

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

January 2006

Sunday, January 8

10K Christs, As Jesus Disappears

Special Points of Interest

- AOF Honored “As A Group” for its “Special Events” Work (pages 1 & 2)
- Statement Uniquely Authored by a Cluster of Brights (page 4)
- Narnia Movie Review by Ken Nahigian (page 4)
- Darwin Day Coming! (page 5)
- AAI Convention (page 5)
- President’s Vision (page 6)
- Solstice Party Scene (page 7)

Dave Fitzgerald is authoring a forthcoming book on the historicity of the Christian “god-man.” He has titled it, “**The 10,000 Christs and the Evaporating Jesus.**” Dave will be the featured speaker at the January general meeting to tell us what lies behind that intriguing title.

One of the leading First Amendment activists in the Bay Area, David is on the Steering Committee of San Francisco Atheists. He is Director of Student Outreach for the Garrison-Martineau Project, a community-building non-profit organization dedicated to encouraging dialogue across the gap between those who are “believers” and those who have a naturalistic worldview. Mr. Fitzgerald also works closely with groups like the National Center



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American Atheists’ California Awards Program Honors AOF “AOFers Together” Receive An Award

American Atheists’ “California Awards Program” has awarded to Atheists and Other Freethinkers a **Special Events Award**. Unlike previous awards in the program, this one goes to the organization as a whole. Recipients of varied awards were announced at the Winter Solstice Party of San Francisco Atheists.

Mynga Futrell had nominated AOF for the award, and when announcing to her that the group had won the honor, Dave Kong (California Director of American Atheists) wrote the following:

The entire AOF group has been given a Special Events award for your work on

the Freethought Day festival over the past several years. It is a great idea and the cooperation among the California groups to make it a reality is simply terrific. Keep up the good work, and I hope the idea spreads to other areas across the state and beyond.

The CAP awards program was set up initially to honor individuals for their various contributions, and so by giving the award to *all of us*, AOF has been made an exception to the previous pattern.

For the story on how this award came to be, go to the AOF Line, page 2.

AOF Line

A “First Ever” for the American Atheists’ California Awards Program

By Mynga Futrell

Annually, Dave Kong, the California State Director for American Atheists, sends out an announcement to the state’s affiliated groups, reminding them of the AA’s “California Awards Program” and asking for nominations of any *persons* in the various groups that deserving recognition (and for what reason). As Dave states in the announcement, categories “are flexible” and so some awards are humorous while others are for substantive contributions. It has always been *individuals* who has been nominated and thereby always individuals who have received awards.

The question posed to AOF was: *Who (within AOF) did we wish to nominate (and for what attribute or contribution)?*

It was already early November when the e-mailed announcement arrived via former AOF board member Ed McConnell (*Ed has until recently been serving as AOF’s liaison to the American Atheists organization*). The deadline for nominations was November 15 and AOF would not be having a board meeting until after that, and so, what to do? (E-mail is neither an easy nor appropriate way to discuss “who” we might wish to nominate.)

I thought maybe we should just nominate AOF itself and asked the board by e-mail if anybody had any problems with that? Nobody

did, and so I wrote up the nomination, supplied documentation, and sent it all in to Dave Kong by the deadline, along with a reminder that he himself had said that the awards categories were “flexible.”

I got a prompt reply that, while “yes,” they were indeed flexible, the CAP had not heretofore given any awards to organizations, only to individuals. They were concerned about tensions within groups regarding ownership of awards.

I wrote back right away and renewed the nomination and asked for reconsideration, remarking that I foresaw there being no such “ownership” problem as regards our group. After all, AOF has varied assets that belong to the organization (stored in various homes, basements, and garages until the community can somehow achieve a “Reason House”). I was sure that any award received would be treated like all the other assets of the organization.

I am delighted that the CAP made an exception this year. After all, we in AOF did initiate the Free-thought Day celebration in 2002, and although we more recently have co-produced it with HAGSA, our AOFers have sustained it all along through the hard work of many members and by monetary support of many more.

Congratulations, *all of you*.

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

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

Meeting Recap

Richard Shek Edifies, Delights

By Paul Geisert

At the December AOF meeting, Dr. Richard Shek, of the Humanities and Religious Studies Department at Sac State, exposed how those who live in the eastern cultures, and particularly the Chinese, interpret their place in the universe.

