

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

March 2009

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## Sunday, March 8, 1:30-4PM March General Meeting Mike Newdow on "The Stigma Enigma"

What's the big deal if "under God" is in the Pledge of Allegiance? So what if the motto is "In God we trust"? Does it really hurt anyone if "so help me God" is added to the president's oath of office?



At the March general meeting, noted atheist activist Mike Newdow will discuss these matters and how his three current lawsuits (challenging each of those practices) revolve around that question.

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## 12th Annual Sacramento Darwin Day Celebration Review By Debora Smith

Sacramento's celebration of Darwin's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday was a rousing success, both in content and in attendance. The hall in Carmichael was nearly standing-room-only, with some people traveling from the Bay Area and beyond to attend.

The program began with music from the band *The Theory of Evolution*, and included a song written specifically for our Darwin Day event. The band was followed by science comedian Brian Malow. If you're a fan of Gary Larson's *The Far Side*, you'd surely appreciate Mr. Malow's humor. An especially fitting vignette was his pondering about whether the selective pres-

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(Continued from page 1)

sure behind human bipedal locomotion might actually have been countless generations of prehistoric moms nagging their kids to “Stand up straight!” and “Stop dragging your knuckles when you walk – what, were you born in a tree?!”

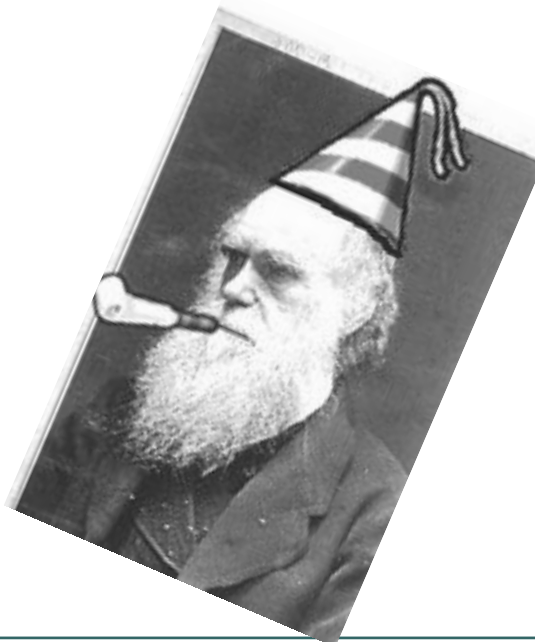
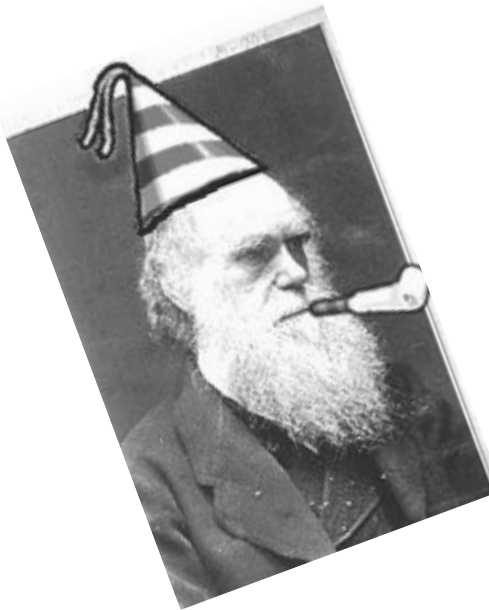
While Mr. Malow’s comedy would have been a sufficient reason to have considered the day a success and the price of admission well-spent, the program’s headliner, Dr. Michael Shermer, was the icing on Darwin’s bicentennial birthday cake. His talk, titled “Why Darwin Matters,” included some readings from his book of the same title. He told of his own trek a few years ago that retraced Darwin’s footsteps across the Galapagos Islands, and how the grueling hardship of the expedition across those hot, dry, rocky islands instilled in him a respect for Darwin’s intrepid nature. He talked about the prevailing creationist theory of Darwin’s time: Paley’s Natural Theology with its watchmaker analogy, and how the Intelligent Design movement has picked up where Paley’s philosophy left off, and still wants to fill all the gaps in our knowledge with “God did it.” and stop, whereas science *begins* at the gaps and seeks to find natural explanations. He ended by saying that Darwin matters because evolution matters, and evolution matters because science matters, and science matters because “it is the preeminent story of our age, an epic saga about who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.” Dr. Shermer’s talk was followed by a short Q and A, and then Mynga Futrell led everyone in a chorus of Happy Birthday to Charlie.

