

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

November 2007

Special Points of Interest

December General Meeting Announcement (page 1)

Don Knutson's *The Rise of Species-ism* (page 2)

Freethought Day 2007 Image Round-up (page 3)

AOF Board Candidate Statements (page 4)

Don't forget to attend and vote on Nov 11!



Sunday, November 11, 1:30-4PM Elections, Plus: "Protocol for Atheism Today: Possibilities and Practicalities"

This past year has seen the rise of a phenomenon labeled in media as "The New Atheism." *Is this all well and good?* At the November AOF meeting, invited panelists (Paul Geisert, Hank Kocol, Cleo Kocol, and Paul Storey) will tackle questions of strategy to bring to light pros and cons of various approaches. *How can atheists and freethinkers most effectively garner influence for their messages of reason and science and the necessity for secular government?*

As stimulus material beforehand, panelists and audience will view a half-hour video medley excerpted from the recent "Crystal Clear Atheism" conference in Northern Virginia that garnered considerable press attention. Featured in the video segments will be the quartet of prominent atheist luminaries so often mentioned as central to the emergence of this new form of atheism. Subsequently, each invited panelist will provide 8 to 10 minutes of personal assessments and recommendations of strategy, before opening the floor to general Q&A.

The "New Atheism": This phenomenon directly confronts cultural views that have heretofore privileged mainstream religion. Even liberal religionists are no longer

(Continued on page 3)

Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
AOF Line	2
Membership Form	6
Family News	6
Selected Community Events	6
AOF Volunteer Opportunities	7

December General Meeting: SN&R's Joey Garcia Discusses Secular Spirituality

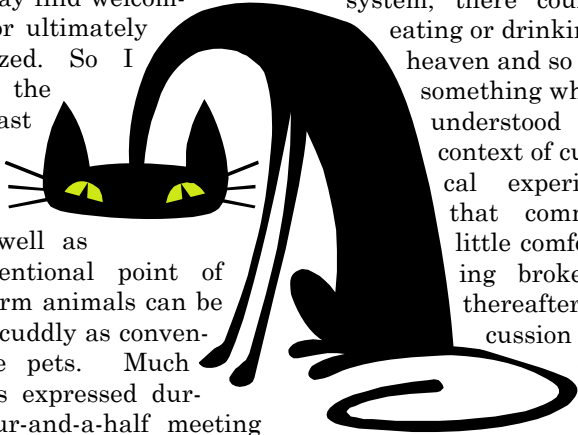
Joey Garcia has written the *Ask Joey* relationship advice column in the Sacramento News & Review for ten years. She is also the founder of *Rise Up Belize*, *advancement through education*, a registered non-profit that serves children and elementary school teachers in her native country of Belize, Central America.

She writes: *Increasing numbers of Americans designate themselves as spiritual, not religious, but those committed to religion insist spirituality and religion are inseparable. Part of the problem is clearly the variety of ways the word spirituality is employed. The other issue is the rise in people who are attempting to divorce themselves of religion. Common ground does exist—but in highly unexpected places! You'll find out where to find it and how to nurture it, during this lively dialogue with Joey.*

The Rise of Species-ism

By Don Knutson

I do occasional volunteer work at the City Animal Shelter on Front Street and they provide monthly meetings for volunteers to express their feelings for animals they care for which may find welcoming homes or ultimately be euthanized. So I checked out the meeting last month to add my experiences as well as my unconventional point of view that farm animals can be as cute and cuddly as conventional home pets. Much emotion was expressed during the hour-and-a-half meeting and toward the end a woman mentioned that she wouldn't want to go to heaven if there weren't animals there and someone replied that there was a belief in a "Rainbow Bridge" which allowed spirits of animals to join their human compan-



ions in the promised land. Of course this was hard for me to stomach but I didn't want to burst too many bubbles in this tender meeting so I just mentioned that, without a sewage system, there couldn't be any eating or drinking going on in heaven and so the concept is something which cannot be understood within the context of current empirical experience. While that comment offered little comfort, the meeting broke up shortly thereafter and the discussion reminded me of the mythology of a deity creating man in his own image. And so the creator of the universe is a member of your own species and thus, superior to all other species. How convenient! Speciesism is not yet a word but is nonetheless a certifiable bigotry.

Save the Dates!

November Movie Night: **Friday, November 9, 7PM.** *Stealing Heaven.* Home of Bev Church, 120 Eastbrook Circle (see also page seven for details).

Joint AOF-HAGSA Winter Solstice/HumanLight Celebration: **Sunday, December 23, 1-4PM.** Details to-be-announced. Volunteers needed! 916-447-3589.

Sacramento Darwin Day 2008: **Sunday, February 10, 2008, 2-4:30PM.** Details to-be-announced.