He contrasted the western view of deity (as something external to humankind) with some eastern "with us/like us" concepts. Also, there was a yin/yang aspect (light/dark, hot/cold, etc.) to most everything around, and that led to different ways of looking at the multiplicity of life events and to ongoing "negotiations" with the deities.

One of the more interesting things was how fluid might be the religious conceptions an individual embraced across a lifetime. Dr. Shek pointed out that, early on, there was a Confucian bent, which gave way to more Taoist influences, and finally (facing

mortality), more elements of Buddhism.

All in all, it was a delightful lecture, accented by humor from Dr. Shek, who has been a professor at CSUS since 1976.



Dr. Shek addresses December meeting.

Prior to Dr. Shek's talk, I had the help of a first-time visitor to AOF in ensuring an accurate understanding of the "solstice phenomenon." Then, Bill Potts, president of HAGSA, made sure everyone was "up to date" on the latest entry into the holiday celebration buffet of choices for Americans. It's the "Human Light" festival, which serves as an alternative to the winter solstice. The formal celebration date is December 23, and individual groups can "do their own thing" as far as making it meaningful, involving children in the process. (The new holiday is finding acceptability in humanist groups.)

December AOF Program

(Continued from page 1)

for Science Education, the Ask-A-Scientist lecture series, and the Secular Student Alliance.

Here's how Dave describes the content of the talk he plans to give...

What can we know about the real Jesus? Can we even be sure there was a historical Jesus? And if not, how could this huge enchilada called Christianity have ever come about? In my talk on "The 10,000 Christs and the Evaporating Jesus," I will present a thoughtful and slightly smart-assed examination of the historical evidence for Jesus and shed some light on the origins on Christianity, including some of the lesser-known saints and scoundrels who helped bring us the Christian scriptures. I promise a fascinating and very entertaining presentation.

...and here's what Dave says about himself:

I have a Bachelors degree in history from California State University-Fresno. I was raised Southern Baptist and was a hardcore believer until I had a secular epiphany in my 20s. I live and work in San Francisco. I'm not married, but I am living with my gorgeous girlfriend, the writer and movie actress Dana Fredsti. I speak Irish Gaelic and a smattering of about twenty other languages (I can say almost nothing in almost every language...) When I'm not being an Atheist activist or working on the book, which is very little lately- I love fencing, kickboxing, dancing, movies, and reading. "10K Christs" is my first book.

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.

Brights use *The Brights' Net*
to craft a cooperative statement

“Intelligent Design” Isn’t Science

By 3739 Brights

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Various school boards and communities in the United States are trying to introduce Intelligent Design (ID) into public school science classes. ID advocates may, by and large, believe ID to be scientifically credible. Then again, perhaps some of the proponents are trying by essentially surreptitious means to introduce religious beliefs into science programs. Whatever the impetus, the ID endeavor disregards the definition of science and must be rejected. Intelligent Design has no valid place in a science curriculum. It is not science.

Science deals empirically with reality. In fact, central to scientific method is that its ideas about the natural world can be tested, replicated, and verified. Unlike science’s account of the evolution of life on earth, the ID explanation postulates ideas that can not be observed or confirmed. By looking upon a designer as necessary to account for the origin and development of life, ID breaches science as a discipline.

*The scientific process, with its rigorous methods of confirmation, is the best means to understanding our world, and no nation can expect to fare well if its citizens are confused about or misinformed in science. The Intelligent Design movement presents an impediment to educating students for our scientifically-oriented world. It is a grievous threat to the academic integrity of education. *Statement issued 10/28/05*

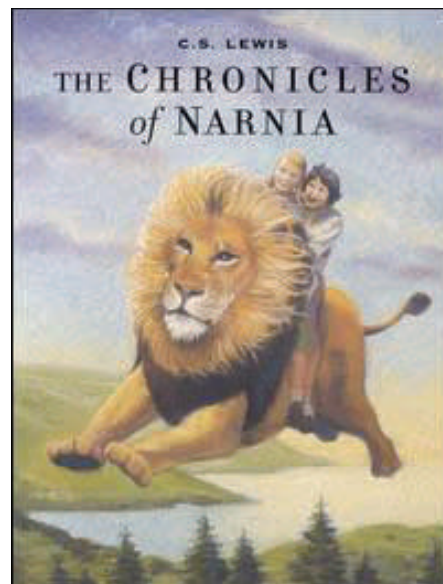
Background on I.D. Statement (from *The Brights' Net*)

The courtroom controversy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania spurred 3,739 individuals from across the globe to craft a collective position statement. What motivated them to sit down at their keyboards?

