

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

February 2009

## Special Points of Interest

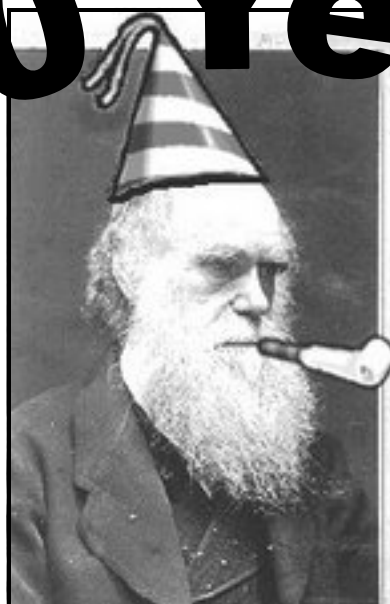
Dr. Michael Shermer  
Headlines Sacramento  
Darwin Day! (page 1)

AOF Bowling Team  
Formed (page 3)

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Summary (page 4)

**Sunday, February 8, 2:00—5:00 PM**  
**A 200th Birthday Bash for**  
**Sacramento's Darwin Day 2009 With**  
**Internationally Renowned**  
**Dr. Michael Shermer**

# 200 Years



## Standard Fare

Membership Form 6

AOF Upcoming Events 8

AOF will not meet on Sunday, February 8. Instead, all are invited to attend Sacramento's Darwin Day event at La Sierra Community Center (John Smith Hall), 5325 Engle Road, in Carmichael (close to Garfield Avenue, two blocks west of Fair Oaks Blvd.). Tickets at the door are \$15 (students \$5). Doors will open at 2 o'clock, and there will be literature tables and merchandise from several organizations. Door prize. The educational program runs from **2:30-4:00 p.m.**, with refreshments and camaraderie afterwards until 5. Entertainment will feature musical group "Theory of Evolution" and science comedian Brian Malow (<http://www.butseriously.com>).

Why do half of all Americans reject the scientific theory of evolution? There are religious and political reasons. At Sacramento's 12th annual Darwin Day event, historian of science and best-

(Continued on page 6)

## Historical Context

# An Essay on The Origins of Darwin's "Origin of the Species"

Darwin turned wholeheartedly to the problem of evolution. Ever since his Beagle trip he had been convinced that the difference between what naturalists called 'varieties' and what they called 'species' was much less significant than previously thought. If pigeon breeders could create varieties as different as pouters, runts, and fantails, what would prevent nature from doing the same? And, given millions of years, wasn't it possible that a pigeon could be turned into something so radically different we would no longer be willing to call it a pigeon—or even a bird?

Darwin was not the first to have these kinds of thoughts. Seventy years before, his grandfather, Erasmus, had devoted a whole section of his book *Zoonomia* to the issue of evolution. In 1844, Robert Chambers anonymously published his controversial book, *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, a sweeping history of the cosmos that came down strongly on the side of evolution, largely on the evidence of fossils (the 'vestiges' of creation). The book was flawed, but popular, and it brought the idea of evolution into the public eye. The opposition to evolution was still strong, but it included among its number a wide range of opinions, from those who thought that all species had been created at the beginning of the world in the same form as they now had, to those who thought that new species were being continuously created to fill new environmental niches, to those who thought that variation within species was within Nature's power but the creation of new species remained in God's hands.

Darwin had two things to contribute to this debate: a wealth of observations on adaptation, and, more importantly, a theory that could explain how new adaptations arose without the guiding hand of a divine Creator. His observations were gained by his own experience on the Beagle, his eight painstaking years of work on barnacles, and the advice and expertise of friends like Hooker. His theory was his own creation. Darwin solved the problem of evolution by pointing to a mechanism that depended on nothing but variation and chance: natural selection. Many more individuals were born than could be supported by the environment, which meant that some had to die. Which ones died? Obviously, those that were least well adapted to the environment. Given that there is variation in the population, and that that variation is heritable (i.e. can be passed from one generation to the next), it was clear that the most useful adaptations would be preserved. If enough of those adaptations were accumulated, a new species could arise.

