



P.O. Box 130753  
Tampa, FL 33681

**Plans** *continued from front page*

The Atheists of Florida Newsletter is slated to be distributed largely in electronic form via the internet. For more information about this, please read the article on page 3.

**TV and Radio:** The TV programs listed above could fall within this MEDIA category as well.

In addition, Atheists of Florida is exploring the establishment of a 24/7 audio program on the internet. Costs would be considerably less for than a radio program, and the internet streaming would have far greater coverage. For comments and info, contact Joe Reinhardt at joerein@tampabay.rr.com, or Ed Golly at AthAIFLE@aol.com.

**Public Relations:** Atheists of Florida is building a resource base of public relations contacts—newspapers, radio and TV, other media—to post meeting notices, send out press releases on Atheists of Florida special events, and disseminate timely the atheist position on major events and issues. For suggestions and information, contact the Public Relations Project Manager, Brent Yaciw, [yacw@earthlink.net](mailto:yacw@earthlink.net).

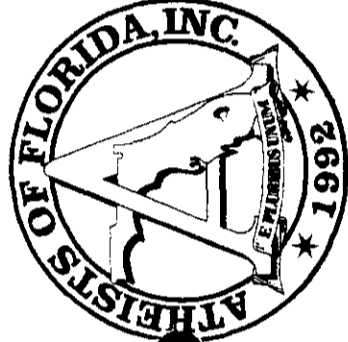
**Speakers' Bureau:** This is a concept whose time has definitely come for Atheists of Florida. It's very important that A of F compile and maintain a listing of persons willing to go out and speak to groups, along with their areas of expertise. Some chapter members also suggested that A of F draft a letter to distribute to the schools, offering members as speakers for philosophy classes. Contact Joe Reinhardt at: [joerein@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:joerein@tampabay.rr.com).

**MONEY**

I know, we'd like to think we are above this mundane subject. But we really can't do outreach and progressive projects without it. So, again, how to make this "M" more efficient?

**Fundraiser:** A of F is examining the prospect of a paid professional fundraiser.

*Please note the article in this issue regarding a change in distribution of our newsletter*



Volume XII No. 6  
September 2005

# Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of state and church  
www.atheistalliance.org/florida www.tampabayatheists.org Sponsor of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund  
A Member Society of Atheist Alliance International, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

**TAMPA BAY: Pinellas County—First Sunday of each odd-numbered month** (Jan., Mar., etc.) 1:30. Due to holidays and outreach events, no more meetings at the library for the remainder of 2005. Members will be notified of special events, including the outdoor event planned for November 6.

**Tampa—First Sunday of each even-numbered month,** 1:30-4:30, Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias. FMI: Ed Golly, 8137835-1500, [AthAIFLE@aol.com](mailto:AthAIFLE@aol.com).

**Big Deal! Free CD**—to all first-time attendees of any Tampa Bay chapter meeting, of a debate between Dan Barker, former minister turned atheist, and Jason Gastrich, Christian host of a weekly internet Web program. This discussion covers many of the common foundational arguments of the Christian belief system, and Barker destroys them all.

**Go Public:** A of F also needs to be more forthright in asking members and other possible donors to donate funds to Atheists of Florida. Our Newsletter and other communications will be more forthright in asking for this help.

**MINGLING**

Yes, we have serious business to do. But we also need to have fun and to provide a community for our people in the freethought world, who are often cut off from other venues.

**Group Social Events** were suggested as one way to increase our satisfaction and ties with our freethought ... let's see, do we say ... colleagues ... comrades ... brethren and sistern? You know! Send us your ideas!

**Conference 2006:** As determined by the Board of Directors meeting this year, Atheists of Florida will host a state-wide conference in 2006. At this point, Project Manager Nan Owens is working on hotel proposals for the convention. We are looking for your input on this convention—do you want mostly speakers or workshops to build local chapters and outreach projects? what would drag you out to the Atheists of Florida 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention? We've set up a mailbox just for your comments and hope to hear from you soon. Contact Owens at: [freethought@earthlink.net](mailto:freethought@earthlink.net)

## Progressive Plans for Atheists of Florida

Florida during the regular school year. Jim Young hosts a weekly booth for the students. If you are interested in information on this activity, contact Jim at: [JAYOUNG@mindspring.com](mailto:JAYOUNG@mindspring.com).

**Miami Book Fair International** is held around the second week-end in November. New restrictions added by Fair promoters have caused Atheists of Florida to decide that participation is not effective given the high cost of this endeavor.