They fear the citizenry is losing sight of what science is and how it works. The public is framing this controversy as a debating contest between two opposing teams. It is commonly argued that, if both sides were presented in science classes, “then children could make up their minds.” That fact alone demonstrates an enormous lack of understanding of science.

The scientific approach dwarfs all others in its ability to yield practical benefits to mankind. Almost daily, science produces new medical advances, new information about outer space and the universe, and new knowledge about the DNA that produces and regulates all of life. Even these achievements will pale in comparison to what lies ahead as science continues its quest for accurate, verifiable knowledge.

However, the widespread misunderstanding and confusion surrounding the Intelligent Design controversy makes it clear that people are ignorant of how those engaged in scientific enterprise produce knowledge. Developments taking place are undermining support for teaching of sound science in schools.



Narnia, the Movie

Review by Ken Nahigian

Ruth and I went to *Narnia* last week (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, based on the book by Christian evangelist C.S. Lewis, and now at the Century and UA Cinemas). It was a delight. Christian allegory was obvious but not heavy-handed; preaching was gentle; battle-scenes were stirring, even a bit scary; and the CGI (computer effects) was believable.

As a freethinker, only a few points irked me -- such as when Lucy came back with fantastic stories about a magic world in the Wardrobe, and Uncle/Professor Digory offers the old False Trilemma (“Well, either Lucy is telling the truth, or she is lying, or she is “insane.”) Lewis jumbled many mythologies together, hodge-podge, to make his fantasy world. And as with all his stories, you can sense him behind the scenes, pulling characters’ strings. No one ever seems quite in motivation, more like shadow-puppets moved around. But if you can put your private agenda on the shelf for just 140 minutes, those are small sins.

I was a fantasy fan long before I was a freethinker. When I was done rolling my eyes, the movie rewarded me with a great story, breathtaking cinematography, marvelous magic and a little revisit to childhood. And Aslan, wow! Also I must say that Jardis, the White Witch, was kind of hot.

Not at the Tolkien level, but recommended.

*Seeing scientific literacy and human welfare at stake, 3739 Brights individually authorized the statement arguing against any further weakening of science education by treating Intelligent Design as if it were some scientific alternative to evolution. These Brights are some in an international constituency of individuals with a naturalistic worldview (free of supernatural beliefs). Brights are in 137 nations and connected only by Internet. They stand on the side of the fruits of reason and science as first presented to the world during the Enlightenment. *The Brights' Net* is a nonprofit educational organization working to develop a society that offers a level playing field for acceptance and civic participation by individuals, whether their worldviews be supernaturalistic or naturalistic. Its website is: <http://www.the-brights.net>

9th Annual Darwin Event to Feature Evolution Educator and Activist

Nick Matzke to Speak at Darwin Birthday Gala on Feb. 12

This year's Darwin Day event is once again taking place at the La Sierra Community Center in Carmichael on Charles Darwin's birth anniversary, February 12, 2006. Doors to John Smith Hall will open at 2 PM, with the program beginning promptly at 2:30. The interval permits those in attendance to visit the various tables from varied supporting organizations, who will have literature and merchandise.

After the program, there will be the traditional birthday cake and opportunities for camaraderie with those who share a commitment to the value of scientific enterprise and support sound science education. The subject this year is "Intelligent Design," which has been the hottest topic going as far as news of science education. As has been clearly ruled recently in the *Kitzmiller et al.* case

in Dover, PA, the I.D. concept is indeed "disguised creationism" — just what its critics have been saying all along that it is.

One prominent critic of this new form of creationism is Nicholas Matzke, the featured speaker at the 2006 Darwin Day Educational Gala. He was point person for the National Center for Science Education in the Pennsylvania lawsuit, even moving to that state for the duration of the trial. (*More on Mr. Matzke below.*) He will be speaking on origins and evolution of the I.D. movement and answering audience questions. AOF members will receive a special mailing in January and can obtain advance tickets. Here is a perfect opportunity to invite family and friends to come hear a noted speaker and have fun, too! —Darwin Day 2006 Committee

"We're not in Kansas anymore"

The Atheist Alliance

Heads to the Heartland

for the first ever joint convention with the Secular Student Alliance!

