

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

December 2005

## Sunday, December 11 New Light on Winter Holiday

### Special Points of Interest

- Great Press for AOF (page 1)
- Cliffs Notes Answer to "What is AOF?" (page 2)
- AOFers Assist at Newdow Show (page 3)
- Movie Review by Ken Nahigian (page 4)
- AOFers Attend Washington DC Event (pages 4, 6-7)
- AOF's KVIE Brick Now In Place (pages 4 and 6)
- Weakening the Wall of Separation (page 7)

Despite the "December dilemmas" associated with the varied holiday celebrations this time of year, there is something of a familiar cultural thread running strong in the U.S. that frames the overall perspective. At the December AOF meeting, Dr. Richard Shek, of the Humanities and Religious Studies Department at Sac State, will "open the window" and take us beyond the familiar understandings. We will see how some of the rest of the world, particularly in Chinese and eastern



(Continued on page 3)

### Reporter Uses AOF's Highway Cleanup to Frame Key Litter Article AOF Front Page in Sacramento Bee By Mynga Futrell

It seems that ten years of participation in the Adopt-A-Highway program has led to prominent notice for Sacramento's Atheists and Other Freethinkers and, in a sense, about the best press AOF has ever received. The November 4 article was high up in the main section and thus, likely to be read by a significant fraction of the community. It centered not on AOF, but on the state's litter problem.

*A tidbit of history: Betty Simonsma, while AOF president, was featured in*

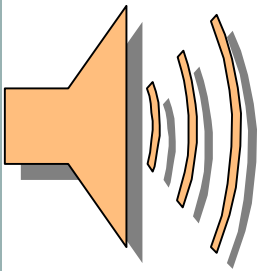
*an outstanding "Style Section" article in the Bee about ten years ago. That piece, focused as it was on AOFers' "unbelief," drew a goodly number of the typical hateful reactions in followup letters to the editor, along with an admiring one or two.*

Headlined "California Talks Trash," Tony Bizjak's report focused primarily on the harm done to the state's waterways by the mushrooming trash accumulation, along with various factors underlying a growing litter problem. AOF's

(Continued on page 6)

### Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
Meeting Recap	3
Social Event	5
Membership Form	6
Board Meeting Summary	6
President's Thoughts	7



## AOF Line About AOF (All in a Nutshell)

*Editor's Note: Occasionally AOF has cause to "toot its own horn" and describe its varied activities. Here we provide AOF News & Views readers with the most recent version of our summary description.*

Atheists and Other Freethinkers has been an active nonprofit association conducting monthly meetings since 1993. Its membership is small, but the group does far more than meet and talk. (It does hold monthly meetings, publish a monthly newsletter, and have varied social activities, such as movie socials and an occasional party.)

AOF engages in a pattern of activism and cooperation with other organizations that accomplishes goals and garners community notice. Here are examples.

- AOF annually plans and co-produces a *Darwin Day* celebration with the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA). Due to its ongoing emphasis on sound science education, the Sacramento event is now being co-sponsored not only by some nonprofit organiza-

tions but also by departments at California State University-Sacramento and Sacramento City College.

- In 2002 AOF initiated a *Freethought Day* fair as a celebration of reason, freethought, and church/state separation. The outdoor event subsequently gained co-sponsorship of HAGSA and several other local organizations. An educational event, it now has a hanging pictorial gallery of free and independent thinkers with printed gallery program, banned books exhibit, freethinker bookshelf exhibit, youth education exhibit, live music, literature, entertainment (magician, skit, critical thinking activities for kids), and more. Other groups (e.g. Scouting for All, San Francisco Atheists) have attended to "table," and the

*(Continued on page 5)*

*The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.*

## Newdow Filing a Different Complaint

*Atheist Michael Newdow has spent years fighting the "under God" aspect of the Pledge of Allegiance, and now he plans to ask a federal court to order removal of the national motto "In God We Trust" from U.S. coins and currency.*

*Newdow said the IGWT violates the religious rights of the atheists who belong to his "First Amendmism Church of True Science." The church's "three suggestions" are: (1) question, (2) be honest, and (3) do what's right. Newdow said it wouldn't be*

