa Bay area in early August.

In mid-August, the first of five billboards went up in greater New Orleans, located at the corner of Canal and Rampart streets in the central business district.



Pictured here, it reads: “Imagine No Religion” reminiscent of a song by the late John Lennon.

Other billboards in the New Orleans area include this one located along South Causeway Boulevard in Metairie. Thanks to James Veillon for snapping the photo of the Lincoln-head penny with “in reason we trust” across the top.



Along with these messages, FFRF is debuting a billboard with the philosophy of actress Butterfly McQueen, who is quoted as saying “As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion.”

Besides the two pictured billboards above, others are located at Washington and Broadway, North Galvez and London, and Fourth and Silverlilly.

NOSHA president Harry Greenberger appeared in an interview on local WDSU-TV to comment on the billboards, along with local Archbishop Aymond. While Harry’s comments mirrored FFRF’s purpose to reach out to non-believers, but the Archbishop seemed wary, saying, “I guess as a Christian and as a leader it’s startling. I must admit, it give me a funny feeling.”

“We are trying to reach out to freethinkers in the South. Just as there are indeed atheists in foxholes, there are many nonbelievers in the so-called Bible Belt,” said Freedom from Religion Foundation Co-President Dan Barker, author of *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*.

Other cities which will see similar billboards and signs go up along their streets in the next several months include Atlanta and Louisville. For more information on the billboard campaign, check out their website at www.FFRF.org.

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NOSHA BOARD MEMBER WAS A CIVIL RIGHTS HERO 50 YEARS AGO

In an article printed in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* on September 16, 2010, many of us learned for the first time that one of our board members was a hero of the civil rights movement in New Orleans. In September 1960, **Lanny Goldfinch**, then a graduate student at Tulane University and a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was one of four people to stage a sit-in at the “whites only” lunch counter at McCrory’s five-and-dime on Canal Street.

In addition to Lanny, the other participants of the sit-in were Rudy Lombard, Cecil Carter Jr., and the late Oretha Castle. The four refused to leave until they were arrested. The case of the group, who came to be known as the “CORE Four,” went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1963, the high court threw out their arrests in *Lombard v. Louisiana*, one of a series of rulings about sit-ins that swept the country at the time.

Lanny told the *Times-Picayune* that the activists knew that things could become quite volatile, but were committed to the cause. He and some of the other participants called their parents and told them how dangerous things were becoming. Lanny was even “burned in effigy” on the Tulane campus. He received numerous hate-filled phone calls as well. He said that he would tell the callers that his goal had been simple. “I just wanted to have coffee with my friends,” he would say.

This country owes a great debt to Lanny and his friends and people like them all across the country whose dedication to the cause resulted in major civil rights reform.

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ARE SECULARISTS DOING ANYTHING FOR HUMANITY?

(Most of you may know that NOSHA members have access to an on-line discussion group at googlegroups.com. Most often an interesting item is posted with one or two responses, but occasionally a discussion can go on for days. Following are excerpts from just such an exchange. What do you think, are secularists doing anything for humanity?)

The discussion opened with the following post from **John**:

Yesterday I came across the FaceBook post below. It’s from a Baptist Preacher friend of mine. Any of you

worthless secular humanists/atheists want to respond. If the response is not too hate filled, or too laced with profanities (you know how us atheists are, or at least he does) I promise to tag him back with it.

“No secular humanists were seen ministering in the youth detention center. No secular humanists were seen building homes in the Baptist Crossroads Habitat for Humanity project. No secular humanists were seen providing food for hungry children at our nearby school. What are these guys doing for humanity? Oh, they’re ...spending all their time criticizing Christians for being so hateful ...”

Harry: You might advise him that there were most likely Secular Humanists at the youth center, Habitat for Humanity and food programs, but because we are so reviled by the Christian population the Humanists are reluctant to let anyone know that they are “non-believers” and are “in the closet.”

Chad: ...I would tell him that maybe not all of us need to constantly remind people of our identity when giving to charity. What the hell do I care if the person that I’m donating to is a Christian, Buddhist, Atheist, or whatever? They could use some help and that’s the only thing someone could care about. Likewise, I shouldn’t need to constantly remind them of where their help is coming from. It’s coming from a fellow human being. Isn’t that enough? Doing the right thing isn’t enough. You have to do it for the right reason. You shouldn’t do it because you fear eternal retribution or want a castle in the sky. You should do it simply because you know it’s the right thing to do. I would also remind this preacher that I don’t see every act of charity as an opportunity to push an agenda. There was enough of that crap going around after Katrina.

