

Atheists of Florida

DADE&BROWARD: Third Sunday of each month, 2:00 alternating between Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave. Ft. Lauderdale, or Biscayne Cafeteria, 147 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables. Specific meeting information and activities published in **NEWSNOTES**, included in all newsletters. FMI: Patrick Bens. 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441. atheist1@bellsouth.net

LESS THAN 50% OF Hawaii residents hold any tangible form of religious belief or belong to any church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, according to figures published in the new *2000 State of Hawaii Data Book*.

Based on a combination of statistical esti-

Religion declines in Hawaii

—submitted by *Edwin Corl*

mates and reported numbers, only 29% of Hawaii residents belong to any of the Christian sects, down from about 34% in 1990. Catholic Church membership nearly doubled to 56,000.

Buddhist sects account for approximately 100,000 residents or about 8%, while the Jewish population is estimated to be 10,000, or less than 1 percent.

These numbers leave a whopping 62% or 751,000 residents outside the religious mainstream. All other religions report very small numbers of adherents, representing far less than 10% of the population.

Based on these figures it is reasonable to deduce that more than 50% of Hawaii's population is non-religious. More than 750,000 residents can be described as atheist, agnostic, humanist, non-religious and/or indifferent.

NOTE: The membership and attendance numbers reported by churches are spurious. For example, the Catholic Church uses its baptism records and does not take into account the many thousands who leave the church as adults. Many evangelical churches are known to exaggerate membership numbers. **A**

CHAPTER EVENTS

TAMPA BAY: Pinellas County—First Sunday of each even-numbered month (Feb., Apr., etc.), 1:00-3:30 at the Pinellas Park Library, 78th Ave N & 52nd Street.

Tampa—First Sunday of each odd-numbered month, 1:00-3:30, Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthALFLE@aol.com.

NO MEETING IN SEPTEMBER. But join us for *Superstition Exposed* on Friday evening, September 13th, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00, hosted by Families In Reason. This will be a collaborative of exhibits, including one from A of F, for guests to dispel classic superstitions. Location: Center Place Fine Arts & Civic Association of Brandon, 619 Vonderburg Drive, Brandon. Tickets are \$15 in advance, or \$20 at the door. FMI: www.families-in-reason.org.

Letters

continued from page 7

private schools fulfill that a properly funded and administered public school could not? Jeb, can you answer this?

—*Brent Yaciw*
Wesley Chapel, Florida

☺ ☺ ☺

Camp Quest

Dear Staff at Camp Quest,

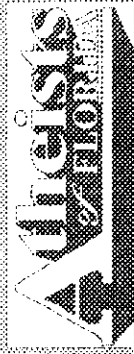
The *Dayton Daily News* recently did a story on your camp, and it was like a breath of fresh air. My daughter just got back from Camp Kern in Lebanon Ohio, and did not have a good time. As a young (10 yrs) Atheist she felt very much out of place. She tells me that god was a frequent topic. She felt like she did not belong, but she loves the idea of camping. Please send me information about next year's activities, and how to register her. Thank you for offering Atheists and other non-religious people a wonderful family oriented place for our children to feel safe and wanted. I would be more than willing to be involved also. If there is anything I could help with, I would love to be a part of this experience.

—*Rodger Hearn*
Sidney, OH

Recent contributors to the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund:

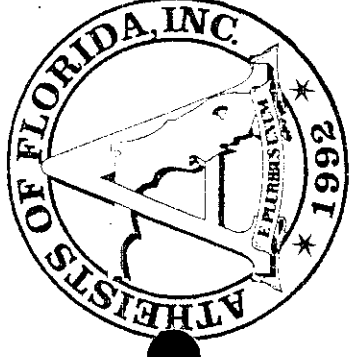
Herbert E. Williams	\$ 15.00	Musy, who shared Ed's booth at USF on many occasions)	25.00
Anita Garcia	5.00		
Dr. & Mrs. Williamson	50.00	Norma E. & C. Murray Cossey	400.00

8 June/July 2002



P.O. Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681

ADDRESS SERVICE
REQUESTED



Volume XI No. 3
June/July, 2002

Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated
A Member Society of Atheist Alliance International, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies
www.atheistalliance.org/florida

Atheists of Florida Board meets for 2002

MIAMI—THE ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA annual Board of Directors meeting was held on Sunday, July 14, 2001 in Miami.

Chairman of the meeting Ed Golly announced that Atheists of Florida now has an office with a commercial street address in Tampa. We are housing our rather substantial library and archives in that office. Christos Tzanetakos has many video tapes to contribute, as well as all video and DVD copies of our *Atheist Forum* Cable TV programs. Items are sorted and inventoried, with some books available for sale and others to be made available for lending to members. The office is conveniently located just one block from the Tampa chapter meeting site and should be open sometime in September.