*right to take up a collection when the money says "In God We Trust."*

*Last year, the Supreme Court dismissed Newdow's lawsuit over the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance because he doesn't have custody of his daughter, in whose name the lawsuit was filed.*

*Newdow has resurrected that case by filing an identical lawsuit on behalf of two families.*

## AOF Board (2005-6)

President: Don Knutson  
Vice President: Mynga Futrell  
Secretary: Kevin Schultz  
Treasurer: Ken Nahigian  
Directors at large:  
Carla Corbett, Beverly Church  
Dave Flanders, Phil Lazier  
Vincent Wales

## AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor)  
Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)  
Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

*Freethought Day, Oct. 9, 2005:*  
Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

*Darwin Day, Feb. 12, 2006:*  
Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

### Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach (Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga Futrell); Connections (Kevin Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan, Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

## AOF's Voluntariat

### Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)  
Hank Kocol (CSH)  
Kevin Schultz (AA)  
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

### Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Pat Kelley

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian  
Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:  
Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)

## AOFers Help Out at Newdow's Show Our Coruscating Constitution

A goodly number of AOFers volunteered to assist Michael Newdow at the pretty-much "one-man show" he had billed as "History has never been so entertaining!" Dr. Newdow did pull off his show, and it packed in a lot (an awful lot!) of history for the audience. The event was (for the most part) entertaining too, but there were enough rough edges, glitches and unevenness to the overall enterprise that the intended educational goal (*to build audience understanding of the key principles that propelled Newdow on his legal cases*) suffered greatly.

Nevertheless, the event provided a grand opportunity for cooperation among the volunteers, who came from various directions. As far as AOFers go, the "higher-ups" involved included Bev Church, who worked with Mike and coordinated various event preparations in her "executive producer" role, and Rena Lowry, who assumed a stage



Dr. Williamson addresses November meeting.

manager role and contributed some of her artistic talents to props. She also coached youngsters in advance for their parts, including her daughter Brieta.

Listed on the printed program as participants in a "Liberty and Justice for All Choir" were Anna Andrews and Paul Geisert. Others named as volunteers included Jerry Bachman, Ken Nahigian, Kevin Schultz, Don Knutson, Dave Flanders, Carla Corbett, and Bob Wilson. Tom Ikelman, who worked on the Freethought Day Committee, was among others I recognized as helping out in a major way. Even I, who had just planned

to attend and enjoy the evening, ended up punching tickets at the door.

I recognized a couple of folks who came all the way from San Francisco! And while the audience was disappointingly meager, there were plenty of police and protestors.

—Mynga Futrell

### December AOF Program

*(Continued from page 1)*

civilizations, view such things as solstices and seasons, and the associated symbolism and meanings that have accrued. It is an opportunity to step outside our cultural boundaries for a while to see the cosmological perspectives that changing seasons have awakened in others. He will concentrate his talk on Chinese and other nearby eastern cultures, the better to remind us, perhaps, of how limited are our own (or any culture's) views of the totality of humanity.

Dr. Shek has been a professor at California State University, Sacramento since 1976. He is a member of the Association for Asian Studies and the Association of Taoist Studies in Japan. Shek earned a B.A. from International Christian University of Japan, a M.A. from UC Davis and a Ph.D from UC Berkeley.

In addition to the main topic, two very brief ancillary presentations will precede Dr. Shek's talk. The "refresher lesson" by AOF's Paul Geisert, retired science educator, will ensure that all in attendance have an accurate conceptual grip on the "solstice phenomenon." (Everyone gets an "A!") Bill Potts, president of HAGSA will make sure everyone is "up to date" by introducing the "Human Light" festival, a brand new holiday celebration for humanists which serves as an alternative to the winter solstice that may appeal to many freethinking families.

### Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the Atheist Alliance International ("a positive voice for atheism"). AOF

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

#### AOF's Statement of Purpose

*The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.*

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*Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).*

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.



## Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism Outfoxed

Movie Review By Ken Nahigian

"Fair and Balanced" is the motto. But director/producer Robert Greenwald saw a certain lopsided quality to Fox News broadcasting. So, over many months, he tracked broadcasts, took notes, checked sources, dug through a paper trail of Fox in-house memos, talked to other media watchdogs, interviewed Fox employees, and generally snooped around. In 2004, with all his ducks lined up nice and straight, he released this exposé.