Although this sketch of the theory was already in place in Darwin's notes, in 1854 he was still struggling with a few pieces that he had yet to make sense of. One had to do with the population of islands like the Galapagos. According to his theory, animals and plants had arrived on the islands millions of years before and had slowly adapted to fit the unique environments on each island. But how had they gotten there in the first place? He was unwilling to accept the possibility that these volcanic islands had once been closer to the mainland of South America. Instead, he tried to prove that seeds and even eggs might have been transported on ocean currents from the mainland. He conducted experiments: soaking seeds in salt water for weeks to see if they would still germinate (most did) and figuring out which seeds would float (most didn't). The second puzzle piece was why there was such a great diversity of life in the world. If every species was continuously adapting to fit the environment as best it could, why didn't all species converge to the same form? Shouldn't there be some 'best species' that would dominate all others? Darwin solved this problem by drawing an analogy

*(Continued on page 6)*

## AOF Board (2009)

**President:** Beverly Church  
**Board Chair:** Don Knutson  
**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell  
**Secretary:** Open  
**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian  
**Directors at large:**  
 Steve Campbell, Rena Lowry,  
 Tom Nicolette, Debora Smith,  
 Jillian Stanley

## AOF Committees

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

### Freethought Day, Oct 2009

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Debora Smith, Ken Nahigian, Robert Poeschel

### Darwin Day, Feb. 8, 2009:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,  
 Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,  
 Ken Nahigian,

### Ad Hoc Committees:

Under Review

## AOF's Voluntariat

### Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell (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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Wednesday, February 11, 11:00 a.m. @ Country Club Lanes, 2600 Watt Ave.

## Inaugural AOF Bowling Team Formed

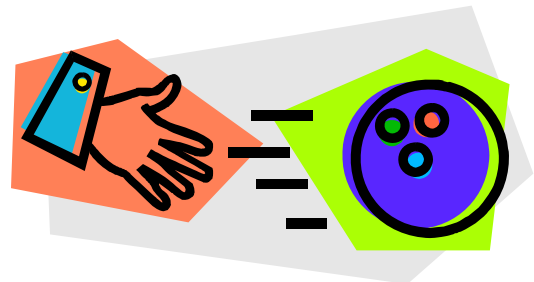
By Tom Nicolette

Hi Folks! Some of you may have heard that I am trying to start up an A.O.F bowling group. After a couple of lame starts I have figured I would try for the second Wednesday—the Wednesday right after the monthly regular meeting.

So the very first EVER A.O.F. Bowling meet-up is going to be on February the 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 A.M. at the Country Club Lanes 2600 Watt Avenue, Sacramento (916-483-5105). Their web site is here:

<http://www.countryclublanes.com/>

If you are interested in being a “Pioneer” in this “ground breaking” event please call me at 916-929-4024. Or email me at: [Tom@aofonline.org](mailto:Tom@aofonline.org)



We can have up to 8 people bowling per lane. No experience or expertise required and the more the merrier and the cheaper I might add. Naturally hangers-on, kibitzers and teasers are always welcome to tag along. We accept all sizes, shapes, genders and dispositions. The light hearted and witty are especially welcome!

Looking forward to bowling wid cha!  
—Tom

## Incarcerated Subscriber Requests Copy of “The Quotable Atheist” Book Request—Can You Help?

Taylor Allen at Mule Creek State Prison, Ione, sends the following plea to AOF: “[Please] do me the enormous favor of getting me a copy of a terrific book I had for only a night, and fell in love with. ... It is by a true atheist, Jack Huberman of Nation books, NY, “*The Quotable Atheist*”, and it’s super! ... Lists quotes from people who no one would think would say such things, and helps my gut-feeling-created argument that Carl Sagan was a true atheist would couldn’t really say so as it could have ruined him. As was Einstein ... *The Quotable Atheist* is also funny ... It would make my day to get a copy in the mail!” Taylor also writes, “[Just] put it in a small manila envelope and mail to me regular book rate. Will come in my mail to cell, as it is soft cover.”

Can someone help Taylor Allen? His mailing address is: Taylor Allen H-10526 / MCSP, A-3-148 / PO BOX 409020 / IONE, CA 95640-9020

### 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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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.

