

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

November 2011

Sunday, November 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Elections! Plus: The Future of Atheists and Other Freethinkers

Special Points of Interest

Asking Notables for Public Recognition of Freethought Day 2011, by Kelly Karas (pages 1, 6)

Are you up to the challenge? Take the Weekly American Humanist Association Crossword Puzzle! (page 2)

Shifting Gears, Forging Ahead, by Mynga Futrell (pages 3, 7)

AOF Board Elections for 2012: Candidate Statements (pages 4-5)



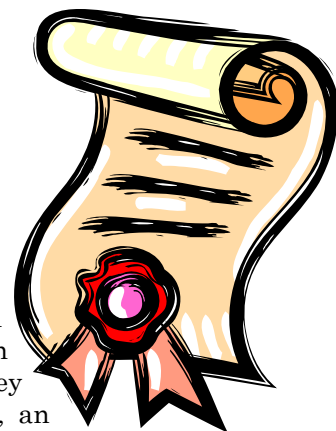
AOF apologizes for a change of plans. We will not host a public screen of the acclaimed movie about D.M. Bennett, notorious 19th-century freethinker, at the November general meeting—that must await another day!

Instead we urge every dues-paying AOF member, and every freethinker concerned about the future of organized freethought in Sacramento, to attend an open discussion of AOF's future. In other words, *where do we go from here?*

Sacramento-area freethought activism is flourishing. AOF, less so. Our general meetings have dwindled. AOF Directors have discussed this and what to do about it. Currently AOF pays about \$150 a month for meeting room rent at the Sierra 2 center, which has lately averaged to about \$10 per person. Per month. This may not be a wise

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Asking Notables for Public Recognition of Freethought Day 2011 By Kelly Karas



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This year, I'm pleased to say that **Mayor Johnson** and the **Sacramento City Council** have willingly sent in their endorsements—no questions asked. In fact, they were very pleasant! We also have, for the first time, an endorsement letter from **California Senate Pro tem Darrell Steinberg**. Yeah!

That's the "good news". Like many of you, however, I've learned not to get excited too quickly. I found out that our current Governor, Jerry Brown is no Arnold Schwarzenegger when it comes to our celebration of reason and church/state

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AOF Line

By Don Knutson

Just a reminder that November has a fifth Tuesday which means AOF volunteers are needed to help serve the needy of Davis at St. Martin's Church on Hawthorne Way in Davis on Tuesday, Nov 29th. We do setup, serve & cleanup of dinner beginning at 4:00 p.m. We are normally out of there no later than 7:00 p.m.. Carpooling can be arranged at (916)447-2169 .

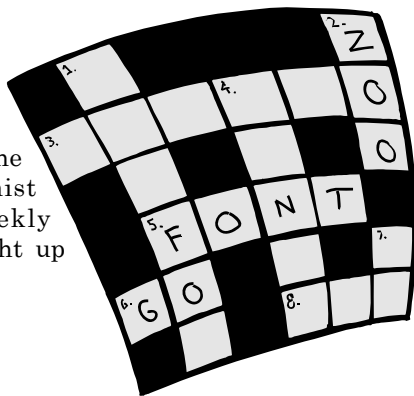


Weekly Humanist Crossword Puzzle!

Do you like crossword puzzles?

If so, you may find the American Humanist Association's weekly crossword puzzle right up your alley!

Link to the puzzle:
<http://j.mp/sssYsD>



From the Humanist Network News' weekly e-zine:

"This week: Can you guess these Religious Right leaders by their photographs? Our special thanks to Dan Mason, creator of this puzzle! Dan creates puzzles for the Williamsport Guardian, a bimonthly newspaper promoting awareness, arts, culture and education in north-central Pennsylvania.

The answers will appear in the next issue of Humanist Network News (November 9)."

