

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2007

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## Sunday, July 8 Climate Change Expert to Discuss the Science of Global Warming



"This is the single most important issue of our generation," says Sierra Club official and Davis resident Carl Zichella. "When my children and grandchildren ask me if I knew about the climate crisis and what I did to fight it, I want to be able to answer them proudly. I think most people in Davis understand the significance of this issue but many have questions and want to learn how they can be part of the solution."

Global warming is real, its impacts can already be seen and all of us need to take action now to confront the climate crisis. Carl Zichella will bring that message to Atheists and Other Freethinkers when he presents the global warming slide show developed by Al Gore and as reflected in the book and Academy-award-winning Paramount Films documentary – An Inconvenient Truth.

Zichella is one of just 1,000 citizens that have been trained by The Climate Project®  
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## Standard Fare

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Give AOF your auction items, your speeches, your potluck dishes yearning to breathe free....

## August Sizzler and Silent Auction

It's a potluck and a cool one, too (salads, beverages, and desserts). The program at AOF's August general meeting does not promise coolness, though. Expect a bit of fired-up commentary as we will continue our annual tradition of hearing prepared orations by members who would like to edify all those in attendance. All speeches are short ones. A presenter can opt for a couple of minutes to have a brief say or, at most, a five minute slot to hold forth on something more substantial. Presenters who stick to their topic and do not overrun their time are eligible for a drawing for the oratory prizes (one for each category). Topics submitted in advance have priority for available time. The meeting promises full stomachs and neural stimulation. Don't miss it! (Bring an item for the salads/desserts table!) For more info on the silent auction, please see the full write-up on page six!



—Mynga Futrell

## AOF Highway Clean-Up To Continue

### AOF Line

By Don Knutson

At recent AOF Board of Directors meetings, there has been occasional discussions about whether we should continue our now 13 year-old Adopt-A-Highway commitment to CalTrans. The question is whether we could be devoting our limited energies to alternative projects which could bring greater exposure to our organization beyond the two signs on the highway displaying our commitment. As our highway cleanup coordinator for the last several years, I have sensed that our participation offers a unique experience for our members to get good exercise while making a positive contribution to our immediate community and beyond.

A recent San Francisco Chronicle article particularly emphasizes that contribution we are making. It quotes a curator in the Monterey Bay Aquarium husbandry department as saying that "every year, plastic debris

kills 40% of newly hatched albatross chicks...their parents see shiny things on the surf, ingest them and regurgitate them to the chicks. It's a slow and painful death."

It could be said that our two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Boulevard is far removed from the native habitat of the albatross—the ocean. And yet not an insignificant amount of refuse that we collect could ultimately be swept by the rain into tributaries and into the ocean a mere 85 miles away. We live in a very inter-connected world.

Ultimately, it will be the decision of our membership by their involvement in our periodic clean-ups whether we shall continue this responsible activity.

If you are physically able, I ask you to consider participating!

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

## Answering the Propagandists

By Cleo Fellers Kocol

Daily, freethinkers are dirtied by slander, singed by diatribes and maligned on air waves streaming hate. We must sing a refutation of intellect and logic, let the world hear our voices, let them see us whirling like a dervish delineating truth. If



we say nothing, write nothing, do not share knowledge and friendship, dark will descend faster than the global warming threatening our earth. Freedom is not granted to those who go dormant in silent fear.

### 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](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)

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# May I Please Check Your ID? Gordy Slack Shares Excerpts

By Kevin Schultz

Science and natural history journalist Gordy Slack presented his book "The Battle Over the Meaning of Everything" to AOF in June. Mostly covering the teaching of the Dover trial in Harrisburg, PA, it also summarizes his broader observations on the cultural conflict between theistic and naturalistic worldviews. Raised as a Christian Scientist, Mr. Slack left his roots to embrace Buddhism. Today, he simply identifies himself as a "very curious journalist," wholly embracing a naturalistic worldview.



**Gordy Slack** shares a humorous moment with the audience

Mr. Slack read four passages, most from his book. He wrote the first, "On the Union of God and Science," (not from his book) during the Dover Trial.