## ***Public Transparency: We Tell It Like It Is***

# **AOF 2008 Financial Summary**

By Ken Nahigian

To achieve more transparency of operations, AOF presents this financial report for 2008. Despite a recession and market meltdown, membership has held steady, donors were generous. In September AOF received a bequest from a passing member, putting us within sight of a long term goal: a meeting hall of our own! If you would like to help AOF achieve this, please contact Nancy Gilbert, [gilbertn@surewest.net](mailto:gilbertn@surewest.net), our volunteer coordinator.

### AOF General Financial Report for Calendar Year 2008

<b>Beginning Bank Balance (1 Jan 2008)</b>	<b>\$1,571.42</b>	
<b>Revenue/Income:</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Graphical Reference</b>
Memberships & Subscriptions	2,109.96	[1]
Donations to General Fund	2,618.82	[2]
Auction Revenue	218	[3]
Sales Revenue	315	[4]
Refunds Received	126.07	[5]
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$5,387.85</b>	
<b>Expense/Outgo:</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Graphical Reference</b>
Newsletter Expense	-1,582.77	[1]
Telephone/Voicemail Expense	-222.17	[2]
Speaker Expense & Gifts	-409	[3]
Fundraising Expense	-113.14	[4]
Charitable Donations & Grants	-600	[5]
Investments to other accounts	-1,000.00	[6]
Merchandise for Sales	-101.5	[7]
Meeting Room Rent	-1,550.00	[8]
Post Office Box Rent	-52	[9]
Administrative Costs	-265.07	[10]
Taxes & technical fees	-51.5	[11]
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>-5,947.15</b>	
<b>Ending Bank Balance (31 Dec 2008)</b>	<b>\$1,012.12</b>	

**Scudder Money Mkt Account:**

	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Beginning Balance</b>	<b>\$5,496.72</b>	
Investments	1,000.00	
Dividends	168.12	
<b>Ending Balance</b>	<b>\$6,664.84</b>	

**Wachovia Securities Account:**

<b>Beginning Balance</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	
Change in Equity	46,857.69	Bequest received Sept 2008
Interest & Dividends	0.25	
<b>Ending Balance</b>	<b>\$46,857.94</b>	

**Total, all accounts**

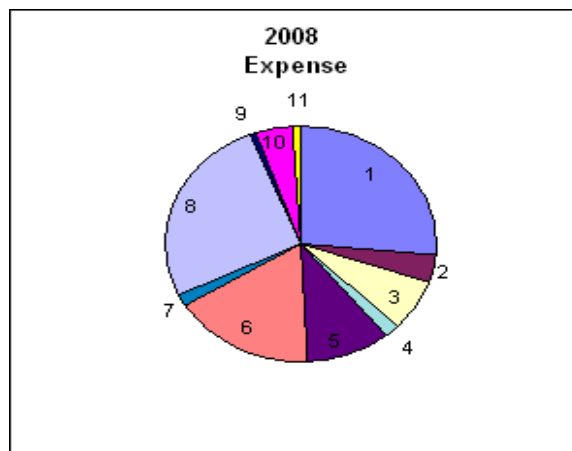
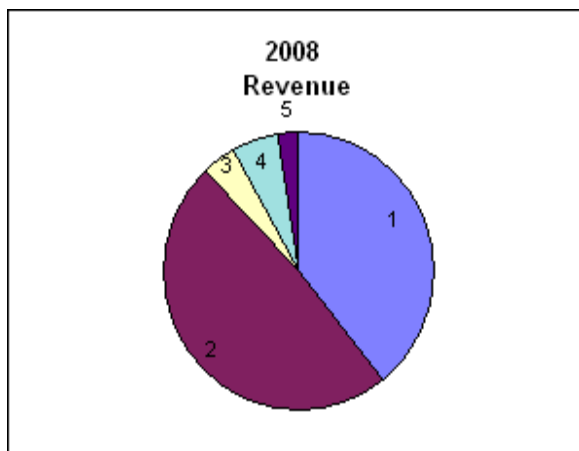
**\$54,534.90** Total on hand