AOF Board (2011)

President: Jerry Sloan

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: Kristi Craven, Mynga Futrell, Peggy Lucas, Mario Sandri, Jerry Sloan, Jillian Stanley, Vincent Wales

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Building / Reason House Committee

Vacant, Chair

Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

Freethought Day 2012: Date to-be-announced

Vacant, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2012: Date to-be-announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

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

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>

Jerry Sloan, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>

Jerry Sloan, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>

Jerry Sloan, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

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Shifting Gears, Forging Ahead

By Mynga Futrell

In Sacramento and surrounding areas, many major challenges to atheists' legitimacy as citizens remain. (See Kelly's saga on page one regarding snubs by California's current governor and both U.S. senators.)

My question is: *How can AOF best address these challenges?*

Like so many unemployed and under employed workers today, the Atheists and Other Freethinkers organization has much to offer, but finds itself increasingly mismatched to the contemporary situation surrounding it. With the advent of the Internet and its many available options for freethinkers, AOF finds paid member aging and attendance at meetings dwindling.

The AOF mission appears to be in need of some serious re-interpretation by its membership. Do we want to keep going as we're going, or shift gears to perhaps better address the challenges to acceptance of atheists as full-fledged members of the community? I don't think we can keep doing what we're doing. We need to shift gears.

Where AOF is headed will be discussed at the current membership meeting (Nov. 13), but before looking ahead, first a glimpse at the past. *Have we made progress?*

While serving as AOF's president back in 2002, I (along with Jerry Sloan,

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use of our resources (your dues).

What to do? The Board proposes a new quarterly general meeting schedule. This would allow AOF to seek more exciting, perhaps better known speakers to whom we could pay a reasonable honorarium, even travel expenses if necessary. What do you think of this?

On months we do not meet at the Sierra 2 site, we might plan some strictly social gatherings. Meanwhile, AOF will continue to support the Darwin Day event in February, Freethought Day in October, and other special activities.

The Board has also proposes a more focused effort during 2012 to establish Reason House for the Sacramento community of reason. This means anything from finding a piece of property on which to construct a building to an actual building that would meet our needs. We certainly would appreciate membership input on this issue!

Also coming up at the November meeting, of course: **AOF Board Elections**. Under AOF Bylaws, each November, we bloodily execute the previous band of autocratic oppressors, and instill a new band of autocratic oppressors. Just kidding about the execute part -- we hope. But if you are a voting AOF member, come to this meeting, exercise your unique franchise, and help throw the rascals out (or keep them in, your choice).

If you are a dues-paying AOF member and would like to serve on the Board this year, please contact us! (see page two)

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 of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

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 Board Elections for 2012

Candidate Statements

AOF requested candidates submit a statement limited to 300 words. Please take the time necessary to read the candidate statements below. Elected candidates start in January of 2010.

Kristi Craven (Incumbent)

I grew up being taught that truth, integrity and character are the cornerstones of a good life. Never have I felt closer to that goal than in the past 6 years when I have become an agnostic freethinker. Now I know the difference between belief and facts, truth versus tradition, and comfort as opposed to reality. My road to that discovery has been a difficult one, flocked with various churches, cults and disorganized thinking. As Dan Barker of FFRF has often told people that if he was not a believer than no one is can also be applied to me. I searched for meaning and symbolism in everything, looking for that magic formula that would make everything make sense. I reached out to God in every way imaginable finally becoming a born again Christian in 1997. It didn't take long for me to realize that I was far too intelligent and independent to accept this ideology and decided that either all religions were true or none of them were. I went through a period of accepting all religions until I finally just woke up one day and told myself that the God of no confusion certainly was confusing. It was then that I realized what I really was, an atheist. It was a painful acceptance at first and was not without significant personal loss, but pretending anymore to be something that I wasn't just was no longer an option. Since becoming a non-believer I have discovered that so many of the truths I was holding onto were not truths at all and that doing my own research instead of just accepting someone else's word for what was right gave me the answers I had been searching for so long and I truly felt "born again". I still find myself missing the fellowship and friendships that came from my church relationships and hope that I can bring this to the AOF table. I am also an accomplished singer, musician and actress and hope I can lend my talents, as I did as a Christian, to inspire and give courage to those who are, perhaps, once like me, lost and searching for the truth wherever it may lead them.