Even if you take network news for granted, his findings may disturb you. If you care about your news, smoke may emerge from your ears.

Quoting a Salon review, *Outfoxed* is "a scathing -- and compelling -- indictment of the bias of America's most-watched cable news network." Former employees describe how media mogul Rupert Murdoch filtered or micro-managed their journalism, for example, demanding a minimum of two conservative pundit rebuttals for every liberal interviewed, or pressuring a news anchor to manufacture a huge birthday party for Ronald Reagan when one he was sent to cover never materialized. Though shameful, these tricks seem trivial next to footage directly from Fox itself – a montage of Bill O'Reilly bullying or steam-rolling over his guests, editorial commentaries disguised as news (with repeated use of the evasive non-source, "some say ..."), news clips carefully selected and edited to paint Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry as waffling, confused and weak, clips selected to capture President Bush with respectful, reverent images, official memos managing language, managing headlines, managing topics, managing point of view.

Eventually it may seem overwhelm-

ing, and a bit depressing. But while *Outfoxed* may discourage you, and while it probably won't change the mind of committed conservatives – after all, let's admit it, other media have their own goofs and gaffes – it will certainly shock some fence sitters out of casual complacency. And it may galvanize television critics to speak out, take action.

Media experts Jeff Cohen (FAIR), Bob McChesney and Chellie Pingree provide focus and context throughout, commenting on the danger when corporations take control of broader & broader swathes of our news media.

Producer Robert Greenwald has created and/or directed 65 theatrical and television movies, miniseries and features. He is the Executive Producer of the UN series - *Unprecedented* (2002), *Uncovered* (2003) and *Unconstitutional* (2004).



Sleuth  
Report

By  
Ken  
Nahigian,  
*Private Eye*

While at KVIE last night for a volunteer orientation, I decided to check for the "AOF Brick" that our organization had purchased last year. And I found it.

Our brick has prominent placement in the patio walkway outside the Ose Community Room - it's well-lighted and visible. (And not far from it, the brick Ruth & I purchased in honor of Xegon and Sammie, our favorite departed cats.)



All the bricks are in an L-shape arrangement, many with uplifting and positive messages; the AOF one is at the north-east arm of the L.

If someone could zip out there for a digital snap, it would make a great pic in the December issue. The address of the KVIE Ose Community Room is [2595 Capitol Oaks Dr.](http://www.kvie.com/2595-Capitol-Oaks-Dr)

—Editor's Note: Kevin Schultz must have followed up because I received an image just before publication time. See it on p. 6.



The **Camp Quest Singers** perform on the mall in Washington DC on Nov. 11 at the Veteran's Day "**Atheists in Foxholes**" event.

Q: Who is this man?   Answer on p. 7

## AOF & HAGSA to Hold Potluck Party —Bring your Family and Friends! Celebrate the Solstice

By Carla Corbett

Following the tradition of the past two years, HAGSA and AOF will hold a Solstice Potluck on Sunday, December 18, 3-6 pm in the Fahs Room of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, 2425 Sierra Blvd., Sacramento 95825.

Please join us for a secular celebration of the season. This is a very enjoyable event, and of course, the more, the merrier. Guests are welcome.



If you would like to share your talents by participating in the entertainment, please contact Margo Gunnarsen. Reach her by phone at 916.427.0369 or by email at [jwgunnarsen@comcast.net](mailto:jwgunnarsen@comcast.net)

—————  
*Note: If you plan on attending the party, please take a moment to let Margo know what dish you will be bringing.*

### AOF Board Meeting Summary

October 23, 2005  
Home of Carla Corbett

October minutes approved by consensus with corrections. Treasury report approved by consensus. Kevin Schultz made new AOF liaison to American Atheists.

Meeting relocation: Bev (Kevin) moved to stay at Sierra 2 until next summer, and to resume search for new location at that time, if necessary. Passed unanimously.

Extending meeting time: Bev (Don) moved that the board extend the reservation of Room 10 by 30 minutes before the meeting begins to allow enough time for room set-up. Passed by consensus.