Allocated Funds

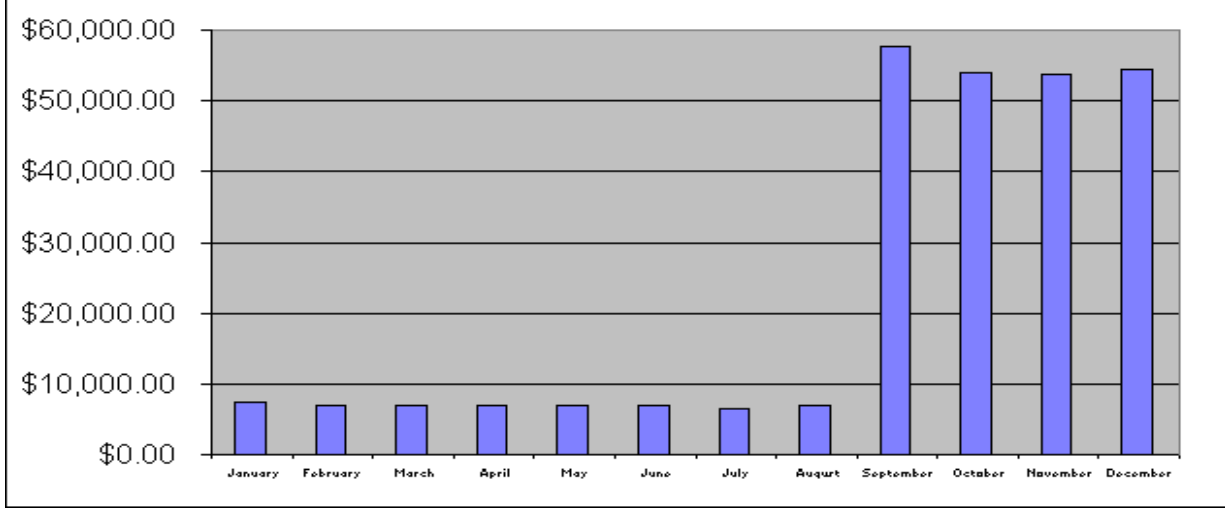
13.05

**AOF General Fund**

**\$54,521.85** Available



**AOF General Fund by Month**



# 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).*

*(Continued from page 1)*

selling author. Michael Shermer will be giving his insights on the matter. Dr. Shermer was once an evangelical Christian and a creationist, and he is now a skeptic and one of the best-known public intellectuals defending evolutionary theory.

Dr. Shermer's presentation, *Why Darwin Matters: Evolution, Intelligent Design, and the Battle for Science and Religion* is based on his book of the same name. The book builds a powerful case for evolution as the theory that most closely parallels the Christian model of human nature and the conservative model of free market economics. His presentation will explain why science should be embraced by people of all beliefs.

Sacramento's birthday gala is a community celebration of science and humanity. The event is co-sponsored by a diverse collection of community and educational organizations, including AOF. It offers a way for interested citizens in the region to tap into up-to-date and socially relevant information regarding science and evolution. The educational program is to interest and inform the public at large. This year is the 200th birthday of the scientist, Charles Darwin, and a special program is planned. Please inform others about Sacramento's Darwin Day by directing others to <http://sacdarwinaday.blogspot.com> which provides further details and access to a PDF flyer for downloading and printing. —Mynga Futrell

*(Continued from page 2)*

with modern industry. It was not true that there was a single 'best job' in any task. In fact, production got more efficient the more specialized each worker became. The same held true in the natural world: species specialized so that they could capitalize on particular aspects of the environment. In fact, a species that was failing in the competition in one particular environmental niche could become startlingly successful if it simply shifted niches so that it was no longer in head-to-head competition similar species.

To shore up his understanding of variation under artificial selection—the kind of selection that had produced pets and domestic farm animals—Darwin started to learn all he could about pigeons. Breeding pigeons was a pastime that few aristocrats threw themselves into, but Darwin eagerly built a shed in the yard behind Down House. He started making trips into London to speak to the professionals, downing beers with them while they boasted about how they could see differences of 1/16th of an inch between two pigeon's beaks. Darwin studied not only living, breeding pigeons, but also dead ones; for a while, his workshop became a shop of horrors as he killed and 'skeletonized' pigeons of all varieties and ages, not to mention the occasional rabbit or chicken, studying the sometimes striking differences in structure between different varieties.