Miami/Dade chapter Director Patrick Bens has been seeking a permanent meeting place for the chapter. Bens revealed that he has had problems with Pelican's Nest and that location will not work out.

Atheist Forum

The Tampa Bay chapter has now completed one season of production of the *Atheist Forum* Public Access Cable TV program. This consisted of 12 one-hour programs that have been archived on DVD. Now in our second season, the program has been reduced to a 30-minute format due to technicalities. Hillsborough County residents who are subscribers to Time/Warner cable can view the show on Tuesday night at 10:30 on channel 20 (live). City of Tampa residents can see the show re-run on channel 19 Wednesday at 1:00 p.m.

The primary co-hosts for the *Forum* are Golly and Brent Yaciw, with supplemental co-hosting by Jim Young and Andrea Steele. We are in

the process of developing our own production crew from the Tampa Bay chapter. Next season we hope to be back to a 60-minute format which will allow about ten minutes for news followed by 20 minutes for a topic or guest, and the remaining 30 minutes for live call-ins.

AAI Convention

We have negotiated a contract with the Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore to host the 2003 Atheist Alliance International convention on April 18—20. A convention planning committee will soon be formed and we will begin preparations for what we hope will be the best Alliance convention ever.

Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

This year the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund application has been approved for inclusion in the 2002 campaign by thirteen out of the nineteen Florida Agencies which accept and distribute donations to non profit organizations, with the remaining applications pending appeals from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in Washington, DC.

Another achievement this year was the acceptance of our application for inclusion in the 2002 Florida State Employees Charitable Campaign. This is the same Florida Agency which the previous two years denied our inclusion and forced us to appeal the case to the Fourth District Court of Appeals in Ft. Lauderdale.

The Board elected the five new trustees for the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund to serve for a three-year term. They are: Christos Tzanetakos, Steve Miles, Dr. Michael Brannon, Ray Erickson, and Alex Giannakoulis. (see **BOARD**, next page)



Atheists of Florida Board of Directors. Front row from left: Jim Young, secretary; Ed Golly, president; Patrick Bens; Alex Giannakoulis; Steve Miles, vice-president; Dr. Michael Brannon, chairman; Brent Yaciw, treasurer; and Christos Tzanetakos, founder. Not pictured: Jim Peterson, Nan Owens, Anthony Schleifstein, Raymond Erickson, Olympia Wood.

"The divorce between church and state ought to be absolute. It ought to be so absolute that no church property anywhere, in any state, or in the nation, should be exempt from equal taxation; for if you exempt the property of any church organization, to that extent you impose a tax upon the whole community."
—President James A. Garfield
speech to Congress, June 22, 1874

J. Young—Wide World of Atheism

California appeals pledge ruling
SAN FRANCISCO—In July, the state asked a federal appeals court to reverse a ruling that said it was unconstitutional to have students recite the Pledge of Allegiance in school.

The circuit court blocked the decision from being enforced in public schools to allow for appeals. The court can rehear the case with the same three judges or with an 11-judge panel. It can also let the decision stand.

"If the U.S. Supreme Court can begin its day with 'God save the United States and this honorable court,' school children should be permitted to recite the Pledge of Allegiance," Gov. Gray Davis said.

The state's attorneys said the pledge is not a prayer or other form of religious exercise but a "vocal expression of patriotism and duty."

Meanwhile, Dubya exploited the July 4th holiday to call the nation to religious faith, and equate belief in a deity with patriotism.

•••••

Vouchers threaten

WASHINGTON—In another landslide decision (5-4) issued in June, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Cleveland's school voucher program even though 96% of the students participating in the program used the vouchers to attend religious school. The battle over vouchers is now turning to Congress, which is expected to soon debate the fate of these misguided programs.

Specifically, House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX) has introduced the "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act," HR 5033. This troubling legislation would divert \$45 million in public funds over five years to fund transportation, tuition and fees at private and religious schools in the District of Columbia.

The program would offer only the illusion of "choice" for the vast majority of DC public school students. At best, it would increase the opportunities of a handful of children that will be carefully selected by private schools that have the luxury of deciding who they want to admit, all while funneling much-needed funds away from public schools.

And now in Florida...

TALLAHASSEE—Arguments are underway in state court challenging Florida's original voucher law. The federal ruling does not affect how the Florida Constitution is construed, a Washington attorney representing voucher opponents told Circuit Judge Kevin Davey.

And the 1999 voucher law violates the state constitution, which does not allow public money to be spent to promote religion, John West argued.

"It is impossible to say that this is not direct, substantial aid to the religious mission of the participating

schools and churches," West said.