For all these dates and more be sure to check out the online community events calendar:

Sacramento Community Events Calendar for Freethinkers



<http://sacportal.humanists.net/calendar>

Subscribe to all the local happenings online!

AOF Board (2007)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jerry Sloan

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, Kevin Schultz, Paul Storey, Susan Vergne

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)
Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 7, 2007

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 10, 2008:

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: 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: Kevin Schultz

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

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Freethought Day 2007 Recap



Jerry Sloan reads the Freethought Day Proclamation from Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo



Richard Kowaleski performs magic with humor and panache



FTD Chair Bev Church sports a balloon hat crafted by the Camp Quest West booth



Interfaith Religious Liberty Foundation representative **Karen Scott** inducts **Roger Williams** into the Freethinkers Gallery.



American Atheists National Affiliation Director Jim Heldberg shows FTD committee member **Tom Ikelman** the finer points of riding the Segway personal transporter.

More pictures on page seven...

AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

exempted from investigation or open criticism. The four (Oxford professor Richard Dawkins, author Sam Harris, and journalist Christopher Hitchens, and to a somewhat lesser extent, philosopher Daniel Dennett) have written books containing outright attacks on "faith" that are tough on mainstream religious people for their failure to confront the irrationality in their own belief systems. These books have sold very well, and through the rash of book tours and media appearances in which these authors have failed to give religion its "due respect," these men have brought "atheism" to the forefront as never before in recent years. Their messages have stirred much Internet discussion and controversy within freethought, religious and also scientific communities.

The "Crystal Clear Atheism" conference: This late September convention was organized by Atheist Alliance International, of which AOF is a member society. "Science must ultimately destroy organized religion; "God is a myth;" and "Children must not be schooled in any faith" is how one journalist described the shared points the major presenters offered at the September convention. Yet these celebrities do not think alike on matters of strategy. At the extremes, one calls for wearing of a red letter "A" on T-shirts to "Come Out as Atheists!," while another cautions not to rally around the word *atheism*, or actually, any term at all!

—Mynga Futrell

FTD Sac Bee Press: <http://www.sacbee.com/religion/story/420375.html>

FTD Sac Bee Letters: <http://www.sacbee.com/326/story/429806.html>

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.

AOF News & Views: Copyright © 2007 by *Atheists and Other Freethinkers*, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists and Other Freethinkers.

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.

AOF 2008 Candidate Statements

In alphabetical order:

Alice Corley

I am a lifelong freethinker and would welcome the chance to serve on the AOF board and help promote our goals. I am particularly interested in furthering AOF's community outreach and education programs to enhance awareness and understanding of free-thought in the Sacramento region. AOF is a vibrant and stimulating organization, and I care a lot about its continued success. I would appreciate your vote in the upcoming board election. Thank you.

Kay Dickey

I have been an AOF board member and have served in several officer positions during most of the years AOF has been in existence. I also serve as AOF's co-representative to the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) and as treasurer of the AAI. I have been involved on the planning committees of both of the major events co-sponsored by AOF; Freethought Day and the Darwin Birthday Gala. I hope to see AOF grow in active membership of freethinkers of all ages.

Mynga Futrell

This organization is dear to my heart, and across recent years, I have served AOF's board in so many capacities (president, newsletter editor, organizing roles in Darwin Days and Freethought Days), you'd think I should be all worn out by now. But, I'm not - not yet, anyway! AOF is an indispensable resource for freethinkers in the Sacramento area, and I'm game to do my part to keep it chugging along on its worthwhile mission, promoting civic acceptance for atheists. We need to expand membership and grow in vibrancy in order to confront the all-too-many challenges to legitimacy.

Nancy Gilbert

I accept the opportunity to be a Board candidate. If so honored by your vote, I would like to see us focus on 1) encouraging our mutual sociality, 2) Enlarging our membership, which would help with #1 & 3, and 3) work on refuting that pervasive perception that a moral sense and ethical behavior is somehow dependent on religion or a god-belief. This is a too widely believed assumption, which I think has no basis in fact. There is ample evidence that humans have at least some genetically programmed sense of justice (unfortunately, not uniformly coded!), and that early childhood inculcation and modeling is extremely important. I know of no study supporting god-belief as needed for ethical behavior, good moral sense or a sense of justice. I feel we should loudly proclaim this whenever possible; it goes to the basis of our political and sometimes social exclusions.

Don Knutson

Ever since I joined AOF in the mid-'90's, I have taken a considerable interest in the organization by serving on the Board during most of that intervening time span and I have served the last two years as your President. In many ways, I consider our struggle to be one of civil rights for people who wish to explicitly enjoy life free of deities and superstition. Maintaining the healthy state of our organization with our continued growth is an important element in our achieving a society where those of a naturalistic persuasion would not meet discrimination. Also, rebuilding the separation barrier between church & state in our country any way we can will continue to be my priority. I would appreciate your vote.