Reimbursements: Motion made by Kevin (Ken) to reimburse himself for itemized list of expenses, including printing and materials for the Secular Student Alliance rack outreach at American River College, totaling \$122 (receipts provided). Passed unanimously.

Legal Education Fund: Bev (Don) moved to give remainder of the legal education fund to Mike Newdow for his services of the "Coruscating Constitution" event on Nov 22. Passed unanimously.

Next meeting: Sunday, January 15, 2005, 9:30, at the common house. The board will not hold a board meeting in December.

### About AOF (in a Nutshell)

(Continued from page 2)

mayor has for a 2nd year declared the date of the October event, Sacramento's Freethought Day.

- AOF has for 10 years conducted a highway cleanup program. In 2003, its involvement in Adopt-A-Highway garnered AOF a Cal-Trans honor as Volunteer of the Year for the region. Most recently (November 4, 2005) AOFers in the October cleanup crew made the front page of the *Sacramento Bee* in an article on litter in California.
- AOF members have maintained a 6-year participation in meals for needy with Davis Community Meals, a 3-year book-purchasing project to supply youth books (critical thinking, skepticism) to the Sacramento Public Library

System, an education program on the Establishment Clause during the Newdow Pledge consideration and filing of an *amicus curiae* brief in Newdow's appeal; and fundraising for local public television station KVIE. AOF has exhibited something of a humanitarian bent at critical times, raising funds for Hurricane Mitch, tsunami relief, a children's receiving home, and donating materials to women escaping a violent environment.

AOF is a member society of the Atheist Alliance and supports the AAI's overall thrust as a *positive voice for atheism*, having participated in each annual AAI convention meeting for the past decade. As an autonomous local organization, though, AOF's interests are broad. The organization maintains three additional national affiliations

(American Atheists, American Humanist Association, and Council for Secular Humanism), encouraging cooperative actions across the various membership organizations and exchanging information with all.

Locally, AOF also participates for some activities in a casual confederation loosely termed *Sacramento's Community of Reason (SCR)*. It works very cooperatively with local organizations such as Humanists of the Greater Sacramento Region [HAGSA], Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking [SORT], Sacramento Skeptics, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State [AU-Sac Chapter 19].

Many AOF officers and members recognize and are on good terms with some of the more influential activists in the state and nation. Some are on national and international boards of secularist groups.

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)     Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10)     Patron (\$50)

Single Membership (\$20)     Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer.     E-mail     Postal mail

## AOF in Sacramento Bee Article

*(Continued from page 1)*

highway cleanup crew exemplified all the volunteers out there engaged in what the reported noted was a Sisyphean task. The piece incorporated a number of quotes from AOFers who were present at the October roadside cleanup.

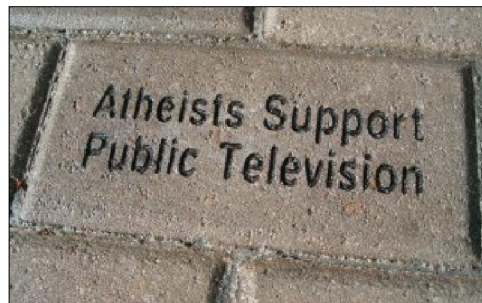
As reported in last month's *AOF News & Views*, the 10th anniversary cleanup (yes, we have been doing this for ten years) included a pre-work "roadside continental breakfast" coordinated by board member, Carla Corbett to celebrate our longevity. It was during that time, just before we were heading out to tackle the main work, that the reporter and photographer showed up at the Park&Ride area and interviewed several of those present. They also followed some of us around during about the first 45 minutes of work.

There were three pictures (2 color) accompanying the litter article. Two of them were of AOF crew members, Debra and Richard Prowse on the front page, and Kevin Schultz in the followup. The page one article led off with a featured pull-out quote by Paul Geisert: "This is a throwaway society. There is a segment of society that doesn't mind letting the

environment take the blow. It is very discouraging."

There was not a single word in the entire piece about our beliefs. The whole article was focused on California's horrid trash problem. Consequently, despite AOF being part of an article on the *Bee's* front page, its voice recorder drew not one crank call that day or the next. (We did receive two requests for membership applications, though. It's good we are listed in the white pages!)