**Management Effectiveness:** Although this is being included under MEMBERSHIP, it could be yet another "M" to enhance the growth of Atheists of Florida.

We need to furnish our organization with the tools to grow and manage a larger organization....different skills are needed to maintain and enlarge an organization versus founding and establishing an enterprise. It's just too easy for tasks to be dropped or not completed on schedule when depending on a loosely-ordered volunteer base.

It's time to firm up our volunteer positions, commitments and systems....even, possibly, to add one or two part-time paid positions. We'll address this last idea further at a later times.

Thus, our Board of Directors has been charged to set up a management flow chart, i.e., to specify which position in the organization does what and WHEN!

**MEDIA**

—meaning all communications with members and with the public at large.

**Newsletter:** The Atheists of Florida Newsletter is probably the most important communications vehicle in our repertoire. It's how we keep in touch with all members regarding meetings, special projects and feed-back. It's also the most telling document we can provide to the media, prospective members, and "just-curious folk." Because of overload, the recent publication schedule has been variable and patchy. Thus, the board arranged to bring this function back onto schedule.

Ed Golly will continue as editor. Nan Owens will provide regular services to produce the newsletter, to enter paid and new subscriptions into the A of F data base, and to disperse information and mailings.

A of F also is seeking additional staff to assist with content. If you are available to help as a news or features editor, please contact Golly at: [AthAIFLE@aol.com](mailto:AthAIFLE@aol.com). (continued on back page)

Although it is said that faith can move mountains, experience shows that dynamite works better.

**IN CELEBRATION OF ITS 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY,** Atheists of Florida founder Christos Tzanetos, along with a core group of Board Directors, met in Tampa on Sunday, August 7, to explore where Atheists of Florida is going, how to boost the growth of our organization, and to assign specific duties and goals. As a wider benefit, the growth and visibility of Atheists of Florida could impact favorably on reason and secularity for all citizens in Florida.

The Board concluded that we need to focus on the four "M"s: i.e., MEMBERSHIP, MONEY, MEDIA, MINGLING. But since these are interdependent on each other, we will be doing all of them at the same time to affect their progress. Following are the goals and strategies as determined by the board, along with suggestions put forth by attendees of the monthly meeting of A of F's Tampa Bay Chapter, which immediately followed the board meeting. The chapter discussions not only provided some good ideas—in turn, they raised further questions!

**MEMBERSHIP**

**Outreach:** For the Tampa Bay Chapter, there is no doubt that Outreach efforts have had a major effect on membership and meetings attendance.

**TV Programs:** Probably the largest contributor has been the *Atheist Forum*, a weekly 1-hour TV show on Tampa Bay Community Network in Hillsborough County. This activity is labor-intensive, so new and/or more volunteers are sometimes needed as current crew members move, are out of town, or just need a break from the every-week commitment. Currently we have a small supply of certified producers to satisfy the station's requirements on that level, so we only need to build up a resource of crew members ... we ourselves can train volunteers for these tasks. In addition to the *Forum*, other Chapter members have produced and are continuing with further freethought programs in both Pinellas and Hillsborough counties.

**Atheists of Florida Public Presence:** Atheists of Florida participates in various public events, making itself and its benefits known to people outside our membership and meetings. The following upcoming events were discussed:

**St. Petersburg Times Festival of Reading:** For 2005, this event has been compressed into 1-day, its venue moved to St. Petersburg campus of USF. Although the Festival and Circus McGurkis are being held on the same day this year, the members felt we could staff them both, as in the past we have over-staffed some events, thereby reducing our effectiveness.



www.atheistalliance.org/florida  
www.tampabayatheists.org

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**Membership dues**

- Life Member \$ 500.00
- Sustaining 60.00 Yr
- Couple 50.00 Yr
- Individual 40.00 Yr
- Student (under 25 yrs) 10.00 Yr
- Unltd Income (over 65) 10.00 Yr
- Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 Yr

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- Editor:** Ed Golly  
**Staff:** Jim Strayer, Nan Owens  
**Web master:** Jim Peterson

**IN 1982, ON THE ONE-HUNDREDTH anniversary of Charles Darwin's death, Stephen J. Gould wrote an article to celebrate Darwin's life. Many other scientists had done the same, but Gould's article was different. Instead of praising Darwin's Scientific works on evolution, he wrote about Darwin's last published book, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action***

**THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION  
No. 27—Charles Darwin—a crafty fellow**

—Jim Strayer



*of Worms, with Observations on Their Habits* (mould referred to the upper organic layer of soil). It was published in 1881, two months before his death.