The humorous passage shared his insights on the conflict between science and religion over time, including the attempt of intelligent design to merge science and fundamentalism.

Mr. Slack's second passage discussed his (and his father's) 1998 meeting with Phillip E. Johnson, the distinguished emeritus profes-

or of law at UC-Berkeley, grandfather of the neo-creationist ID movement, and author of the book *Darwin on Trial*. Describing the back-and-forth argument as intensive, ceaseless, yet civil, Mr. Slack shared Mr. Johnson's main concerns

with evolution as the worldviews it engenders—in Mr. Johnson's words, "a relativistic, purposeless, godless view of the world in which self-aggrandizement and pleasure are sufficient ends in themselves, where the only objective measure of goodness is reproductive fitness." The lunch ended with a back-and-forth "No. Yes. No. Yes. NO. YES!"

It opened Mr. Slack's eyes to the conflicts between naturalistic and theistic worldviews.

His remaining passages discussed his thoughts on the diversity of religions in the US and his father's conversion, and Thomas Koon's work on paradigm shifts.

Download the meeting audio here: <http://tinyurl.com/3dejcd>

## AOF Program Continuation

*(Continued from page 1)*

to deliver this science-based presentation. He was selected from a pool of thousands of applicants and underwent intensive training on global warming and climate change in preparation for making presentations to community groups. The Climate Project presenters intend to reach more than a million audience members in 2007. Admission is free.

The presentation is sponsored by Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF), a local group dedicated to state-church separation. According to AOF Board member Don Knutson, "people want to know what they can do about climate change, and even those who saw the movie have questions. This is an opportunity to meet face-to-face with an expert who can answer those questions."

For more information, visit: <http://www.theclimateproject.org>

—Don Knutson

## Sacramento Community Events Calendar for Freethinkers



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

Subscribe to all the local happenings online!

## 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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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.

## Historical Figures Series

# A Better, Flatter Earth

By Ken Nahigian

It's not true what they say. Almost *no* respected thinker of the Middle Ages, and fairly few after, thought the earth was flat. Critics scoffed at Columbus for proposing, not a spherical earth, but a sailably short antipodal route. In fact, critics were right—if he had not collided with the Americas, pure serendipity, Columbus and his crew would have died at sea, and none would remember him.

Yet flat-earthism enjoyed a strong revival in the 19th century, disabusing many of the “atheistic sham” of a “globe earth.” We who fulminate at modern creation science, such as the popular new Creation Museum in Petersburg, KY, might enjoy this odd lacuna of history: a tribute, not just to human foibles, but to the power of the truth to find its own way—eventually.

In 1838, respectable scientists were just taking note of Darwin, when a new pamphleteer and speaker appeared: Samuel Birley Rowbotham. Observations along Cambridgeshire drainage canals, together with intense Bible study, had convinced him the surface was perfectly flat, the supposed curvature a patent hoax on a gullible public. (With a telescope, he often saw objects at water level six miles away—probably due to refraction through cooler air.)

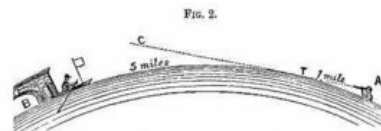
Under the name *Parallax*, for two ferocious decades, Rowbotham debated and wrote. He was a tiger who knew all the tricks, regularly steamrolling even expert opponents. Soon his followers included many well-educated folk. His book, *Zetetic Astronomy* (read it at <http://sacred-texts.com/earth/za>), sold widely.

In case you wondered, the North Pole is in the center of earth's disk. Out to the edge is Antarctica, then an ice cliff, and beyond it an infinite wilderness of ice

and snow. The sun, moon and stars are just a few hundred miles out, bobbing above us. The moon is self-illuminated.

Rowbotham inspired many other articulate flat-earth proponents, such as John Hampden, “Lady Blount,” Wilbur Voliva, William Carpenter, and Alexander Gleason. With lecture tours, pamphlets, public demonstrations and raucous debates, they often confounded leading authorities, and opened thousands of eyes to the deception of the “atheistic globe theory.”