Cataryna: But I would definitely remind him of this. From Matthew 6:1-4

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

John: ...I belong to a Kiva group of Atheists, Agnostics, Freethinkers, Humanists, and Non-Believers. Kiva, if you are not familiar with it, donates money around the world to local groups involved in micro-lending. Our non-believer group has donated more money on this worldwide effort than any other group, including the numerous faith-based groups also involved in this most worthy program. For years, I ran a Life

Skills program at a state prison in the state of Mississippi. My program took place on the same night of the week as the christian bible study course. So I would see hundreds of bible-carrying inmates pass by my room, where I would talk to maybe a dozen or so inmates about how to live a life without recourse to breaking laws, just because it was a smarter way to live, and led to fulfillment and contentment. I know two of this very small group who have been out of prison for years and are living good lives. I would like to know how successful the bible study course was. If it fits in to all of the statistics gathered on prison recidivism, I would have to say I was much more successful than the bible study. If you check out statistics on who is incarcerated, you will find that believers break laws at a higher rate than non-believers. Non-believers are less represented in the prison population than they are in the population as a whole, and their recidivism rate is lower, too.

Mims: Skipping ahead to my experience in Hurricane Katrina recovery in Mississippi, I have been totally involved in the recovery effort for the last 4.5 years. In my over thirty years in public service, Katrina recovery has provided my most intense and intimate association with faith-based charitable groups. I have become increasingly disappointed with the most deeply faith-based groups, the ones more interested in proselytizing than hanging sheetrock. They are the most corrupt and myopic organizations I have every seen. From very large organizations like the Salvation Army down to the local Baptist churches, they are uncooperative, narrow-minded, clueless, organizations. Give me secular organizations like the American Red Cross, Hands On USA, any time over any group, including the N.C. Baptists, the Salvation Army, or (worst of the worst) Catholic Charities, anytime. Or give me government organizations like the Americorps ‘volunteers’ and ‘YouthBuild.’ These secular groups have been far more helpful than the ‘faith-based’ groups. I can tell you also that organizations like Habitat for Humanity are filled with non-believers. The organization itself is ‘faith-based,’ but the volunteers aren’t necessarily believers. I have met many who just want to help.

And finally, **Robert** summed it up nicely: Secularists don’t do community outreach programs to help our fellow humans as an excuse to proselytize to a captive and needy audience. We have no “agenda” when we help our friends and neighbors in our community, unlike this minister who uses the misfortune and bad luck of his fellow man to take advantage of their situation as a means to push his religious belief system. So when Secularists help humanity we do so out of our concern for our fellow human beings whereas when these religious folks “help” in the community they see it as an

opportunity to use suffering as a Trojan horse for their religious dogma. You can see this attitude when this guy states that his worldview has him “ministering” in the youth detention center.

When I worked with these kids I addressed their personal situation, concerns and needs, but I did not “minister” to them with any religious fairy-tales on how this imaginary “god” can save them from their troubled life. So when he sarcastically asks what are Secularists doing for humanity it is clear that we are out actually doing things that help make the here and now better for all of our fellow human beings without the religious baggage that harms those who need assistance. This guy reminds me of Reg, the leader of the Peoples Judean Front in “Life of Brian,” when he asks, “What have the Romans ever done for us?”

(If you would like to join the NOSHA on-line discussion group, go to the NOSHA website at www.nosha.info for more details.)

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NEW STUDENT ALLIANCE GROUP

For those of you in have friends or relatives in the Hammond area, there is a new **Secular Student Alliance** chapter there.

At **Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU)** in Hammond, the new group met for the first time on August 31. Meetings will be held every other Tuesday in the Student Union (Livingston room) at 3:30 pm.

Dr. **Barbara Forrest** will be their speaker at the September 28 meeting. Her topic will be “Interacting with Religious People.”

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<p>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</p>

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ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET AND RECEPTION PICTURES

The remainder of this newsletter will be devoted to pictures from the Friday night reception and the Saturday night banquet. Many thanks to Charlotte Klasson and others for the photographs.

We’ll start with pictures from the reception held at Harry Greenberger’s home.



Beth Deitch and Ricky Adams



Dilia Palgrave with Francisco Alecha and Amy Smith



Dave Schultz, Ricky Adams, and Beth Deitch



Marshall Harris with Connie Gordon



Harry Greenberger with the guest of honor Ellen Johnson

The rest of these photos were taken at the banquet. We'll begin with all the board members who were present, pictured with Ellen Johnson.



Standing from left to right are Ricky Adams, Jim Dugan, Dave Schultz, Will Hunn, Patrick Lestrade, and Charlotte Klasson. Seated are Harry Greenberger, Ellen Johnson, and Connie Gordon.



Leandro Illin and Percy Prestenback



Marshall Harris, Dilia Palgrave, and Lisa Suarez



Zizi Zarins and Betty Alessandra



Clark Forrest and Chris Struppek

Douglas King and Will Hunn



Will Gautreaux with Jim Dugan and his guest



Amy Smith with Francisco Alecha (in back) and Eugene Hamori



Glen Sandburg and his guest

We hope to see all of you and more again next year!

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 friend 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: _____

2011 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.

**NOSHA
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