

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

March 2006

Sunday, March 12

A Dictionary for Doubters

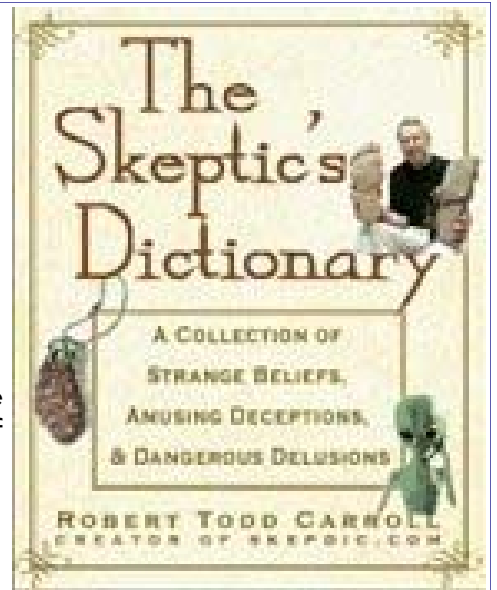
Special Points of Interest

- AAI Response to Muslim Cartoon Capitulation (page 2)
- AOFer Action (page 4)
- AOF Committee Calls for Members with Money Skills (page 5)
- AAI Conventions Upcoming (see insert)

Bob Carroll, Professor of Philosophy at Sacramento City College and guest speaker at the March AOF meeting, will be using his presentation time to relate to the audience the story of his one-man product, **The Skeptic's Dictionary**, which he has been producing online since 1993 (beginning it the very year that AOF itself came into being).

The SD was one of the earliest full-fledged publishing projects on the Internet, and each year Carroll adds more richly hyper-linked material. The dictionary has swelled over time to become an online resource for thousands of skeptics and inquirers, many of whom are seeking "the real truth behind the claims" in this "New Age" age. From abracadabra and

(Continued on page 4)



Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
Meeting Recap	3
Coming Social Event	5
Davis Meals Report	6
Membership Form	6
President's Thoughts	7

Delightful New Addition to Darwin Day Celebration

"Big Bang Band" Adds Merriment



Besides the typically serious educational presentation on some aspect of science, this year's Darwin Birthday gala featured a "fun" aspect, too.

The "Big Bang Band," which followed on the heels of the speaker's presentation, delighted the crowd with their rollicking renditions of "melodious science." The BBB is a science and astronomy educational outreach musical group from Sonoma County.

AAI Decries Capitulation to Islamic Violence

Press Release on Response to Cartoons

By Bobbie Kirkhart

Los Angeles — February 6, 2006

The Atheist Alliance International calls on all governments that claim to value freedom of expression to stand up to the bullying tactics of Islamic militants, who are wreaking havoc around the world in response to the printing, in privately-run periodicals, of editorial cartoons depicting Mohammed.

Many Muslims believe Mohammed, indeed any human or animal, should not be portrayed, and the Atheist Alliance honors their right to that belief. If it ever were to happen that a government coerced members of any religion to display their icons in a manner which they find blasphemous, the Atheist Alliance would be on the side of the believers. In this case, where no one is forced to draw Mohammed or even to look at his likeness, we find it ironic that some Muslims are protesting the renditions of their prophet as an inspiration to violence by demonstrations of kidnapping and arson, while making threats of worse mayhem.

More dangerous than the uprising, the Alliance believes, is the fact that several governments, including three Western democracies, have given comfort to these terrorists by criticizing the private expression of a free press.

Ironically, Kurtis Cooper, spokesman for the US State Department, was talking not of the rioters but of the newspapers, when he said, "Inciting religious or ethnic hatreds in this manner is not acceptable." The government of Norway sent their foreign minister to Leba-

non to deliver an official apology. It was a Danish paper that originally published the cartoons and Denmark at first stood by the right to uncensored speech, but has now issued letters of regret.

With embassies burned and citizens threatened, such responses might be understandable, but they are not acceptable. It is the job of government of a free people to protect the free expression of opinion, not to criticize it.