Gould had selected this writing of Darwin's because it was not only his last, but it summed up the complete theory of evolution. He showed that very small changes over long periods of time have had great effects on the physical environment and living organisms. It also showed how science is done and, most importantly now science is used.

Gould wrote what he thought were Darwin's three most important accomplishments. He said that Darwin was given credit for "discovering" evolution. He admits that this is misplaced, but in nineteenth century biology, evolution was heresy and not accepted by most of society. He stated that Darwin showed a mechanism to account for evolution—Natural Selection—and that Darwin's greatest achievement lay in establishing principles of useful reason for science.

So why was Darwin a crafty fellow? Because in most of his writing, but especially this one, he illustrated what historical biology is all about. Some scientists of the day said that worms had little effect because of their weakness and size. That is what would be expected if they were viewed for a short time or not studied carefully. Darwin observed that lime spread on a field ten years earlier now lay under 6 cms of soil. He and his son devised a measuring device, the famous worm stone, to show that it sunk into the ground at a rate of 2.2 mm a year. He

movement of soil from high to low ground. Darwin compared this to the formation of coral islands. Many small animals over long periods of time build the foundation for plants, animals, and even air fields. Cities are built on coral islands which took millions of years to form. More of Darwin's research on evolution was based on historical biology than on fossil evidence.

What Darwin did was to leave a vast amount of written material for others to study, so that long after his death the evidence for evolution would be available to everyone, even those who are not scientists. This brings me to the reason for this article. Almost everyone who writes about Charles Darwin approaches his work from a scientific view or from his personal life. I would like to submit, from a teacher's point of view, what I believe is his most important contribution to science: Why do I agree that he was a crafty fellow? Because he brought science to the masses.

Darwin was a well known author of natural science long before he wrote *On Origin of Species* by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. In his lifetime he wrote four books and over one hundred seventy-five scientific papers. All were easily understood and available to the general public. When *Origins* went on sale, all 1,800 copies of the first printing were sold the first day. Most of them were purchased by folks like us. A storm of controversy arose from religious, public, and many scientific leaders. But now the word was out for all to evaluate. At that time, about the only way the scientific information was available was through university lectures; that left out the general population. The success of Darwin's writings and the theory of evolution was apparent ten years later when *The Descent of Man*, and selection in relation to sex was published and there was barely a ripple of controversy.

There were books being written on insects, birds, plants, and many other living things, but they were descriptions, not science. Gould had said that Darwin's greatest achievement lay in establishing principles of useful reason for science. Few would disagree with that today. With his pen, Darwin had opened science to everyone. At the university level, biology and chemistry became more important than Latin and Greek. Science was no longer only for the elite. It was not long before textbooks were being written for high schools and grade schools that contained scientific information. We now expect people to understand science and the scientific method.

After Darwin's death when (next page)

**Loyal Forum viewers respond**  
Date: 9/2/04 12:07:51 PM Eastern Daylight Time  
From: lhn1  
To: AthAl FLE  
Hi, I love the show. I think it is funny when religious people call in and claim that the church does a lot of good, like feed the homeless. That is like saying

**LETTERS**

that oil companies do a lot of good because they clean oil off of birds and other wildlife. If they are going to take credit for the solution then they should also take responsibility for the problem.  
I also think that the nudity ordinance that the religious right is pushing here in the Bay Area is a joke. Do you realize that we could never host an Olympics here because we would have to arrest many of the athletes according to the way the ban is written?  
Thank you,  
—Art Bower

**Our final Forum for the third full season featured an invitation to God (or any alleged deity) to appear on our set. Hi Joe [Reinhardt],**  
I'm a 61-year-old woman who watches your show whenever I get the opportunity. I am always impressed by your reasoned discourse and intelligent views. I'm always surprised that more women do not call in—I almost did one evening, but I tuned in too late and the show was over. Anyway, I was disappointed in what I saw last night, March 15th. I felt like you and your co-moderator were stooping to a level that was silly and baiting. The right-wing, radical, religious nuts who call in make absolute fools of themselves, and I don't think it's necessary to bait them by what you were doing with the whole money-in-the-bucket and calling for the deity to sit on your "throne." I am not a person who has been indoctrinated with religious dogma, at least not the bible based kind. Having been raised Catholic, I got all my dogma from that bunch—they just make up stuff as they go along!  
I guess you could call me agnostic at this point in my life, and that's ok with me. What I would love for you to address is the role of women in the TV evangelical movement. I am always curious as to why the religious right is so "hung up" on sex issues, but the women who are front and center grubbing for money on the TV shows look like absolute tartiffs! They are very sexually seductive, yet they rant and rave about how pure they are! What is up with that? Remember Tammy Faye????  
I think that would make an excellent topic for our show, particularly since the Scrip-