Dave Flanders



I and others at AOF have been on that ongoing search to answer life's persistent questions. Please elect me—Dave Flanders—to be on the board of Atheist and other freethinkers this coming year.

Mynga Futrell (Incumbent)

I have greatly enjoyed serving AOF in many capacities (as president, vice-president, newsletter layout, newsletter editor, on committees and projects, and as liaison to national and international organizations). I continue to be a workhorse for this organization, yet I see reasons for substantial change. The AOF organizational structure remains immensely worthwhile, but carrying on many of AOF's "long-established" activities has become especially wasteful of dedicated volunteer energies.

Members need to tune in more to AOF's purpose (see purpose statement on page three) and reconsider strategy. When our "traditions" (e.g., monthly meetings) grow to be mismatched to the mission, we are being insufficiently prudent with member resources. This is true especially now that younger freethinking folks are gathering via Internet tools like MeetUp's. Mostly casual get-togethers, like AOF meetings years ago, tend to focus primarily on self-identity reinforcement and social camaraderie, but they seldom build infrastructure or pursue sufficiently substantial activities to address the specific "civic legitimacy" aims that AOF has set out to attain.

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I consider AOF to be an indispensable resource for freethinkers in the Sacramento area, but my platform in running for the board this year is in support of a change in direction for the organization. (Please see my "Shifting Gears" article on page three.) I will work with others who, as board members and members, favor changes in strategy.

Ken Nahigian (Incumbent)

Ken Nahigian has previously served AOF as director, treasurer, membership registrar, web lackey & floor sweep. After a 1-year vacation from the Board, he now makes a bid to serve you once again as a director. Obviously he hasn't learned his lesson.

Almost but not quite a founding member, Ken joined AOF in December 1993, before the group even had a name. He became Treasurer in 1995, Registrar in 2004. These were perfect jobs for him, as his blinkered mind finds a kind of small, brittle joy in balanced columns and minutia. He is a doer, not a planner.

Prior to joining AOF, his life was a ping pong game between religious belief and doubt. In his mid-20's he became a freethinker. For him it was a breakthrough, a first breath of sweet fresh air. He still looks back with relief, as the occasional bouts of stigmata were messy. Ken now styles himself, not as an atheist, not as an agnostic, but an apatheist—in other words, it all seems to be much ado about nothing.

Ken's continued vision for AOF is to pinch pennies, sell merchandise, hack away at this website, and keep AOF solvent as best he can. As registrar he works to expand AOF's membership. He would like to build bridges to the many other freethought and skeptical groups within the Sacramento area, creating a true Community of Reason. Finally and most, as a freethinker and humanist, he now sees opportunity for cooperative action between AOF and the more open-minded believers. Freethought has broken free of the intellectual ghetto that held it for almost a century; the horizon is open if our hearts are open, and if we do not fear change.

Mario Sandri (Incumbent)

The Mormons just knocked on my door, minutes before getting this ready to send out. How funny! Maybe their god Elohim thought he'd play a prank on me ... or it was just one of those things, ... you know a coincidence. Though born into a family that was nominally Catholic (peer pressure maybe) I never bought into any of it, like almost everybody else I knew from my generation. As a result there was never a need to be outspoken about my non-belief. If you went to church, that meant you didn't have any friends and there was something wrong with YOU, or you were just really, really old—like pre-WW II old. When I moved here to the U.S., things were a little different, but it is exciting to see so many active local groups, and that one of the last actions of the "old" AOF board was to redirect our focus towards getting a building, that is to become a home and meeting place for all of us. We are living in an exciting time, there is a revolution going on and I'm excited to be on the winning side.

Jerry Sloan (Incumbent)

Jerry Sloan, current president, is a charter member of AOF and as such has served on the board and various committees. He is nationally recognized for his research on Religious extremists in California and the nation. He is also well known for his famous lawsuit against his former Baptist Bible College schoolmate, the late Rev. Jerry Falwell. With some of the proceeds from the lawsuit he co-founded the Gay & Lesbian Community Center.