We commend British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who took issue with a European Union Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson's warning that newspapers should "think twice" before printing the cartoons. Blair's statement said the decision to print is "entirely a matter for the media organizations."

There is no doubt in the minds of most atheists that blasphemy laws have contributed to the current crisis, as they give credence to the idea that government should protect religion, and that religious people—

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

unlike the rest of the citizenry—have a right to be shielded from anything they find offensive to their beliefs. We would suggest that strongly held be-

liefs do not need to be shielded from opposition or nonconformity.

To those who hold freedom of religion dear but find freedom from religion unnecessary, we point out that this incident is a clear example that one does not exist without the other.

—Bobbie Kirkhart is the President of Atheist Alliance International

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, Vincent Wales

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 8, 2006:

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

Darwin Day, Feb. 11, 2007:

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, Kevin Schultz); AOF Finances Evaluation (Carla Corbett, Beverly Church, Ken Nahigian)

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: Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma, Carla Corbett

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

Darwin Birthday Features ID Fighter

Design on Trial in Dover, Pennsylvania

By Dave Flanders

Nick Matzke was the speaker for this year's Darwin Birthday Gala. Nick works for the National Center for Science Education, which defends the teaching of evolution in public schools. It is a nationally recognized clearinghouse for information and advice to keep evolution in the science classroom and "creation science out." The site address is www.ncseweb.org.

Nick recounted how religion has been trying to get a handle on Charles Darwin since his "The Origin of Species" and "Descent of Man" were published in the 1800s. Darwin's theory that human life evolved from lower life forms—a process that includes random mutation and natural selection—shocked people who believed in the thinly disguised fable about Adam and Eve and the talking snake. Nick recounted his involvement in the 2005 case of *Kitzmiller et al. Dover Area School District-in Dover, Pennsylvania*. He served as an information specialist



— Photo by Bill Potts
Nick Matzke Unearthed ID Origins

doing research and assisting the attorneys on the side of the evolutionist. The case attracted national and international attention and may help determine the fate of "intelligent design" in public schools.

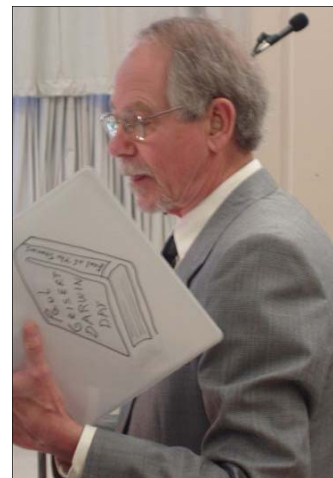
Fundamentalist activism is reactionary to modernity including liberal concepts such as democracy and science. Creationism watchers know well that "Intelligent Design" has been primarily a legal strategy from the very beginning.

ID emerged shortly after the catastrophic defeat of "Scientific Creationism" in the courts during the 1980s. Proponents attempted to use obscurantism—make the definition of intelligent design as vague as possible for legal reasons to get it past the First Amendment.

In the *Scopes* trial, scientific experts were not granted permission to testify. In the *Dover* trial, the

judge noted that a number of "intelligent designer" expert witnesses became no shows at the witness stand. Some described what was transpiring as like watching a train wreck in slow motion. The intelligent design side lost the case.

Darwin wrote: "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science."



— Photo by Bill Potts
Paul Geisert (clearly visible behind whiskers) Emcees Darwin Event

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 © 2005 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.

Tapped to Speak at International Conference AOFers Iceland Bound

Past president Mynga Futrell and her husband, long-time AOF member Paul Geisert, are going to be headed to “the top of the world” in June to participate in an international conference hosted by the Atheist Society of Iceland (SAMT) and AAI.

Mynga and Paul were invited to speak as Co-Directors of The Brights’ Net, an international Internet constituency of *persons who have a naturalistic worldview*. They employ the noun form of “bright” as a civic identity term, encouraging others to “come out” by that same definition. The concept allows constituents to define themselves fully free of any reference to religion. Constituents pursue actions aimed toward producing a level playing field in society for people who are wholly without supernatural/mystical beliefs.