We welcome correspondence from readers. Address mail to: Atheists of Florida P.O. Box 130753 Tampa, FL 33681 Or e-mail: ATHALFLE@aol.com

tures forbidd women from even speaking in the tabernacle. For a certainty, Tammy Faye is easily one of the least attractive women I have ever seen.  
By the way, I teach at a local community college, and it's very hard for me not to shake some of my very immature students when it comes to critical thinking—and most of those students are hyper-religious. Those are the ones who think Bush is the second-coming—very dangerous to this country. I see that you will have a table at the peace march coming up this Saturday. My husband and I will be there, so maybe we can meet. Thanks for the opportunity to give you some feedback.  
—Nancy Morgan, Lutz, Florida

Thanks, sincerely, for your input. I have mixed emotions about the effects/costs/benefits of baiting believers, though I feel that they have certainly earned the honor of having the finger of derision pointed in their direction.  
Religion has been screwing up the world since man crawled out of the slime. Today, it poses a greater threat to the survival of mankind than ever before. Please make it a point to come by our table. I'd love the chance to chat with you.  
—Joe Reinhardt

**Government should serve all**  
Published March 5 in the Saint Petersburg Times  
The arguments over the legality of displaying the Ten Commandments on government property are both sad and funny. For a Supreme Court justice to suggest that the majority should rule is pathetic. The government is empowered to enforce laws that benefit all people, not just he majority of a particular belief.  
The Ten Commandments currently seem to represent Christian ideation. If the religious want them displayed, I suggest they do it in its historical context with a Star of David on it to help show its religious origin. To be completely accurate, the display should refer to the "Laws of Hammurabi," the ruler from whom the laws were plagiarized.—Gloria Julius, St Petersburg

**An impediment to rebellion**  
Published March 13 in the Saint Petersburg Times  
One of the many ways that we know that the Founding Fathers were not the devout Christians that they are hyped up to be can be found in Scripture.  
Romans 13: :Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but those who do wrong. In other words, if the Founding Fathers had been devout Christians they wouldn't have been the Founding Fathers.  
—Joe Reinhardt



**Judge: School Pledge Unconstitutional**  
SAN FRANCISCO—A federal judge declared reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools unconstitutional in mid-September, a decision that could put the divisive issue on track for another round of Supreme Court arguments.

U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled that the pledge's reference to one nation "under God" violates school children's right to be "free from a coercive requirement to affirm God."

Karlton said he was bound by precedent of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 2002 ruled in favor of Sacramento atheist Michael Newdow that the pledge is unconstitutional when recited in public schools.

The Supreme Court dismissed a similar case last year, saying Newdow lacked standing because he did not have custody of the elementary school daughter on whose behalf he sued. This time, Newdow, an attorney and physician, filed an identical case on behalf of three unnamed parents and their children for whom Karlton said the families do have the right to sue. Again, Newdow himself was dismissed from the case based on the same procedural objection. The other parents were also dismissed, but the judge held that the children had standing to pursue the case under RoeChild-1. The judge stated:

Because this court is bound by the Ninth Circuit's holding in Newdow III, it follows that the school districts' policies violate the Establishment Clause. Accordingly, upon a properly-supported motion, the court must enter a restraining order to that effect. Because of that conclusion, however, as I explain below, it follows that the plaintiffs' federal claims are rendered moot.

Tellingly, in his ruling, Karlton said:

This court would be less than candid if it did not acknowledge that, by virtue of the disposition above, it need not attempt to apply the Supreme Court's recently articulated distinction between those governmental activities which endorse religion and are thus prohibited, and those which acknowledge the Nation's religious heritage and thus are permitted. ... the distinction is utterly standardless leaving those of us who work in the vineyard without guidance. ... [I]t was only a little more than one hundred years ago that the Supreme Court declared that "this is a Christian nation." [Church of the Holy Trinity] [G]iven the lack of boundaries, a case could be made for substituting "under Christ" for "under God" in the pledge, thus marginalizing not only atheists and agnostics ... but also Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Confucians, Sikhs, Hindus and other religious adherents who not only are citizens of this nation, but in fact reside in this judicial

*U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson wrote, when the court overturned a school pledge requirement in 1943, "To sustain the compulsory flag salute we are required to say that a Bill of Rights that guards the individual's right to speak his own mind left it open to public authorities to compel him to utter what is not in his mind. If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."*

district. [Lawrence K. Karlton, Senior Judge, United States District Court, Eastern District of California, in *Ft 22, Newdow v. Congress*, No. Civ. S—04-17 LKK/DAD.]