April 14-16, 2006

In beautiful Kansas City, MO

Speakers include: **Julia Sweeney**, writer-actress and author of *Letting Go of God: My Beautiful Loss of Faith Story*; **Lori Lipman Brown**, freethought's first Washington lobbyist and Executive Director of the Secular Coalition of America.; **Matt Cherry**, Executive Director of the Institute for Humanist Studies, **Dr. Fred Whitehead**, freethought historian and author of *Freethought on the American Frontier*; **Dr. Ron Pine**, Research Associate, Field Museum of Chicago; **Dr. Paul Mirecki**, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, the first to propose teaching ID as mythology; **August E. Brunzman IV**, Executive Director of the Secular Student Alliance and Director of Camp Quest Classic.. Sessions on atheist parenting, lobbying for separation of church and state, as well as "Leaving the Fold: How Ex-ministers Did It" by Don Bell, Lee Dietz, and Mark Killingsworth and "Selling Atheism" hands-on training by Woody Kaplan; and much more!

See <http://atheistalliance.org> (for reservation and hotel information)

About Nicholas Matzke



Matzke in his "Great Outdoors"

Nick Matzke is a Public Information Project Director at the National Center for Science Education in

Oakland. He has a double B.S. in Biology and Chemistry from Valparaiso University, and a Master's degree in Geography from U.C. Santa Barbara. He has a long-standing interest in evolution in a spatial context, particularly issues surrounding dispersal and convergence.

In the area of evolution and earth history education, Nick specializes in "bringing the scientific literature to the masses" in order to rebut antievolutionist claims about the evolution of biological complexity.

Before coming to NCSE, he conducted extensive literature surveys on the origin of carnivorous plant traps and bacterial flagella. After a one-year appointment at NCSE, he intends to enter a Ph.D. program, where he can work on the integration of bioinformatics and biogeography.

AOF on Deck for Davis Community Meals

Volunteers Wanted!

AOFers will be setting up, serving, and cleaning up on **Tuesday, January 31** at the meal for the needy in Davis, and we need some volunteers for the **4 PM** (to 7) event. Carpooling is offered, along with a fantastic hot meal. This is one of the ways that AOF contributes to the community, and we depend on our members to help. It is so worthwhile. If you haven't done it before, give it a try. You will be glad you did! Please phone the voice mail at 447-3589 to volunteer, or sign up at the January meeting. If you have any questions whatsoever, ask Mynga (via voice mail or in person).

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

President's Thoughts

Looking to the New Year

By Don Knutson

When I think of how liberal theologians and the 25-year-old neo-con revolution will confront the free-thought community in the new year, two instances comes to mind.

One occurred to me personally when I attended an observance hosted by Assemblyman Dave Jones and City Councilwoman Lauren Hammond at the Capitol of Human Rights Day on December 10, the anniversary of the ratification of the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The two local leaders were joined on a panel by two ministers.

Given that the Declaration affirms the right for unions to organize, the purpose of the panel was to hear testimony from aggrieved union members from local corporations including Sutter Health and Blue Diamond Almonds. After the program, I reflected upon what I had heard, and it was quite clear the clergy members though they were politically liberal found their faith to be an asset and something to be proud of — a mindset from the myth that morality can only be derived

from the instructions or the example of a deity.

The recent Dover, Pennsylvania School Board case has shown that the only way the Far Right can deal with science is to legislate what is and what isn't science—essentially an effort to surrender to ignorance and assign any mysteries of the world and the universe to a deity.

To me, "Intelligent Design" is symptomatic of the extreme speciesism of the Far Right whereby the entire universe is only here to serve mankind and his redemption.

Now, help for our cause can come from unexpected places such as the Bush-appointed federal judge recently speaking out against the defeated Dover School Board.

But, AOF will do everything in its power in the new year to resist the two forms of madness cited above and defend scientific process and evolution.

AOF's Highway Cleanup

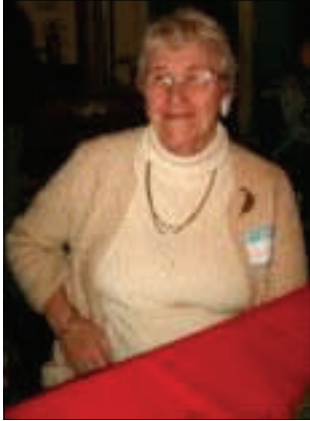
(Well, Sort of a Cleanup)

Just about a month after AOF's Adopt-A-Highway program received unprecedented exposure by having *The Bee* cover it, we returned to the two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. December 4 to clean it up again but, alas, only three (yes, you read that correctly — the number was 3!) AOF volunteers made themselves available.