Ken Nahigian

Ken Nahigian, incumbent board member, is almost but not quite an AOF

founder. Early AOF members found him living in a makeshift hut, hoarding aluminum cans and shaving dime edges for the silver. He joined our group in December 1993 and has served as treasurer since 1995.

After a long-checked history of religious belief, Ken became a freethinker in his mid-20's. Motto: "I started with nothing, and still have most of it left." His personal vision as AOF treasurer is to pinch pennies, sell bumper stickers, and keep us solvent.

Kevin Schultz

I'm committed to helping this organization achieve tangible, realistic goals here in our community and want to put that commitment to use in 2008 at our board retreat, which will plan long-term strategy for the next few years. I've served since 2001 on the board and hope to continue AOF's service to our membership in 2008.

Debora Smith

I've been a freethinker all my life, although I haven't given it much consideration until recently. I felt outed as an atheist in 2004, when the Bee ombudsman did a column about a letter I'd written (re: use of the phrase "self-described atheist") identifying me by name and profession.

I'd like to explore ways to make AOF's existence known to students on campuses around Sacramento, and to make it appealing to them to participate.

Paul Storey

No candidate statement submitted at press time.

A VOICE FOR ATHEISTS

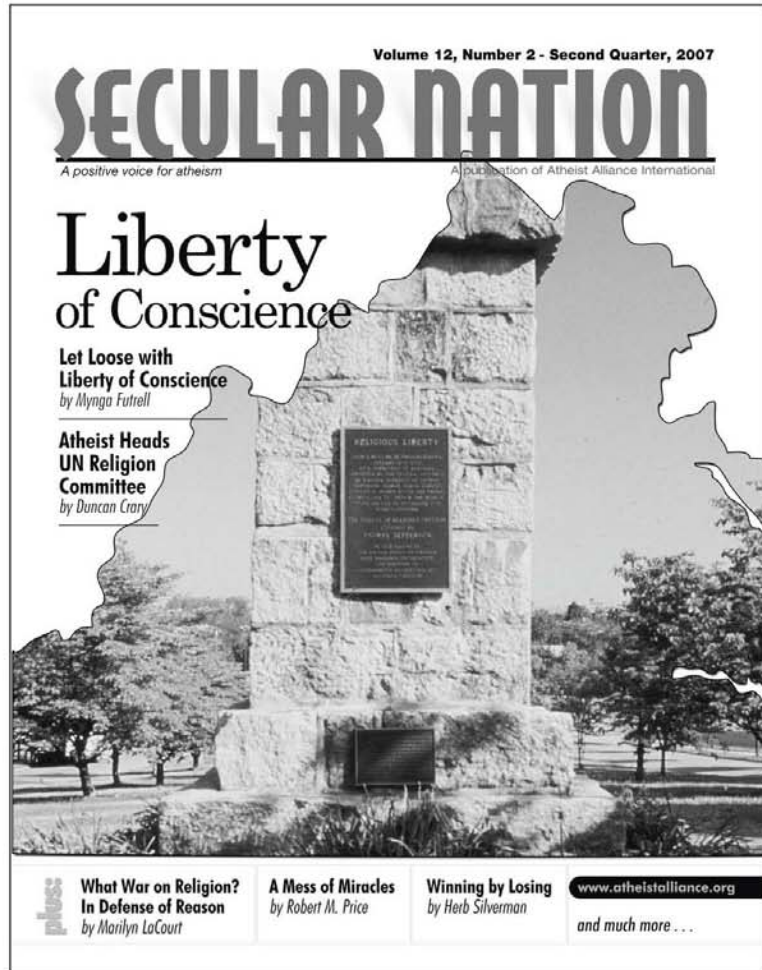
A STANDARD BEARER FOR ATHEISM

When you join Atheist Alliance International, you support our public visibility projects, coalition building, and member society funding programs.

Individuals, through the Individual Members Group, have their own elected representative on the AAI board of directors.

Secular Nation is a membership benefit for supporters of AAI. As individuals and groups, we work together to become publicly visible and publicly respected.

We have no paid staff. This is a grass roots, coalition-building organization of volunteers. Our members run the AAI. Together, we make all the decisions and do all the work.