Following the decision, Newdow stated to AP Radio: "Imagine every morning if the teachers had the children stand up, place their hands over their hearts, and say, 'We are one nation that denies God exists.' I think everybody would not be sitting here saying, 'Oh, what harm is that.' They'd be furious. And that's exactly what goes on against atheists. And it shouldn't."

The decision sets up another showdown over the pledge in schools, at a time when the makeup of the Supreme Court is in flux.

The Karlton and 9th Circuit decisions conflict with an August opinion by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va. A three-judge panel of that circuit ruled the pledge is a patriotic exercise, not a religious affirmation similar to a prayer. "Undoubtedly, the pledge contains a religious phrase, and it is de-meaning to persons of any faith to assert that the words 'under God' contain no religious significance. The inclusion of those two words, however, does not alter the nature of the pledge as a patriotic activity."

### **Court rules atheism a religion**

A federal court of appeals ruled in August that Wisconsin prison officials violated an inmate's rights because they did not treat atheism as a religion.

"Atheism is [the inmate's] religion, and the group that he wanted to start was religious in nature even though it expressly rejects a belief in a supreme being," the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals said.

The court decided the inmate's First Amendment rights were violated because the prison did not allow him to create a study group for atheists.

Brian Fahling, senior trial attorney for the American Family Association Center for Law & Policy, called the court's ruling "a sort of Alice in Wonderland jurisprudence. Up is down, and atheism, the antithesis of religion, is religion." He said the ruling was "further evidence of the incoherence of Establishment Clause jurisprudence."

The Supreme Court has said a religion need not be based on a belief in the existence of a supreme being. In the 1961 case of *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the court described "secular humanism" as a religion.

"It is difficult not to be somewhat jaundiced about our courts when they take clauses especially designed to protect religion from the state and turn them on their head by giving protective cover to a belief system, that, by every known definition other than the courts' is not a religion, while simultaneously declaring public expressions of true religious faith to be prohibited," Fahling said. This statement is a textbook example of the "sound bite" mentality that turns logic inside out. Atheism is not a belief system, and no court in this nation has ever prohibited public display of religious faith, true or false. Our courts should prohibit the government from presenting displays of religion in any public building or on any public grounds.

chromosomes, genes, and DNA were discovered, the story of evolution was complete. The question that Darwin could not answer, of how characteristics were passed on so that natural selection could take place, was finally answered. Even more amazing than these discoveries is that everyone can read about it in the daily newspaper, magazines, and see it on TV.

Charles Darwin brought science, especially evolutionary science,

**T**HE ANNUAL MEETING of the Board of Directors of Atheists of Florida brought many new members to the board (see masthead, page 2). Joe Reinhardt was elected president.

Within the past two years we have attempted, unsuccessfully, to generate our newsletter electronically on our Web page. With new software in place, we have decided to use the Internet as the primary means to distribute future newsletters. This will accomplish several things for us. Besides reducing our printing and mailing costs, we will be relieved of certain restrictions placed upon mailings sent through the US Postal Service bulk mail system. We will be able to offer active members classified advertising of any nature, and we will be able to accept and publish paid advertising as we see fit.

The majority of our members have already supplied us with an e-mail address which we will use to distribute future newsletters. Members without e-mail or who so request will still be able to receive a printed newsletter by first class mail. This will save lots of time for those of us who fold, collate and label nearly 400 newsletters each mailing. Consequently we have allowed our Bulk Mail permit to expire.

Another advantage will be that we can produce newsletters of any length which may help us get them published more regularly.

**Special recognition certificates**  
Since Atheists of Florida is run entirely by volunteers, the board decided to recognize the efforts of one member and one board member every year. Board members will elect the non-board member recipient and the general membership will elect the board member. Nominations will be conducted by e-mail during the month of January. In February the officers will convene and vote to award the recognition certificates accompanied by a \$50.00 restaurant gift certificate.