Debra & Richard Prowse and yours truly collected about full 12 trash bags on a crisp autumn morning.

Never before had we had so few volunteers show up in our ten-year history of performing the task.

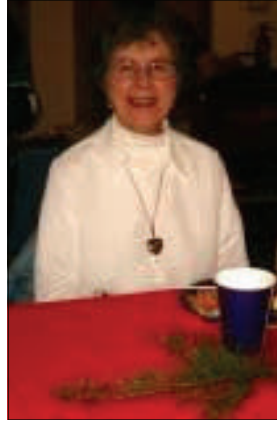
Still, we will doggedly continue when he hit the road again **Sunday, January 22, 2006 @ 8a.m.** Heavy fog and wet conditions cancel. (Well, in truth, they just postpone. The trash will await us!)



Cleo Kocol



Carla Corbett



Diana Ruth

*"Lovely Ladies"
Solstice Party Snaps
By Kevin*

Newsletter Submissions

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

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.

Wintertime Revelry

By Kevin Schultz

Members of AOF and HAGSA gathered inside the Fahs Room at the USSS Dec 18 while Sacramento's first winter storm blew and pelted the outside of the building with cold rain. Inside, the comforts of the room quickly warmed both clothing and temperaments, and the array of cool salads, hot dishes, chewy breads, sweet desserts, and refreshing beverages facilitated laughter, camaraderie, and gastronomical satisfaction in all present.

Table decorations consisted of colorful table-cloths of red, yellow, and green, with holly branches adding a wintry touch. Lit candles added atmosphere to the late afternoon event. Dishes included several salads, homemade hot and spicy vegan chili and meat-lovers chili, fresh baked loaves of bread, artichoke dip and crackers, deli mini-sandwiches, deli meat and cheese tray, rye bread, beef stew, shrimp, and vegetable lasagna. Desserts included pecan pie, homemade cookies, fresh

pineapple and grapes, homemade fudge, and brownies. Members completely filled two large tables with food. Beverages included a variety of wines, juice, coffee, and water.

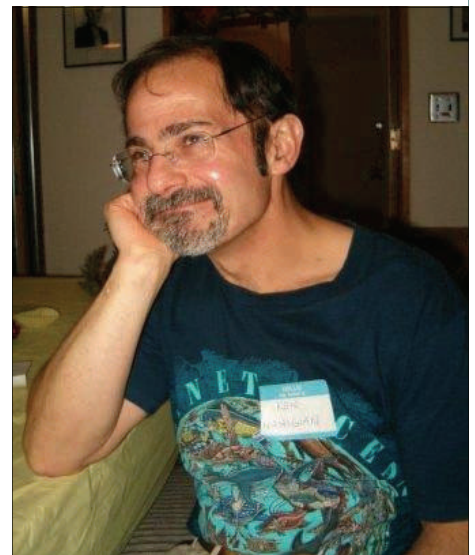
Departing from previous years, the winter solstice party of 2005 featured no formal entertainment program. Members seemed to enjoy the event just as much as previous years, staying well past the five o'clock party conclusion to continue talking and socializing. Perhaps the 2006 winter solstice event might invite members to wear costumes?

Send suggestions to: info@aofonline.org

Thanks to everyone who participated, especially **Diana Ruth**, who arrived early to set-up. (Editor's note: Diana is pictured above.)

When the event ended, the rain had tapered off to a light mist, seemingly worn out from its attempts to dampen the spirits of those who attended.

Visions of Sugarplums?



Ken Nahigian at the Solstice Party

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

January Calendar of Events

AOF General Meeting **Sunday, January 8, 2:30 - 5 PM**

Next AOF Board meeting Sunday, January 15, 9:30 AM

AOF's Highway Cleanup Sunday, January 22, 8 - 10 AM

Davis Community Meal Tuesday, January 31, 4 - 7 PM

Save the Date! - Darwin Birthday Educational Gala Sunday, February 12, 2 - 4:30 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-?-06), 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.