They were a curious lot. Lady Blount, for example, was Elizabeth Anne Mould Williams, wife of Sir Walter de Sodington Blount. Her causes included not only earth's irrevocable flatness, but vegetarianism, the scourge of masturbation, and “protection of the Dark



**The 1838 Bedford Level Experiment**, offered by Rowbotham as proof of the earth's planality. Noted surveyor Alfred Russell Wallace proved Rowbotham's results inaccurate. More information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedford\\_Level\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedford_Level_experiment)

Races.”

John Hampton of Swindon was an Oxford graduate. In 1870, he and Alfred Russel Wallace, the evolutionist, had a famous contest on the shape of the earth. The stake was £500. Wallace won. Declaring it a cheat, a furious Hampton hounded and hectoring poor Wallace to his dying day.

The Rev. Wilbur Glenn Volvie oversaw Zion City, Illinois—a paradise on 6,500 acres of farmland, which banned pigs, oysters, tobacco, trade unions, and round-earth believers. Volvie even founded a 100-kilowatt evangelical flat-

earth radio station, WCBF, in 1922.

After Rowbotham died (1884), fans established the Universal Zetetic Society and a journal, *The Earth Not a Globe Review*. The Zetetic Society quickly became international and spawned other groups, including the International Flat Earth Research Society of People's Covenant Church in Lancaster, CA (is that a great name, or what?), which persisted until its last president, Charles K. Johnson, died in 2001. At the end, membership was a “few hundred,” many of whom may have been there to enjoy the joke. See its flyer at <http://holysmoke.org/hs00/flaterth.htm>.

But the heyday of flat-earthism was far ranging. In *Everybody's Political, What's That?* George Bernard Shaw described a debate where a flat-earthier trounced every opponent. Explorer Joshua Slocum visited the Transvaal Republic (now South Africa) in 1898; there its otherwise-respectable president, Paul Kruger, boldly told him, “You don't mean [you sailed] around the world; it's impossible! You mean *in* the world!”

Flat-earthism had a good run. Despite all, it melted into the ash heap of history. Even creationists poke fun at it now. A possibly serious forum hangs on at <http://theflatearthsociety.org>, but the Society in Lancaster seems long gone.

For me, thinking back on it inspires a certain philosophical faith in the synergy of conflict, the free market of ideas, and the broad quilt of history. People may spout nonsense; but truth is a force of nature. In time it will emerge like grass through cracks in the sidewalk.

In time. Ah, there's the rub.

# Government Support of Pervasively Parochial Schools?

By Susan Vergne

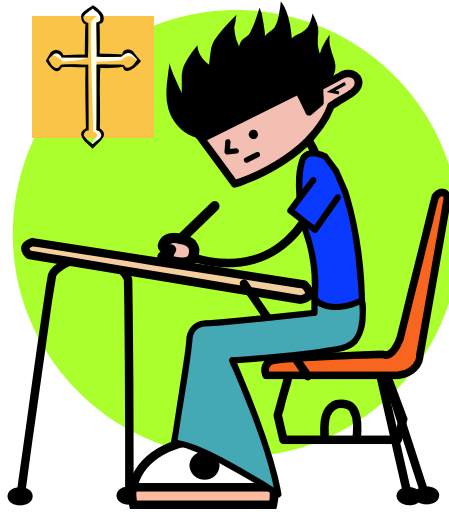
The California Constitution (Constitution) insures the separation of church and state and guarantees that the power, authority, and financial resources of the government shall never be devoted to the advancement or support of religious or sectarian purposes. Since 1879, it has included a provision prohibiting state and local governments from granting anything "in aid of any . . . sectarian purpose, or help[ing] to support or sustain any school, college, university, hospital, or other institution controlled by any . . . sectarian denomination whatever . . . ." (Cal. Const., art. XVI, 5; former art. XIII, § 24, repealed Gen. Elec. (Nov. 5, 1974).)