There were cakes (four of them!) and other refreshments, and plenty of literature to peruse at the education and local sponsors’ tables. Mr. Malow had a number of his comedy CDs available for purchase, and Dr. Shermer did a book-signing; both CDs and books sold out before the afternoon was over.

If you missed the event, don’t despair – you can find a recording of the program available on YouTube. Enter “Sacramento Darwin Day” in the search field to locate the videos.

Kudos to Liam McDaid for his fine job as MC, and to all the people who helped make Darwin Day 2009 such a success. The bar has now been set quite high for DD 2010!

Youtube Videos of the Sacramento Darwin Day event: <http://tinyurl.com/cz7ny5>



## AOF Board (2009)

**President:** Beverly Church

**Board Chair:** Don Knutson

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Jillian Stanley

**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. 7, 2010:**

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.

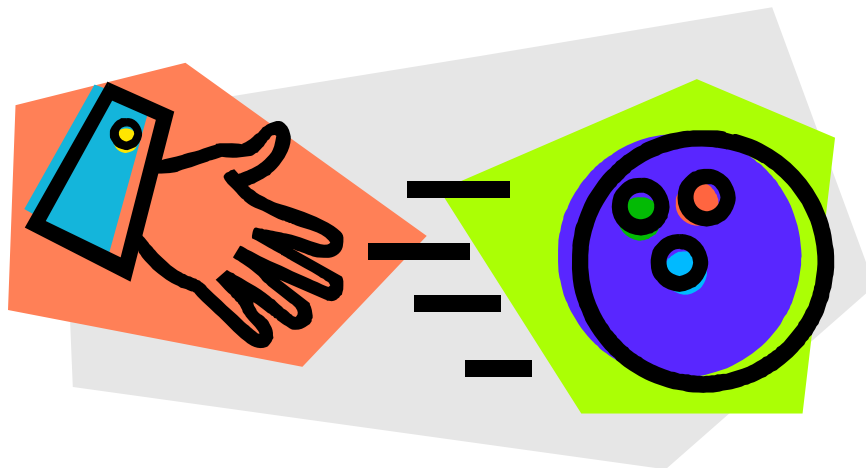
# AOF-Affiliated Inaugural Bowling Event a Success

### By Tom Nicolette

Hi folks! The first ever A.O.F. affiliated bowling event was a smashing success! Much to our surprise all of us bowled very presidentially. Every one of us beat Obama's score of 37.

As this Newsletter is going to press I cannot report on our second bowling event that is scheduled for 02/25/2009. Which hasn't as of yet occurred except to say that the incredible "Pinfidel" may join us!! Also known as Brian Jones. This will add to our powerhouse team of:

1. Paul Geisert
2. "Pinboy Phil" A.K.A Phil Lazier
3. "Bowling Belle" A.K.A. Karla lazier
4. "Gutter Girl" A.K.A. Deborah Smith
5. Bob Smith
6. "Three Fingers McGee" A.K.A Tom Nicolette



Keeping the ole bowling ball rolling (ok bad pun) the third ever bowling event is scheduled the first Wednesday after our regular A.O.F. meeting which would be on March 11, 2009 again at 11 a.m. at the Country Club bowling lanes on Watt Avenue.

Here is their web site: <http://www.countryclublanes.com>

You can contact me at [tom@aofonline.org](mailto:tom@aofonline.org) or telephone me at 916-929-4024

All are welcome and bring your non-bowling family and friends along also to kibitz and tease you. Bowling is easy and fun. The more the merrier.