As it happens, Mynga and Paul had to think really hard about going to the conference because Iceland is the third most expensive country in the world! Their decision to go ahead and make the trip, at SAMT’s

invitation, was made easier by a generous action by member Gail Sanders. Gail felt that AOF should help out and offered \$500 to be earmarked to support such a trip. The AOF board voted to support this project, and so Futrell and Geisert will get \$450 toward expenses. AOF has a pattern setting up “special funds” to receive earmarked donations for its approved projects (such as for legal education about the Establishment Clause). In such cases, it keeps 10% for processing/accounting.

The Iceland event is coordinated by some of the local freethought groups, including Sidemennt (the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association), Skepticus, and Vantrú.

Among the other Americans participating are Dan Barker, actress Julia Sweeney, and Enthusiastic Bright Margaret Downey, who founded the Anti-Discrimination Support Network for nontheists. Evolutionary biologist (and Enthusiastic Bright) Richard Dawkins from the U.K. is also a participant, along with three Icelandic speakers.

Dictionary for Doubters

(Continued from page 1)

acupuncture to werewolves and zombies, the “‘truth’ of the matter” is what Bob puts out. His lively writing has won numerous awards.

Dr. Carroll has been a full-time member of the SSC Philosophy Department since 1977, and he now teaches classes that relate well to his dictionary project: logic and critical thinking; law, justice, and punishment; and critical thinking about the paranormal. His Ph.D. (1974) is from the University of California at San Diego.

In this presentation, Bob will discuss how his project started, what is, where it’s going, and how we might be able to help.

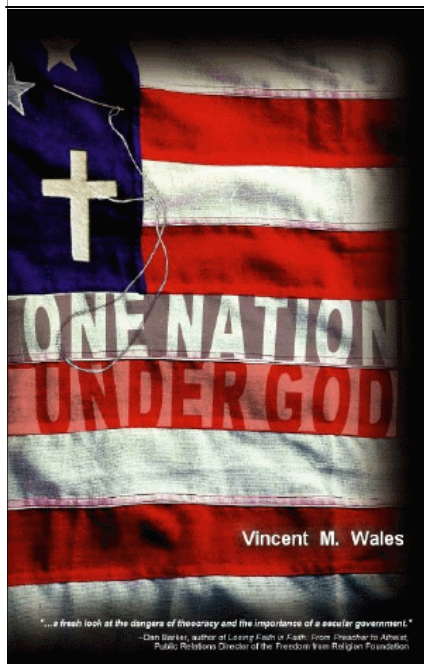
This should be a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at what has become one of the most widely respected compilations of information of this kind in the world.

FREETHOUGHT DAY!

2006 PLANNING BEGINS

Want to join the Committee?

Contact Bev at 359-5423



AOFer Garners Fiction Award!

One Nation Under God, the speculative fiction novel by AOF board member Vincent M. Wales, has won another award. This novel won for best book in the General Fiction category of *Fresh Voices 2006*, a national competition held annually by the Writer’s Marketing Association.

One Nation Under God is well aligned with Vince’s tagline as a writer of “fiction that makes you think.” It is a dystopian tale of a near-future America under the rule of the religious right. It is also a coming-of-age story of the evangelical President’s teenage daughter, who grows to question everything from her sexuality to her religious faith, ultimately becoming yet another victim of her father’s administration’s repressive policies.

Previously, Wales’s book won awards for Best General Fiction and Best Young Adult Fiction in the 2005 Northern California Publishers & Authors book awards. It also placed as a finalist in the General Fiction category in Best Books 2005, a national, annual competition hosted by USA Book News. (The winner was Amy Tan’s newest novel; other finalists included Nick Hornby and Olga Grushin.)

Visit www.onenationundergod.info to learn about *One Nation Under God*.

Financial Health Committee Begins Its Work

Calling All Number Crunchers

By Carla Corbett

The Financial Health Committee had its first meeting in February. We developed a strategy for analyzing AOF's overall financial status and recommending a path forward.