The Florida law being challenged allows students at public schools that earn a failing grade two years out of four to get a voucher to attend a private school. Only students at two Pensacola elementary schools were eligible for the first three years of the program, and approximately 50 students opted to use vouchers at five participating private schools.

Four schools were Catholic schools, and West argued that religious beliefs permeated the schools. "These students participate in religion classes; these students participate in worship services; these students participate in prayer," he said.

It doesn't matter whether the parents of those voucher students consented to the religious training, West added. "The taxpayers should not be required to fund religious exercise even for people who have chosen it freely."

The state, ironically arguing against its own constitution, maintained that it could not discriminate against religious expression and consequently, it should violate its own rules and use taxpayer's funds to promote religion.

In June, nearly 9,000 students at 10 public schools across the state became eligible. The parents of 338 kids notified the state that they intended to use vouchers. That doesn't guarantee that they will find a participating private school.

•••••

Jesse is our hero!

MINNESOTA—Gov. Jesse Ventura's proclamation of "Indivisible Day" sure has divided some folks.

Ventura set off some early fireworks at the Capitol when he took the suggestion of an atheist group and declared July 4 as "Indivisible Day" in Minnesota. The proclamation reignited a long-simmering debate about the governor's attitude toward religion and the separation of state and church.

"This process is continuing the governor's hostility towards religion that was originally revealed in his *Playboy* interview when he said religion is a sham and crutch for weak-minded people," said Aaron Hall, a spokesman for the Minnesota Family Council. "He's continuing that attack in a more politically correct way using his public office."

•••••

Your tax dollars at work

WASHINGTON—Ministers, priests and rabbis will keep their tax break for the cost of housing under a bill Dubya signed into law in May. The measure protects the "parsonage exemption," a 1921 provision challenged in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.

Supporters said the exemption is particularly important in rural areas where churches, synagogues, mosques and temples would be less able to compensate for its loss, making it harder to attract clergy. Better, they reasoned, to stick the taxpayers with the subsidies and forget about upholding the constitution.

ceeds the allowable number of Board seats. If voting is necessary, it will begin November 1st and close November 21st. Ballots must be opened and counted in the presence of the Chairman and a minimum of two other elections committee members to be valid. Directors of chapters composed of at least ten members are automatically elected to the Board and will not be included on Board voting ballots.

The Board voted to authorize the president to appoint an Executive Director for Atheists of Florida. Compensation for the Executive Director is not to exceed one hundred dollars a month. The Executive Director's duties shall include, but not be limited to, performing and/or supervising the administrative day-to-day functions of this organization and any other duties as defined in writing by the President and/or the Board.

Further clarification of the powers of the president allow that all policies and appointments put in place by Presidential decree will be communicated in writing to all Board members and will be in full force until the Board has a chance to review and formally reject the action where they will be automatically presented as a MOTION to be formally approved or rejected by the Board. The President shall appoint Project Managers/Committee Chairs.

A motion to secure communications was passed, but it's too complex to include herein. It will be incorporated into the Chapter Operations Manual and be available at chapter meetings or by e-mail when ready.

The Board decided that the organization will hold the annual board meeting within the first two months of each calendar year. The president shall set the time, date, and site. If by December 1st of the preceding year, the president has failed to set this date, the chairman will immediately intervene to do so. Every effort will be made to give board members two months advance notice of this meeting.

Another long motion adopted was to establish a perpetual endowment fund for Atheists of Florida. This motion will be incorporated into the Bylaws. The purpose of the fund is to endow the organization with a perpetual source of funding for operational expenses. The intent of the contributors is to ensure that Atheists of Florida will always have sufficient income to fund its endeavors. We will describe this endowment fund further in a future newsletter.

Our new officers

The new president of Atheists of Florida is Ed Golly, who may serve up to two terms of one year each. Vice president remains Steve Miles, and Jim Young was re-elected secretary. Our new treasurer is Brent Yaciv. Chairman of A of F is Dr. Michael Brannon. Congratulations to all our officers.

The final business was to award life membership status to Laura and Jack Golly for their generous contributions to the scholarship fund and providing our office in Tampa. We also bestowed life membership status to Joe Redner of Tampa who is not only a publicly outspoken atheist, but also donated our spectacular "Ten Commandments" book covers.

MARIE CASTLE, who has been sharing the Atheist Alliance International's co-presidency with Bobbie Kirkhart, is leaving her leadership post (effective September) and thereby bringing to a close the recent state of affairs. (In March, the AAI board had elected both persons to share the presidency.)

There is much to show for Marie's tenure in leadership. She leaves in her wake a coalition that has been growing and developing rapidly. The Volume 1, No. 1 issue of *Secular Nation* magazine records ten member societies in the Alliance. That year was 1994 (when Marie shared the presidency with

Christos Tzanetacos). Eight years later, the number has quadrupled. Membership now

Atheist Alliance Report

Shifting of gears at AAI

includes groups in several other countries.