### 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*

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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

# Oahspe, A(nother) New Bible

By Ken Nahigian

*Urantia* is a mystery. It whispers and teases us. It leads us in circles, down blind corridors, into barrows and warrens long since scabbled clean of useful clues. We may never know the truth of it. And any talk of it ultimately turns to *Oahspe*, a "spirit"-inspired guide of similar origin. Here is another story, weirdly alike, yet unique.

At 900 pages, the *Oahspe* book is smaller, older, more modest in reach. Also less coherent, but with its own fair share of occult forays. At the least it makes no secret of the human author, the vessel of the revelators: This was Dr. John Ballou Newbrough, New York dentist and mystic.

A huge, charismatic man with fiery red hair, Newbrough was born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1828. From childhood he claimed clairvoyant powers. Attending the Cincinnati Medical College, he became a practicing dentist. After stints at gold prospecting in California and Australia, he married and moved to New York City to resume medical practice. Here he had three children, one dying in infancy. He also became a trustee of the New York Spiritualist Association. Among his claimed "psychical" powers were the ability to paint in darkness with both hands at once, to read remote books with closed eyes, to travel in astral form, even to lift weights of a ton without effort.

In 1870, weary of the trivia that dominated the Spiritualist movement, Newbrough sought deeper knowledge. He was "crying for the light of heaven," as he wrote much

later; "I did not desire communication ... about earthly things; I wished to learn something about the spirit world; what the angels did, how they traveled, and the general plan of the universe." To augment his powers and purify himself physically and spiritually, he began a vegetarian diet, bathed twice daily, did charity work, and meditated each morning before dawn. Spirit guides had advised him that a ten-year regimen of this would bring revelations. Late in 1880, it did.

One cold morning he woke to a room filled with beautiful light. "Am I worthy?" he asked. Affirming he was, the spirits or angels instructed him to purchase a new invention: a Remington Sholes #2 typewriter. On the first morn of 1881, Newbrough rose at 4 a.m. to sit at his new device. "To my amazement as I sat in the chair, my hands went up and started to pound at the keys. It seemed to me that I was half asleep, but I saw everything I was doing. I saw no spirits, but I knew they were using my body and thought. I looked at my hands and fingers; they were going like mad. Then it occurred to me that it was fantastic."

He would type a page, put it aside without reading, begin another. Sometimes he felt inspired to add pencil drawings; again, spirits guided his hand. The pages accumulated. Each morning for 50 weeks Newbrough sat entranced at the keyboard, typing at a quite remarkable pace considering his inexperience and the crudity of the early machine.

On December 15, the manuscript was complete. Next year, 1882, Newbrough published it as *Oahspe: A New Bible in the Words of Jehovih [sic] and his Angel Ambassadors*. "Oahspe" (oh-ahs-pee) means "sky, earth and spirit" in the language of Pan, a sunken Pacific continent. In a voice reminiscent of the Old Testament, *King James* version, with notated chapters and verses, it told the story of man over 78,000 years. It drew from the Bible, Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, world history, Greek mythology, and Newbrough's life. It achieved many firsts: first to suggest the presence of outer planets, first to describe forces around the Sun, first to use the word "starship." A verse read: "When the birth [of Jesus] was completed, the angels of heaven re-entered their starship and hastened back to paradise." This was the Star of Bethlehem, of course.

Some teachings clearly came from Theosophy, another popular movement of the day. Whatever the source, the initial printings sold out quickly, drawing a coterie of disciples—Newbrough called them the Faithists. Among them was Andrew Howland, an affluent businessman.

Newbrough soon convinced Howland to finance an expedition to establish a Faithist settlement and home for outcast children. They boarded a train. In Las Cruces, New Mexico Territory, Newbrough asked Howland to blindfold him so pure inspiration would lead them. The pair rode into the desert. At a bend of the Rio Grande, Newbrough tore off his

(Continued on page 5)

## **Don't Miss Out!**

# **Get Behind AOF / Get Behind the Scenes!**

**By Mynga Futrell**

AOFers, all! **Don't miss out on what's going on behind the scenes of this organization.** You can really make a difference there!