First, the number crunching.

We'll look at current finances on a monthly basis – revenue, operating expenses, cost per newsletter, etc. We will also examine membership, revenue and expenditure trends over the past five years. Next, we will brainstorm ways to restructure or enhance revenue to better meet expenses. Finally, we will determine which of our ideas are most feasible and bring those – along

with findings from the data analysis – to the Board of Directors for consideration.

Treasurer Ken Nahigian has supplied data to achieve the first task, and we'll begin looking at the numbers later this month. We also began brainstorming ideas for attracting new members and ways to ensure that our revenue streams can better support group activities and goals.

It's not too late to contribute your ideas or financial expertise! If you are interested in joining the Financial Health Committee, please contact Carla Corbett at Carla@aofonline.org.

AOF Board Meeting Minutes Summary

February 19, 2006

Home of Vince Wales

January minutes and treasurer's report were approved by consensus.

A package holding the 2005 American Atheists-California Award for "Special Events Leadership" (recognizing AOF for initiating and carrying on Free-thought Day) was opened and the congratulatory letter read aloud at the meeting.

Donor offered to pay \$500 to AOF to sponsor Mynga's trip to International Atheist Conference in Iceland in June. Ken moved to accept donation (Bev). Motion passed unanimously.

Also: liaison reports, program planning for meetings and events and newsletter production.

Next BOD meeting: Sunday, Mar 19, 2006, 09:30, at home of Carla Corbett.

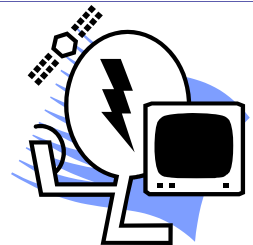


There was a superb crowd for this year's event! The "Happy Birthday, Charlie" birthday cake (a full sheet marble cake with chocolate icing), had been totally consumed during the post-lecture segment. In fact, by the time the speaker was freed from questioning, there was no evidence whatsoever remaining of the magnifying glass (inquisitive nature of scientists) and the book (*Darwin's Origin of the Species*) in butter cream frosting!



—Photos by Bill Potts

Kick Back
and
Enjoy
It!



Movie Night: DOGMA

Who would have guessed that the latest battle in the eternal war between good and evil would take place in suburban New Jersey? In director Kevin Smith's 1999 comic fantasia *Dogma*, angels (Matt Damon and Ben Affleck), gnarly demons, a half-baked apostle (Chris Rock) and clueless prophets walk among America's cynics and innocents, dukeing it out for humankind's fate. You all are invited to attend Movie Night at Bev's — **Friday, March 10 at 7:00 PM**

24 Adkinson Ct.
Sacramento, CA 95835
916-359-5423

Bring your favorite popcorn. Soft drinks provided.

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

Davis Meals Report

Dancing before Dinner By Mynga Futrell

After the January AOF meeting, I was getting a little nervous. Clearly, I had missed my chance to pull together my "event crew" for the Davis Community Meals program!

January 31 loomed ahead on the calendar. (That's when AOF was "on" for its first of four commitments to the for the needy). I had gone to the meeting and discovered there that the "volunteer signup sheet" I had made was still in my computer printer at home. Worse, the blank-sheet-of-paper-substitute apparently didn't even make it all the way around the room.

DCM had listed AOF to do *all* of the support roles for this particular Tuesday meal (set it up, serve it, *and* clean it up). And, since I had volunteered to be the coordinator for this particular event, it was my job to pull together a crew to handle this "whole enchilada." Having done the coordinating a couple of times in the past, I knew the coordinator's most important task was to pull together the necessary number of volunteers. The time was closing in. I needed at least five people besides me. I'd have to hit the phones.

Once in Davis, the coordinating (and

the volunteering) actually turns into lots of fun and rewards. The ambience for the healthy sit-down dinner provided there is just great. For example, there are flowers on the tables and live music (a couple provides piano, vocal, and fiddle). Perhaps it was the fact of winter, but the melodies this time even spurred some of us to dancing when the prep work was most-ways accomplished (and before the meal-line had formed). Servers (AOF, this time) get to eat, too, once all others have gone through the line.