The board voted for Atheists of Florida to hold an annual conference in 2006. The board agreed that the conference should be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the board of directors in February. Board member Nan Owens was appointed Project Manager and has begun seeking opinions from members regarding the content of the conference. Watch for

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**Annual Conference**  
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**Projects**  
Several years ago all committees except Publications were converted to projects headed by individual managers selected by the board. These project managers may select any members to assist them in fulfilling their goals. They report their progress directly to the president of A of F.

Current projects include: Fund Raising; Organizational Manual for chapters; Outreach; Advertising; Cable TV production; Annual Conference; and Public Relations. The board decided to make an effort to sell off the extensive collection of freethought books we have in our library by reducing prices to half the cover price. We would like to end up with only one or two titles of each book to be made available for loan to active members.

ence, out of the closet. It is no wonder that he is at the top the A & E biography list ranking of the top one hundred most influential people of the millennium. Johan Gutenberg is first because of the contribution that the printing press made. Isaac Newton and Martin Luther are second and third. Charles Darwin is listed fourth because of his contributions to science and because he was a crafty fellow.

announcements regarding this exciting event soon. We would love to hear any input you have about it and have set up an e-mailbox for your comments at: [freethought@earthlink.net](mailto:freethought@earthlink.net) (see end of front-page article for more conference information).

### **ForumRADIO**

With the success of the *Atheist Forum* public access TV program, the board decided to establish a 13-week pilot project to purchase broadcast time on WTAN Radio in Clearwater, Florida, for a one-hour program called, naturally, the *Atheist Forum*. With a budget of \$1,000 in hand, programming began in March on Sunday nights. But the station must reduce its transmitting power after sunset and the signal was significantly reduced. After a few weeks we moved the show to Monday evening securing an earlier air time at 7:00 preceding sunset. This gave us a much better range.

However, after the 12-week run, A of F president Joe Reinhardt determined we were not generating a significant response. Although the station simulcast the program on the Internet, Reinhardt felt that listener-ship on the A.M. radio band has decreased significantly in recent years, making it difficult to attract both listeners and sponsors. At the completion of the season, Reinhardt decided to discontinue the program.

We did record all programs and have all shows available on CD. We plan to select some of the better shows and make them available for sale.

But Reinhardt is not through. He plans to develop an Internet program for the *Forum* as a live Web-chat which we could produce at any time we want. He conceives the show as a call-in format that will allow us to talk to or interview people from anywhere in the country. In addition, archived programs including TV productions will be available for downloading on the Internet. We hope to begin the production early next year.

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## **Board of Directors meets**

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the conference.

**Annual Conference**  
The board voted for Atheists of Florida to hold an annual conference in 2006. The board agreed that the conference should be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the board of directors in February. Board member Nan Owens was appointed Project Manager and has begun seeking opinions from members regarding the content of the conference. Watch for

the conference.

**Projects**  
Several years ago all committees except Publications were converted to projects headed by individual managers selected by the board. These project managers may select any members to assist them in fulfilling their goals. They report their progress directly to the president of A of F.

Current projects include: Fund Raising; Organizational Manual for chapters; Outreach; Advertising; Cable TV production; Annual Conference; and Public Relations. The board decided to make an effort to sell off the extensive collection of freethought books we have in our library by reducing prices to half the cover price. We would like to end up with only one or two titles of each book to be made available for loan to active members.

active members.

### **John W. MacKay, P.A.**

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## **NEWSFILES**

*Imagine every morning if the teachers had the children stand up, place their hands over their hearts, and say, 'We are one nation that denies God exists.'*

The essay of Vania Grbic won first place in the 2004 Mark Twain Scholarship Fund competition. She was awarded a \$500 prize from the Fund.

**Topic for the 2004 competition:**  
Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg said, "with or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil—that takes religion." In your opinion, how instrumental is the role of religion in the current climate of world terror, and what should your generation do to alleviate or prevent a human induced catastrophe?

## Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

**Thousands of people died simply because they were born with a certain last name that gave away their religious backgrounds back-**

**R**ELIGION HAS LIVED with people for millions of years and it has been conveniently used in order to explain some seemingly inexplicable events and to justify and control people's actions. There is an abundance of evidence left in form of drawings and different objects used in religious rituals in the caves and burial sites all over the world that show that even the "prehistoric men" believed in certain types of higher power. They prayed in order to please the gods because they feared them greatly. There was no logical way for them to explain numerous natural occurrences such as rain, thunders, forest fires, floods, etc., and they developed a belief that some higher power is dictating their surroundings, and therefore, their destiny.