Vincent Wales (Incumbent)

Vincent M. Wales has been a member of AOF since moving to California in 2000. His first action as an AOF member was the Promise Keepers protest at Arco Arena a mere two weeks after arriving. He served on the AOF Board in 2005, but had to step down due to personal issues, and has been a Director at Large throughout 2011.

He was the founder of the Freethought Society of Northern Utah, a past member of Margaret Downey's Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, has been a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation for nearly two decades, and was the writer behind the website, The Atheist Attic, which contains over one hundred freethought essays. He was also responsible for convincing About.com to feature an Agnosticism/Atheism page, and was its first "guide." He served on the board of Northern California Publishers & Authors for three years, has done volunteer work as a suicide prevention counselor, is currently a volunteer Big Brother, and an affiliate agent of Secret Agent L.

His second novel, ONE NATION UNDER GOD, deals with an American theocracy in the near future. The book was published in 2004 and has won multiple awards while maintaining a five-star rating on Amazon.com, and is currently being considered for a film adaptation. His third novel is expected in early 2013.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

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

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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celebration. And, our U.S. Senators? Well, you had to ask...

Governor Brown: In June, I asked the Governor's office for written acknowledgment of Freethought Day (I reviewed his official website & noticed that in May, he had given a "formal" Proclamation for the National Day of Prayer). A short while later, per email, I received a reply indicating that the request had been "denied". Puzzled by the decision, I immediately sent a letter as an active appeal, asking that the Governor reconsider his "rejection." Once again, I received a 2nd rejection. Finally, I made a third attempt by going to the Capitol personally, in order to drop off an informational package and a request. After weeks of waiting for an answer and receiving none, I inquired of the Governor's Constituency Affairs Department, only to be told that the decision had been made "weeks ago"...NO letter would be issued. Not one person from his staff had given me the common courtesy of notifying me of the decision. Can you imagine?!!

Senator Barbara Boxer: I contacted her office more than once and was told verbally that she declined to formally acknowledge our event. Senator Boxer's website states: "*Senator Boxer is happy to provide greetings for Californians celebrating special occasions such as milestone birthdays and anniversaries, and scouting achievements and **other notable occasions.** [emphasis mine] To request a greeting, you may e-mail us using the form below.*" Along with the anniversary and birthday boxes one can select, there is a section for Boy Scout and Girl Scout achievements, and "other." Yet, no greetings for us. I don't know about you, but I think the 10th annual Freethought Day is a rather notable occasion. Apparently, Senator Boxer does not.

Senator Diane Feinstein: After several similar attempts of contacting her office, I was told verbally that the request was sent to Washington, DC for approval. I thought this was "odd", but perhaps this was their protocol. Well, you guessed it...She too, declined to formally acknowledge our event. Note: Her website states: "*My constituents often call or write me with special requests, and I am happy to oblige. Some of the most common requests I receive are for personal letters of congratulations or recognition... Send me all of the details about your special event using the online form below.*" Her form also includes, in quotes: "*Other, Please Explain.*" And, I did.

Am I getting a feeling that we would be *other* in more ways than one? Why are so many of "our" representatives opposed to wishing us well? Many of us, in fact, are productive citizens who have touched many lives in a positive manner. I have found that the majority of people I have met involved with Freethought Day are wonderful! Most are witty, intelligent and thoughtful. I know one of my goals is to make this a better world for ALL.

Well, that's my two cents for now. I'm grateful to the representatives who endorsed Freethought Day. Obviously, I'm not impressed with those who did not. What am I going to do? I'm going to continue to persist in the cause & my beliefs. What about you?

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the current president) initiated a Freethought Day celebration for Sacramento, which turned into an annual event. At the time, we had been interested in putting a visible “freethought footprint” in the broader community, and doing so in a constructive and educational way. So, we built the idea of gaining more recognition for the American heritage of “liberty of conscience” for *all* (that includes atheists) and the importance of church/state separation which protects *everyone*, including atheists.