Everyone who comes to partake of the meal is so friendly and polite. And, the main DCM staff are first-rate guides to what needs to be done.

They are congenial even to the extent of appreciating an atheist joke told (by whom I won't say) in the kitchen.

I am pleased to report that AOFers really came through. We fulfilled all our jobs to perfection! As coordinator, I got the side benefit of being able to assign myself my favorite role on the serving line — dishing out the freshly cut fruit that DCM provided.

Why was I ever nervous? In all, six AOFers (and a friend of one of them) headed over to Davis at 4 PM and by

About AOF and Davis Community Meals

The DCM serves a full-scale hot meal on Tuesdays and Saturdays on an ongoing basis, often to as many as 100 people at a time, and AOF's obligation (self-imposed) is to assist in *four* of the meals during the year. (Our next commitment is April 18). The DCM handles actual food acquisition and preparation (and washing of pots and pans!), but the cooperating organization (that's us) has specific supportive roles to fulfill that make the overall event possible. Sometimes the chores are spread out across organizations and individuals. For example, one volunteer group might be setting up the tables and chairs, spreading the tablecloths, bundling the silverware and napkins, putting out the salt and pepper shakers, arranging cut flowers, and slicing the desserts, while another volunteer group takes everything down afterwards, sponges, sweeps and mops. The favorite part of almost everyone is when we run the food line, dishing out the food and chatting with the people who come through it.

7 PM we had most everything stowed away and the cleanup pretty much done. (I want to thank Ken Nahigian for his finishing out the mopping task, which let some of the rest of us escape to reach a 7:30 meeting of the Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking taking place in Carmichael that Tuesday evening.)

All in all, it was a heart-warming (and stomach-filling) way to finish off a wintry month. Thank you again, Ken, Tom

(Continued on page 7)

President's Thoughts

By Don Knutson

The "Cartoon Conflagration" which has gripped the Muslim world and resulted in hundreds of deaths is just the latest incitement in the rivalry between the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam which started with the Crusades more than 900 years ago.

The Crusades ensued for about two centuries in a struggle over which religion would control what is today Israel and the occupied territories and was never really settled until the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The British had hardly realized victory in the Middle East before the Balfour Declaration in 1917 was issued declaring the British empire's intention of

creating a Zionist entity in what was then Palestine.

I found it interesting when I visited Lebanon in 2004 that I saw numerous preserved ruins from the Crusades era but I saw none in Israel when I visited there last year—as if this aspect of history had disappeared. Israel's creation in 1948 marked absolute victory for Judeo-Christianity over Islam, and I believe this rivalry will never end because religions do not accept defeat. The irrational American allegiance to Israel is rooted in Eurocentrism, a bigotry heightened by this 900-year struggle, and makes all Americans targets of the fanatical factions of a 1.5 billion-strong Islam.

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.



Darwin Day 2006
It was quite a merry time!

The Big Bang Band

Phil and Kathy LaZier

**Speaker,
Nick Matzke**

—Photos by Bill Potts

Dancing Before Dinner

(Continued from page 6)

Nicolette, Liz Purcell, Kevin Schultz, and Stan Whiteside (and friend) for all your help!

If you have not yet gone over to Davis as part of an AOF crew, then please consider joining the team for AOF's next Davis Dinner commitment (there we need do *only* the set-up and serving tasks!) You'll find volunteering there to be a wonderful way to serve the community.

If you *have* done this before, of course you already know how gratifying it is to play a part in something worthwhile. And since no board member has volunteered to "captain" the April 18 event, why not step forward and *coordinate* this one?

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

March Calendar of Events

Movie Social	Friday, March 10
AOF General Meeting	March 12, 2:30 - 5 PM
Next AOF Board meeting	Sunday, March 19, 9:30 AM
Next AOF General Meeting	Sunday, April 9, 2:30 - 5 PM
Next Highway Cleanup	Sunday, April 23, 8 - 10 AM

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" (10-8-06), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2-11-07). 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.