However, in California Statewide Communities Development Authority v. All Persons Interested in the Matter of the Validity of a Purchase Agreement (Authority), the Supreme Court of California (Court) in a 4 to 3 decision in March, upheld that a government entity could act as an issuer of tax-exempt bonds to permit pervasively-sectarian schools—to finance construction of classrooms, laboratories, residence and dining halls, and other facilities at lower interest rates than they would otherwise have to pay. Pervasively sectarian means that religion is so pervasive at the school that a substantial portion of its functions are subsumed in its religious mission. This decision clearly attempts to erode the separation of church and state through distorted, tortured reasoning.

The Majority relies primarily on California Educational Facilities Authority v. Priest (1974) 12 Cal.3d 593 (Priest), which it states "upheld a state bond program funding the construction of educational facilities at religiously affiliated colleges [but not pervasively sectarian], which were expressly prohibited from using the bond proceeds (paid for by private purchasers of the

bonds) for specified religious purposes." (Priest, p.602.) Oddly, the Priest case did not involve a religiously affiliated college, and therefore did not directly concern a challenge to the provision of the Constitution. Because the school in that case had previously been religiously affiliated, the court in Priest discussed/opined as "dictum" about schools "affiliated with any religious denomination", which is not considered part of the doctrine of the decision. (Riles, p. 806, cited below.)

More importantly, as pointed out by the Minority dissent, Priest must be read in light of the subsequent decision of the



Court, California Teachers Assn. v. Riles (1981) 24 Cal.3d 794 (Riles) in which the court unanimously invalidated a textbook lending program because textbooks, even if the schools "used" the books "only for secular instruction" "have a central place in the educational mission of a school" and are an "essential tool of education. . . ." (Riles p. 811.) The school improvements in Authority are also central to the schools' educational missions and are essential tools of education.

The Majority determined that the Authority's agreements with the three

schools strictly prohibit them from using the bond-funded educational facilities for religious purposes, and conditioned the schools participation in the bond program on its offering a broad secular curriculum comprised of classes with academic content similar to or typical of that provided in nonreligious schools. However, the Court stated "[t]he circumstances that a teacher may, in addition to teaching a course's religiously neutral content, express an idea or viewpoint that may be characterized as 'religious' does not result in a benefit to religion that is more than incidental to the state's primary purpose of enhancing secular education opportunities for California residents." (Authority, pp. 19-20) How can it be secular or religiously neutral and yet permissible to express its religious viewpoints and perspectives in the course of teaching secular subjects?

The Court remanded the case back to the trial court to determine whether each religious school benefiting from the state bond program offers a sufficiently broad curriculum in secular subjects, neutral with respect to religion. "The circumstance that a religious viewpoint may also be expressed in these otherwise secular classes does not preclude a determination that providing the proposed tax exempt bonding financing to the school promotes the state's interest in the intellectual development of its residents and only incidentally benefits religion." (Authority, p. 23.)

The court provided no criteria or guidelines for this ambiguous, internally inconsistent test for constitutionality allowing for a religious school to express its religious viewpoints and perspectives in the course of teaching secular subjects. This will be an interesting case to watch.

# 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

## August 12 Silent Auction

### Plan for Both Fun and Fund(\$)

By Kevin Schultz



The August 12 meeting will very likely one of the most enjoyable events of the year for the members who attend. We will combine charity with fun—and we are planning for lots of both!!

For the auction, we encourage all members to bring at least three items to donate. More will surely be welcomed, but this is not a garage sale, so please keep in mind the concepts of quality, aesthetics and/or likely usefulness to others. Possibilities: books, music, artwork, collector's items, and gift certificates to local eateries or museums. A donor may assign a minimum bid to an item of value. In previous years, freethought items have proved quite popular. One reminder for the auction -- if you bring something, you must be prepared to bring it home if it does not get sold. If you are unable to attend the meeting, please think about mailing a gift certificate or similar easily mailed item to AOF at its post office box (PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851). Mark: Attention Auction. Someone will pick up these items on Saturday, August 11. Do not mail large items, please.