The Freethought Day Fair is now in its 10th year, and although at this writing I have no idea how the event will actually turn out, I can say that its planning has been more extensive than ever before. It looks promising.

During the intervening years from 2002 to now, we’ve had some progress in obtaining “community recognition and acceptance” for Freethought Day. For example, Beverly Church, who began chairing the event in 2004, pursued and was able to garner our first “official recognition.” It came from Heather Fargo, Sacramento’s mayor at the time.

But, progress has generally been two steps forward and one step back. After subsequent mayoral endorsements during the Fargo years, the tide turned when Mayor Kevin Johnson came to office.

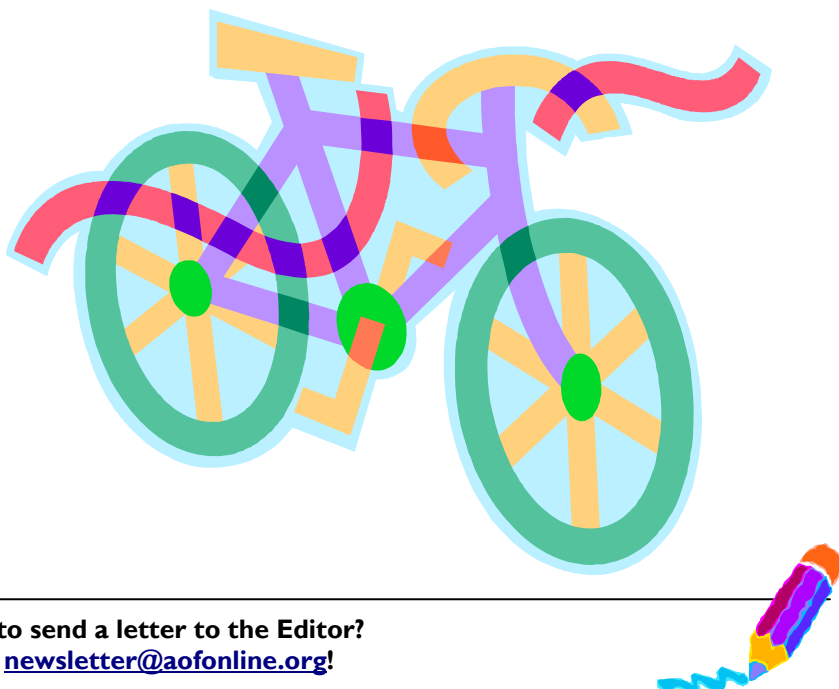
In 2009 his office had endorsed a number of events (e.g., St. Hope Day, Dr. Ephraim Williams Day and Stem Cell Awareness Day) but it turned down the Freethought Day community celebration and broke the brief “tradition” of mayoral endorsement. After some extensive “educating” across the two months following the rejection as I bombarded staff with queries and information, groundwork was laid for success. When Kelly Karas requested that our 2010 event be acknowledged, Johnson’s office came through, restoring the proclamation pattern.

Kelly aims even higher. Even the City Council itself endorsed the 2010 event last year. She also got a wonderful letter of support from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Okay, so it’s two steps forward. But now in 2011, it’s backwards again. Three so called “progressive” representatives (governor and U.S. senators) stood firm – no endorsements of Freethought Day would be issued! In fact, Senator Feinstein’s representative said on the phone that it was “too controversial”.

Too controversial? — a community celebration of reason and church/state separation?

It’s pretty obvious that there’s much work remaining for AOF to do. *We need some new strategies to move forward.*



Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@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 word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF 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.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

November/December Calendar of Events

Freethought Dinner Social: **Kathmandu Kitchen**
 1728 Broadway (<http://kathmandukitchen.com>). Thu, Nov 3, 6:30 p.m.
 Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net

AOF Board Meeting (Planning) Wed, Nov 9, 6:30 p.m.

AOF General Meeting in November (Elections) Sun, Nov 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

Davis Community Meals Feed-the-Hungry Event Tue, Nov 29, 4:00-7:00 p.m.

AOF General Meeting in December Sun, Dec 11, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

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" (Oct 2012), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2012). 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.