Meanwhile, Darwin was testing out his theory of evolution on friends like Hooker and zoologist Thomas Henry Huxley. No one was entirely convinced yet, but some progress was being made. When Lyell, the geologist whose *Principles of Geology* had so inspired Darwin while on the *Beagle*, found out about Darwin's theory, he urged him to publish it as soon as possi-

*(Continued on page 7)*

(Continued from page 6)

ble, if only to ensure that he would not be scooped. Darwin demurred: he was much more interested in producing a watertight case for evolution by natural selection than in gaining credit for a theory that could be easily dismissed. Nonetheless he started working on a manuscript in May of 1856. It started as a sketch, but it quickly became obvious that, when completed, it would rival Lyell's Principles in length, and would probably have to be published in multiple volumes.

In November of 1856, Charles Waring Darwin was born, the first child Emma had given birth to in five years. It was soon clear that he was severely retarded. He died a year and a half later when a scarlet fever epidemic raged through Down.

By April 1857, all of Darwin's hard work had made his chronic illness return in full force. He took time off in April for more hydropathy, which he was beginning to think worked only because it relaxed him and forced his mind of work. Nevertheless, he was happy to do anything that could make the pain, nausea, and weakness subside. He worked productively for another year, but on June 18, 1858, he received a letter which instantly set him back: it was a short manuscript from Alfred Russell Wallace, a younger naturalist with whom Darwin had been in contact off and on for several years, and, at first reading, it looked like a carbon copy of Darwin's own theory.

Darwin felt threatened. After Darwin had worked twenty years and waited for the right moment to publish, a young naturalist had come up with the same ideas. He wrote to Lyell for advice. Should he do the honorable thing, sending Wallace's article to the appropriate scientific society and continue to work on his own full-length volume? Or should he try, somehow, to hold onto his claim for having come up with evolution first? Darwin was torn. In the end, Hooker and Lyell decided that Wallace's paper should be presented before the Linnean Society, but Darwin should also contribute a sketch of his own theory. The joint presentation was made on July 1, 1858, with neither Darwin nor Wallace in attendance. Everyone listened politely, but there was neither the kind of outrage that Darwin had feared nor the approval that he had hoped for. Fortunately, Wallace turned out to be happy with the joint presentation; he knew that Darwin had been working on species for years and felt honored to have his work presented alongside Darwin's in front of a prestigious society. Newly galvanized by the fact that Wallace was nipping at his heels, Darwin threw himself into writing an abstract of his longer manuscript for publication.

The abstract covered the same material as the longer manuscript Darwin had started in 1856, but it was pared down to clear, concise prose that stated the basic argument and presented the crucial pieces of evidence in support of it. He argued that species were not created, but rather evolved. He said that the mechanism in charge of directing evolution was natural selection. The first printing of the abstract was put on sale in 1859 under the title *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. It sold out on the first day.

Source: <http://www.sparknotes.com/biography/darwin/section10.rhtml>

## Newsletter Submissions

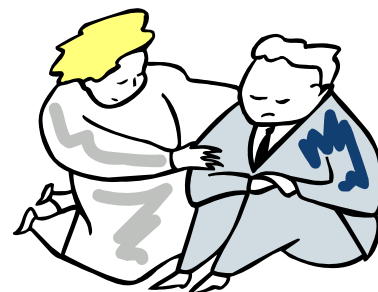
Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

**[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.



*Do you have any info that you'd like to share with the AOF membership?*

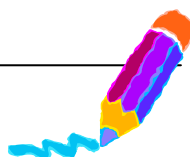
**Please submit items to:**

[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org) and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the *Family News* section. **Thanks!**

## 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.*

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





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

*We're on the Web!*  
**aofonline.org**

## February Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social, Thai Chef's House, 2851 Fulton Avenue;  
RSVP to [shastaseer@sbcglobal.net](mailto:shastaseer@sbcglobal.net) or 419-2105

Thursday, Feb 5, 6:30 p.m.

**AOF February General Meeting Canceled**

**Please Support Darwin Day Instead**

**Darwin Day Sacramento with Dr. Michael Shermer!**  
(see page one)

**Sunday, Feb 8, 2:00-5:00 p.m.**

Inaugural AOF Bowling Meetup (see page three)

Wednesday, Feb 11, 11:00 a.m.

February AOF Board Meeting

Sunday, Feb 15, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

February Adopt-A-Highway Event (first in three months)

Saturday, Feb 21, 8:00-10:00 a.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 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2009-02-08). 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.