This belief has evolved over the centuries and as religion it has grown to be the biggest institution people are involved in. It has consumed billions of people and it has grabbed them into its evil web from which it is very difficult to escape and see the real truth. People's lives were affected in many different ways, and the most extreme individuals tried to prove themselves to their gods by becoming ascetics and living an isolated life of denial and suffering. Even today in the age of supposed reason and science there are reports of people who mutilate themselves and/or others because their religion tells them to do so. They perform silly and ridiculous feats, such as, walking over hot coals, standing on a pillar for days, hanging by their nipples, and permanently modifying their bodies only to prove themselves as worthy to the object of their religious fascination.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund is an independent Florida non-profit corporation sponsored by Atheists of Florida, Inc. It is governed by a board of five trustees who are elected from the membership of A of F. The trustees meet annually to determine the topic for the annual essay contest, evaluate all qualified entries, and select the winning essays.

Income for the Fund is derived primarily from an annual fund-raising among the membership of Atheists of Florida and from Federal Employees through our inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). The Fund awards eight prizes each year.

All winning essays can be read on our Web site at: [www.atheistalliance.org/florida](http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida), click on Twainessay.

they do something that is against their moral beliefs, and this is perfectly summed up in the quote by Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg who said, "for good people to do evil,—that takes religion." People who kill others of different religious background justify it by saying that it was in the name of God—it was done in order to protect something holy. The value of human life is lost in the ridiculousness of religion and people who follow it.

I experienced this tragedy first hand because my family consists of people of numerous different religious backgrounds. I lived in former Yugoslavia during the war that was fought between people who belonged to three different religions. Thousands of people died simply because they were born with a certain last name that gave away their religious background. My grandparents were killed because of this reason, and the killers justified their murder as a murder done to protect their God. I was too young at the time to understand a notion like this, but over time I realized just how poisonous and dangerous religion truly is. It absorbs the minds of even the most wholesome and good people, and it allows them to do unthinkable atrocities. I was a victim of numerous hate crimes as well while I was growing up. My family did not belong on any side of the feuding parties because it was made up of many different religions. I was stoned, egged, and publicly humiliated in many different ways by sons and daughters of doctors, engineers, and even educators. They were all "good" and respectable people but their religion gave them a leeway for violence and hatred for which they would go unpunished and would not have to be responsible for their evil behaviors. All they would have to do was to simply confess what they did and their sins would be forgiven. Their consciousness would be cleared and they could live through another day without a heavy burden on their souls. They would not be bothered by the crimes they committed because a higher power would forgive them, and to them, that was all that mattered.

Besides people who are willing to go to the extremes there are people who are a little bit more moderate when it comes to their religious beliefs and the ways to express them. No matter to what degree someone is involved in their chosen religion, this religion consumes their rationality and it enables them to do almost anything without suffering appropriate moral consequences. When it comes to people who have at least a little bit of consciousness their religion plays a big part whenever

Religion is a very convenient excuse to start a quarrel, argument, and even a war. It is the most perfect phenomena that could be used to unite thousands and even millions of people to fight for a single cause—their gods. People who are scared are willing to do anything in order to make sure that they survive to see another day. Masses are being controlled by fear of higher power that can take revenge on unfaithful followers. Religion is needed to help "good people do evil" because it enables them to live their lives without any moral consequences.

In today's world of wars, quarrels, and constant power struggles religion is a dangerous ingredient that can bring total destruction to everyone. Future generations have a very difficult task ahead. We need to be able to get away from the clutches of religion that is impeding the development of free will and accountability for individual actions. My generation needs to wake up and realize that it is time to move on beyond the "fairy tales" spread by religious institutions and assume responsibility for their actions and directions they choose for themselves. If we want our children to live in a safe and rational world we need to set an example ourselves by leading more responsible and relig-

ion free lives. It is time to stop using religion in order to justify criminal and irrational acts. Today is the time to prevent the crusades of tomorrow by finally waking up and being able to think rationally without having to fall on the different religious teachings.

In conclusion, I believe that religion is an instrumental factor in the current climate of world terror. People use it as an excuse and justification to do unthinkable atrocities to each other. Religion allows "good people to do evil" by providing forgiveness

for their sins. The circle of evil and terror will just continue indefinitely unless future generations do something about it. I experienced the negative effects of religious influence first hand while growing up during a war between three different religious groups. It was an experience that will haunt me for the rest of my life and I would not want the same thing to happen to anyone else. It can be prevented, and the only way to do it is to open up the eyes of the masses and make them realize how dangerous religion actually is.