The organization serves an important role in the Sacramento area. Why not rally round and roll up your sleeves? There are lots of opportunities for you to be involved. Here are just a few of the things you can do:

1. *Help to plan the regular meetings and special program, choose speakers, panels and topics.* [Program Planning, Debora]
2. *Help with meeting logistics (prep work, hospitality, refreshments, announcements, etc.)* [Meeting Matters, Tom]
3. *Help with publicity and tabling at community events* [Outreach and Recruiting, Steve]
4. *Help AOF with news gathering (articles and calendar) for newsletter or website.* [Communications, Bev]
5. *Help develop and organize for community service activities* [Service Projects, Don]

In brackets above is the team to join and the name of the person to contact (someone who would really appreciate your volunteering!). You can reach team leaders by phoning the AOF voice mail at 916-447-3589 or by email to [aof-board@googlegroups.com](mailto:aof-board@googlegroups.com) ]

Other teams are available, too [e.g., Social Activities; Education, Activism]. There is also an array of simple tasks with official titles within some teams! [e.g., Events Editor; Librarian; Archivist; Publisher] Just ask any board member to get you the details.

The new teams and volunteer roles grew out of recommendations from AOF's strategic planning retreat. Our thanks go to Nancy Gilbert and Alice Corley for their help with the revision AOF's committee structure.

Help AOF grow bigger and get even better. Lend a hand. Have fun, too! **Let us hear from YOU!**

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*(Continued from page 4)*

blindfold and declared they had found the Land of Shalam, the new Faithist home.

The colony took root on a 930-acre swathe of creosote desert. But trouble began. Fed up with Newbrough's spiritual fancies and ebullitions, his wife divorced him. He remarried. Then half the Faithists suddenly left the colony, accusing Newbrough of tyranny. By 1887, Shalam was divided and splintered into factions. In 1891, Newbrough died of influenza and pneumonia. His widow married Howland amid sordid rumors. They struggled to keep the utopia alive. But in 1901 their wealth ran out, and they officially disbanded it.

The Faithists scattered, founding smaller colonies in different states. Today they are the Universal Faithists of Kosmon, with perhaps 1500 members and numerous splinter groups. But the original Shalam Colony is but ruins—adobe walls, a name on a country road, some local folklore, and Newbrough's grave marked by a stone set in 1952 by loyal followers.

Meanwhile *Oahspe*, like the *Urantia* book, has entered public domain. You can read it at <http://www.angelfire.com/in2/oahspe3/oindex.html>.

# 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:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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).

## Tidbits, News, and Events of Interest

### AOF Family News

AOF in 1994 and had received our newsletter since March of that year.

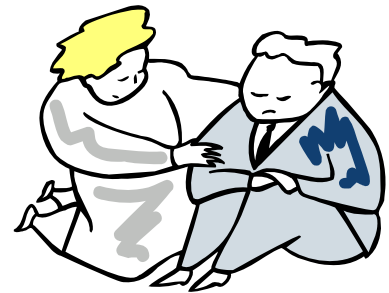
Flash: **Mynga Futrell**, Vice-President of AOF, and husband **Paul Geisert** hit the front page of the New York Times!! Had NYT learned of Sacramento's Darwin Day? Or maybe their involvement in AOF or AAI? Or perhaps the Times had it learned of the size of the organization they co-founded - The Brights' Net (44,000 constituents in 181 nations and growing)?

Naw – not those things. The article by **Leslie Kaufman** is titled "Utilities Turn Their Customers Green, With Envy," and it starts off: "The district had been trying for years to prod customers into using less energy with tactics like rebates for energy-saving appliances. But the traditional approaches were not meeting the energy reduction goals set by the non-profit utility's board."