Be a proud supporter of
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All income goes to public outreach projects and helping our member societies grow in strength and numbers. With your membership, you receive our quarterly magazine,

Secular Nation

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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

Tidbits, News, and Events of Interest

AOF Family News

- AOF board member, **Beverly Church**, has been accepted into the fifteenth **Humanist Institute Leadership Class**. The three-year graduate-level program consists of intensive reading and reflection, and three annual seminars, leading to a Graduate Certificate in Humanist Leadership. For more information: <http://humanistinstitute.org>
- AOF Board Member **Mynga Futrell** has received the Atheist Alliance International's (AAI) Certificate of Appreciation for her contributions as **Education Coordinator**. Congratulations!
- AOF member and nationally recognized poet and activist **Cleo Fellers Kocol** will be speaking in Los Angeles on November 25 at the general meet-



ing of the Atheists United. She will be performing as Margaret Sanger in her historical struggle to bring birth control education to American women in the face of attacks from the religious mainstream. Cleo will also be performing some of her poetry for our audience. AOF members interested in attending can learn more by visiting: <http://www.atheistsunited.org>.



- Can the 2008 AAI convention top the 2007 event including Dawkins, Sweeney, Harris, Dennett, and Hitchens? Rumor has it the 2008 event may be held closer to home—Hollywood—and include star-power. Stay tuned for more details!
- **Atheist branding change?** The AAI board proposed a new symbol for atheism at their



Community Events of Interest to AOF Members

- **Humanists of Sun City, Sunday, Nov 4, 1-4PM:** Monthly meeting. Sierra Pines Recreational Center, 7050 Del Webb Blvd, Roseville. More info: healthphys@hotmail.com
- **FACTS, Thursday, Nov 8, 7-9PM:** General Meeting. Home of AOF board member Bev Church, 120 Eastbrook Circle, Sacramento. More info: <http://www.restorethepledge.com/FACTS/>
- **HAGSA, Sunday, Nov 18, 3-5PM:** Hank Kocol presents: *The Manhattan Project*. Fahs Room, Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS), at 2425 Sierra Boulevard, Sacramento. More info: <http://hagsa.org>
- **SORT, Tuesday, Nov 27, 7:30-9PM:** Monthly meeting. Room 800, La Sierra Community Center, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael. More info: <http://home.surewest.net/kitray/>

2007 conference. Read all about it at: <http://atheist-symbol.info>
We'd love to hear and share what's going on with you and yours! Send news submissions to: newsletter@aofonline.com



Dave Flanders staffs the freethought book table.



Program Chair Mynga Futrell inducting Roger Williams

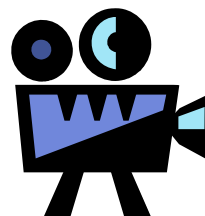


Amos and Newdow jam

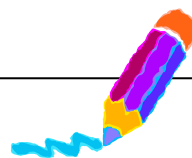
AOF November Movie Night By Ken Nahigian

AOF/HAGSA Movie Night will occur Friday, November 9th, 7-9pm, at the beautiful new home of Beverly Church, 120 East Brook Circle, in the North Natomas area of Sacramento. For directions call Beverly at 359-5423, or see this map link: <http://tinyurl.com/2g6twk>

The movie will be *Stealing Heaven*, the drama of Abelard and Heloise, perhaps the most tragic love story in Western history. Peter Abelard was a professor and scholastic philosopher of 12th Century France; Heloise was his beautiful and brilliant student. Falling in love, they defied convention as well as her jealous, possessive uncle, unaware of the tragedy this would invite. Warning: erotic scenes, as well as one particular leg-crosser of a scene most gentlemen will long remember. 1998; 115 minutes; starring Derek De Lint, Kim Thomson, Denholm Elliott, Rachel Kempson, Kenneth Cranham; directed by Clive Donner. BYOP (Bring Your Own Popcorn).



Want the latest AOF board minutes?
E-mail aofboard@aofonline.org



Newsletter Submissions

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

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Note-pad*. (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.

AOF Volunteer Opportunities

Calling all volunteers! Send us your ideas for projects and/or volunteer using the contact info on page two. Open positions:

- *Post-meeting lunch coordinator*
- *Archive Committee*
- *AOF Librarian*
- *Program Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Caring Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Publicity Volunteer*
- *Freethought Day/Darwin Day*

Interested? Call 916-447-3589!

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!
aofonline.org

November Calendar of Events

November AOF General Meeting (page 1)	Sunday, November 11, 1:30-4 PM
AOF/HAGSA Joint Movie Night— <i>Stealing Heaven</i> (page 7)	Friday, November 9, 7 - 9 PM
AOF Board meeting	Sunday, November 18, 9:30 - 12 PM
AOF December General Meeting (page 1)	Sunday, December 9, 1:30-4 PM
SORT Monthly Meeting (http://home.surewest.net/kitray)	Tuesday, November 27, 7:30-9 PM
HAGSA Semi-Monthly Meeting (hagsa.org , page 6)	Sunday, November 18, 3-5 PM
AOF-HAGSA Winter Solstice/HumanLight Event	Sunday, December 23, 1-4 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 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" (2007-10-07), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2008-02-10). 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.