## Limited Hotel Rooms—Be Sure To Book Early!

### AAI Convention Date Set for

## September 28-30

By Kevin Schultz

In our hectic lives finding time to register for a convention can seem like a challenge. The Atheist Alliance International (AAI) proposes to help persuade potential attendees this year with a line-up including: *Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Julia Sweeney, Eugenie Scott*, and more!

The Atheist Alliance International convention will take place at the luxurious Crowne Plaza Hotel located at 1480 Crystal Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22202. Rooms (single or double) are only \$129 per night (plus tax). Parking is \$15 a day. Airport vans are complimentary. Call (703) 416-1600 for pick-up. Call (703) 416-1600 and ask for the "Atheist Alliance International's Convention Rate." You need to reserve your room before August 30, 2007, in order to get the discount! The \$129 rate is good two days prior to the convention and two days after. AAI will give special gifts to people who register for the convention and book a room before the date of August 30, 2007!

For full information, see: <http://atheistalliance.org/conventions/2007>.

## Grey Hereafter Everafter

### By Anatole Lubovich, Republished Posthumously

Anatole Lubovich's poems and character touched many AOF members during his time in Sacramento. Since his death in November 2005, Do Gentry, Anatole's partner and administrator of his estate, has published a number of his poems in local publications. With Do's permission, AOF continues selected republication of Anatole's poems. After republication, AOF will post the poem to <http://aofonline.org/resources> for public distribution—*Editor*

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Gray Hereafter Everafter

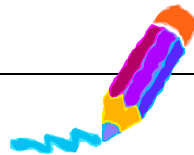
Some, with rapturous visions of post-mortem vacations,  
Hope to catch God's attention by self-flagellations.

While mouthing high praise for His bounty—it's funny—  
They insult Him by spurning His wine, milk and honey.

No wings, harps, or haloes, or heavenly robes  
Await these ascetics and hedonophobes.

The just disappointment they'll meet after death  
Will eternally reek from their pious gray breath.

—*Previously published in Autumn Sun (Zapizdat Publications).*




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Want the latest AOF board minutes?  
E-mail [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)!

## Davis Community Meals

### Tuesday, July 24 4PM

Four times a year, AOF assists the Davis Community Meals Program with their weekly Tuesday meal event. AOF has partnered with Davis Community Meals since 2000.

We would love to see you come out and help us. Besides the warm glow helping others creates in our hearts, the event is a wonderful opportunity to get out and socialize with your fellow friends in AOF. All of the cooking, and most of the cleaning, is performed by core members of the Davis Community Meals staff. For more information, please call the AOF voice-mail at 916-447-3589, or visit the AOF web site at <http://aofonline.org/dcm>. Thanks!

## HAGSA Mid-July Potluck

### Sunday, July 15 3PM

This will be held at the home of Gloria and Wayne Luney. In addition to HAGSA members, friends of HAGSA, including members of AOF, will be most welcome.

The Luney residence is at 8331 Marina Greens Way, Sacramento. If this will be your first visit to their house, you can call Gloria or Wayne at 916 383-9393 or (preferably) click below to create driving directions. Please call, anyway, to let them know if you'll be going.

Driving Directions:  
<http://tinyurl.com/23r65v>

### Newsletter Submissions

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

[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto: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 *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.

## AOF Volunteer Board

The right volunteer with the right activity makes a world of difference. Send us your ideas for projects and/or volunteer using the contact info on page two. *Thanks!* Open positions:

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

Contact 916-447-3589 for more info!

### 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**

## July Calendar of Events

**AOF General Meeting Sunday, July 8, 1:30 - 4 PM**

AOF/HAGSA Joint Movie Night Friday, July 13, 7 - 9 PM *(call 916-447-3589 for info)*

AOF Board meeting Sunday, July 15, 9:30 AM

AOF Davis Community Meals Event Tuesday, July 24, 4-6:15PM

HAGSA Mid-July Potluck Sunday, July 15, 3-5 PM

SORT Monthly Meeting (<http://home.surewest.net/kitray>) Tuesday, July 31, 7:30-9 PM

Humanists of Sun City August Meeting Sunday, August 5, 1-3 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.