This article treated us as "regular people contributing to the community." It was so refreshing! If only the media would do more along the



This is the brick purchased by AOF last year. See the story on page 4.

lines of the shared citizenry aspect of American pluralism (inclusive of those with a naturalistic worldview, rather than hyping nonconformity to the cultural hegemony in which we reside.



AOFer Beverly Church was among those attending the "Atheists in Foxholes" event on the mall on Veteran's Day, November 11.

She is seen here with members of the American Humanist Association. Bev is an AHA board member, as are EvolveFISH's Rebecca Hale (*far left*) and retired diplomat Carl Coon (*middle*). Margaret Downey (*white hat*), the founder and president of Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, is a former AHA board member.



## President's Thoughts

By Don Knutson

Marie Bain, the fired teacher from Loretto Preparatory Catholic High School, has been in the news media quite a bit lately.

She was the one discarded by Sacramento Bishop Weigand because he yielded to right-wing anti-choice zealots hungry for her head.

Now, the high school will have to pay a settlement to Bain rumored to be in the six figures.

On a radio talk show recently, Ms. Bain fielded a question from a woman caller who believed that Bain's firing was necessary in order

to prevent "contaminated thought" from reaching the ears of her young daughters for whom she was paying "a considerable sum" to receive a Catholic education.

This display only confirmed my belief that atheist parents must be the very best parents of all because they do not have absolute answers for the mysteries of life. That search is left to the satisfaction of the child.



## Did You Know?

By Cleo Kocol

Charles Cooper, a Washington attorney who had been head of the office of legal counsel for the Justice Department, in a remark given during argument at the Supreme Court in the late 1980s, may have presaged the current administration's mixing of government and religion.

The Court had accepted a case regarding prayer at high school graduation. Cooper had argued that kids who object don't have to attend. Justice Kennedy found this very hard to accept and argued against it, stating that graduation is a key event in a young person's life, and that saying to students you can attend graduation or not put a grave

burden upon them.

Justice O'Connor asked whether states could choose a particular religion for a state religion – like a state could choose a bolo tie as the state tie.

Completely ignoring the concept of separation of church and state, Cooper said the states could institute a state religion if the people were not forced to be part of that religion!

The Justices, who held different religious beliefs, possibly looked at the slippery slope Cooper's thinking could bring.

Justice Scalia used a sectarianism example showing how favoring one religion over another was not done. He pointed out that our coins do not say "in Jesus Christ we trust."

Cooper's answer was telling and important today. He said Jesus's name was not used in various instances because "it would not be politically possible."

Although the wall separating state from church was left standing, a slow, steady erosion has taken place ever since.

## Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

[frethnkr@mindspring.com](mailto:frethnkr@mindspring.com)

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF 's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

## Who Is This Man?

*Yes, believe it or not !* — It's AOFer Paul Geisert, who went to Washington, DC to attend a Veteran's Day event on the mall. Those who know Paul would be amazed that he would attend *anything* of a military nature, but the event was organized to honor all the "non-existent" atheists who, according to the slur, *always convert* when facing situations of battle and who were not respected during their tours of duty. While there, Paul, a veteran, displayed both his vocal talents and his Camp Quest T-shirt while singing the revamped military tunes (with all-new lyrics written by Camp Quest founder Edwin Kagin who organized the singers for the event). Paul was actually invited to be in the event as Co-Director of The Brights' Network [ [the-brights.net](http://the-brights.net) ].

## Newsletter Freebie Policy

*We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!*



P.O. Box 15182  
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!

[www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm](http://www.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm)

## December Calendar of Events

AOF's Highway Cleanup	Sunday, December 4, 8 - 10 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, December 11, 2:30 - 5 PM
Winter Holiday Party	Sunday, December 18 (Time TBA)
Next AOF Board meeting	January (no December meeting)
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, January 11, 2:30 - 5 PM
Next Davis Community Meal	Tuesday, January 31, 4 - 7 PM

*AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10/8/05), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2/12/06). Watch the newsletter for details.*

### Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