"A frowny face is not what most electric customers expect to see on their utility statements, but Greg Dyer got one. He earned it, the utility said, by using a lot more

energy than his neighbors....Two other Sacramento residents, however, Paul Geisert and his wife, Mynga Futrell, were feeling good. They got one smiley face on their statement for energy efficiency and saw the promise of getting another." Read the whole article at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/31/science/earth/31compete.html>

AOF friend & supporter **Clara A. Carlson** died at home in Port Angeles, WA, on January 10, age 102. Clara had traveled widely, attended humanist conferences, and was well-known and liked in freethought circles. Born in 1906, she moved to Port Angeles with her husband and children in 1971. She was active and alert until last Fall, when a struggle with pneumonia weakened her. An artist, ardent freethinker, feminist, peace activist, church/state separationist and advocate for reproductive freedom, she wrote numerous letters and articles to support her favored causes. She discovered



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!**

## A Darwin Bicentennial Poem

# The Skeletons of Dreams

By Philip Appleman

He found giants  
in the earth: Mastodon,  
Mylodon, thigh bones  
like tree trunks, Megatherium, skulls  
big as boulders - once,  
in this savage country, treetops  
trembled at their passing.  
But their passing was silent as snails,  
silent as rabbits: nothing at all re-  
corded  
the day when the last of them came  
crashing through creepers and ferns,  
shaking the earth a final time,  
leaving behind them crickets,  
monkeys, and mice.  
For think: at last it is nothing  
to be a giant - the dream  
of an ending haunts tortoise and  
Toxodon,  
troubles the sleep of the woodchuck  
and the bear.

Back home in his English garden,  
Darwin paused in his pacing,  
writing it down in italics  
in the book at the back of his mind:

*When a species has vanished  
from the face of the earth,  
the same form never reappears...*

So after our millions of years  
of inventing a thumb and a cortex,  
and after the long pain  
of writing our clumsy epic,  
we know we are mortal as mam-  
moths,  
we know the last lines of our poem.  
And somewhere in curbing space  
beyond our constellations,  
nebulae burn in their universal law:  
nothing out there ever knew  
that on one sky-blue planet  
we dreamed that terrible dream.  
Blazing along through black nothing  
to nowhere at all, Mastodons of  
heaven,  
the stars do not need our small ruin.

(c) Philip Appleman, Professor Emeritus,  
English Department, Indiana University. He  
is the author of "Darwin's Ark", a collection of  
science-themed poems, with illustrations by  
Rudy Pozzatti. Available in a special 25th  
Anniversary edition to celebrate the Darwin  
Bicentennial. "A beautiful marriage of word  
and image ... intelligence and passion," wrote  
Ursula K. LeGuin. Paperback, 104 pages,

ISBN 978-0-253-22092-9, \$19.95 from  
Indiana University Press. Order on line  
from [http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=93182](http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=93182). Or call 1-800-842-6796.

### 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 for-  
mat such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Note-  
pad*. (To submit, attach your file to the  
e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and sub-  
stantive letters to the editor. Note: All  
letters are prioritized by AOF 's pub-  
lishing criteria deriving from the or-  
ganization's Statement of Purpose.

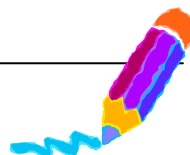


Sacramento supporters of the Freedom From Religion Foundation's "Imagine No Religion" billboard along 8280 Folsom Blvd.

### 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**

## March Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social, Danielle's Village Creperie, 3535-B Fair Oaks Blvd., Sacramento (Located @ Fair Oaks & Watt); Thursday, Mar 5, 6:30 p.m.  
RSVP to [shastaseer@sbcglobal.net](mailto:shastaseer@sbcglobal.net) or 419-2105

**AOF March General Meeting Sunday, Mar 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

March AOF Board Meeting Sunday, Mar 15, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

**AOF April General Meeting Sunday, Apr 12, 1:30-4:00 p.m.**

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (Oct 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