## Mark Twain 2005 Fundraising campaign

**I**N 2004 THE A OF F BOARD OF DIRECTORS voted to transfer the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund and all financial assets of the Fund to the Atheist Alliance International. This action would allow all Member Societies to participate in the Fund and make this a truly international Scholarship Fund. However, at the AAI Board of Directors meeting this year, the Alliance declined to accept the Fund citing inadequate availability of administrative staff.

Atheists of Florida will continue to sponsor the Scholarship Fund for the foreseeable future and selected five Trustees at the board of director's meeting this year for the 2005 competition. Following is the list of donors for the 2005 campaign:

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Donors of \$100 — 500</b>                  | Celia Glantz          |
| Kyoko Brogdon                                 | Ben E. Akertley       |
| Raymond R. Erickson                           | Harold C. Wiedmann    |
| Christos Tzanetakos                           | Michael Mooney        |
| Maria Richardson                              | William A. Kilgore    |
| Bruce Gregg                                   | Jack K. Basart        |
| <b>Donors of \$50 — 100</b>                   | Timothy E. Hart       |
| Andrew J. Herschel                            | Jacqueline D. Jordan  |
| Herbert Williams                              | Donald B. Garver      |
| <b>Donors of \$5 — 50</b>                     | Peter A. Castelvecchi |
| Alex Gribko                                   | Peter N. Rummel       |
| Abigail Ann Martin                            | C. W. Mitchell        |
| Freda Kerns                                   | Edwin A. Corl         |
| <b>Total amount of donations: \$1,480.00.</b> |                       |

## Norma Cossey 1925 — 2005

*Norma & Murray Cossey were members of our organization and sponsors of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund to which they donated each year. The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund had designated one of the annual grants as:*

*The Norma & Murray Cossey Grant Award.*

## Atheist Forum

Now being broadcast on Public Access TV in two Tampa Bay counties

**Pinellas County** Brighthouse Cable TV subscribers—Joe Reinhardt is now producing 30-minute pre-taped Atheist Forum programs on channel 96, though not seen in all of Pinellas County.

Saturdays.....10:30 PM  
Sundays.....11:30 PM  
Wednesdays....1:30 AM

**Hillsborough County** Cable TV subscribers:  
Thursday (live) ...10:30 PM Channel 20  
Rerun Sunday....10:00 PM Channel 19

**Other Public Access TV Shows in Hillsborough County**

### Femme Forum

A 1-hour live call-in show about freethought topics hosted by members of Atheists of Florida produced this season by Nan Owens:  
Friday (live).....7:00 PM Channel 20  
Rerun Saturday...6:00 PM Channel 19

Schedule changes every 13 weeks. To be kept informed of new schedules by e-mail, send your address to [AthAFL@aol.com](mailto:AthAFL@aol.com)

**N**ORMA ELINA COSSEY of Lantana, Florida, a three-time Staten Island Liberal Party candidate, educator, and champion of environmental causes, died Feb. 8, 2005 at her home. She was 79.

Educated as an aeronautical engineer, Norma was working as a math and physics teacher at McKee High School in 1969 when she was tapped to be the Liberal Party candidate for borough president. She ran a long-shot campaign that highlighted preserving the Greenbelt, lack of adequate transportation facilities, and fair housing for minorities.

Norma placed third in a three-way contest, receiving 6,616 votes and losing to incumbent Borough President Robert Conner ... who had run on both the Republican and Conservative tickets.

The following year, she began working as legislative aide to Liberal Party City Council minority leader Eldon R. Clunkgan of Manhattan. It was during this time that she was nominated to oppose state Sen. John J. Marchi (R-Staten Island) in that year's election. Tax reform was her dominant issue, and she garnered 2,700 votes in a race won by Marchi.

Born September 25, 1925, in Cleveland, Norma was raised in East Harlem, graduated from Hunter College High School in Manhattan and earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1946 from Manhattan's Cooper Union, simultaneously working as a junior engineer at Bendix Aviation Co. in Teterboro, N.J. In 1948 she earned a master's degree in aeronautical engineering from Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn, where she met and married C. Murray Cossey, a fellow engineering student and World War II veteran, U.S. Army Air Corps.

After teaching math and science in New York high schools for over 20 years, the Cosseys moved to Florida in 1984. She actively participated in annual Earth Day and Everglades preservation and restoration events, and other environmental activities. We will miss Norma!