Kirkhart, who will be taking up the reins as AAI's president, is looking ahead. Of the changeover, she says: "Building on a strong foundation, the AAI will continue to grow. I can never replace Marie Castle's hard work and determination, but I have seen so much talent and dedication in this organization that I'm certain I'll have a lot of help getting us through this transition and into an even brighter future."

With AAI's gear-shifting taking place, the transition is a very opportune time for reexamining both the organization and its "strong foundation."

I found that a good place to look for a capsule summary of the Atheist Alliance International is inside the front cover of any recent issue of *Secular Nation* (AAI's quarterly publication). The wording of the depiction in the spring 2002 issue reveals the gist of what AAI is about and indicates how AAI is unique among atheist organizations:

"(It) is an organization of independent religion-free groups and individuals. Our primary goals are to establish strong, democratic, atheistic societies in every state and to advance rational thinking through educational processes. All income goes to public outreach projects and helping member groups grow in strength and numbers. We have NO paid staff. Our members run the Alliance. Together, we make all the decisions and do all the work... The Alliance sponsors annual conventions, publishes *Secular Nation* magazine and *The Freethought Directory*, maintains a Web site that hosts member societies' Web sites free, and has a national distribution network for atheist videotapes on public access TV."

It's easy to see that the organization has come a long way without losing its fundamental character. There is a sound (and unique) base on which to build further. Indeed, AAI's organizational structure, erected on autonomous member societies, is a somewhat distinctive design for an atheist organization.

The Alliance arrangement allots to local member societies the voice and impetus of the organization. Each member society chooses its representative(s) who serve on the AAI Board of Directors. These Directors decide what the Alliance does. In this way, the member societies govern the Alliance. This inherently democratic design reflects a fundamental dynamic of the Alliance—it exists because individual atheists have joined local organizations. The volunteer nature and democratic character of the Atheist Alliance offer hope of ongoing vitality.

With the many challenges facing us worldwide, there is no better time than now to act on the ideals of volunteerism and democracy built into this singular atheist association. It will be up to the member organizations themselves to supply the stamina to ensure the continued success of this volunteer organization. It is important to have "secular nation" be more than just two words on the cover of a magazine. Common goals of education and activism for a better, more rational secular society must drive our cooperation.

Atos de la Florida se reupan ahora en nuevo lugar en el condado de DADE.

Pelican Nest—2do Piso

10442 SW 186 Street (Quail Roost Drive)

Miami, Florida 33157

¿Presupuesto Equilibrado? ¡Más fácil de lo que usted piensa!

Usted tiene que rendir cuentas detalladas al Servicio de Impuestos sobre las Rentas. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar impuestos estatales y federales. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar por la protección de policía y de bomberos, por bibliotecas y escuelas. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar impuestos sobre sus inversiones, acciones, fondos mutuos, bonos, etc. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar impuestos sobre sus compras, gasolina, automóvil, etc., etc. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar impuestos sobre lo que herede. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar el impuesto sobre los bienes inmuebles todos los años. ¡Ellos no! Usted tiene que pagar impuestos sobre todo incremento de valor de su casa si la vende. ¡Ellos no!

La familia media en los Estados Unidos paga un mínimo de \$925 al año en impuestos ocultos para librar a las iglesias de todo impuesto -sobre bienes inmuebles, rentas, negocios y sus enormes tesoros en acciones, bonos, etc.

El Wall Street Journal, la cadena televisora CBS, United Press, etc., han hallado que el capital de la Iglesia Católica sola excede el total de las cinco mayores corporaciones estadounidenses (General Motors, Ford, Mobil y Texaco). Las protestantes reunidas casi la igualan.

¡El Servicio de Impuestos sobre las Rentas informa que los donativos monetarios a las iglesias alcanzan a no menos de diecinueve mil millones de dólares al año! Esto sin incluir ganancias de establecimientos comerciales, propiedades inmuebles, inversiones en la bolsa, centros de retiro para ancianos y arreglos de reariendo.

El ardid del reariendo es un método particularmente pernicioso que utilizan las iglesias para aprovechar su exención de impuestos. Una iglesia compra un negocio "en papel" por un precio acordado, digamos, de \$1, y lo arrienda a alguien para que lo maneje, a menudo al dueño original. El negocio queda entonces exento de impuestos sobre la propiedad y las operaciones. Los pagos del arriendo al nuevo dueño, la iglesia, son cargables a los impuestos como donativos hechos a la iglesia. De esta forma, se están al gobierno los impuestos que hubiese cobrado por la tierra en que el negocio está situado y por las ganancias del negocio. La iglesia gana, el negocio gana, el gobierno y los pagadores de impuestos perdemos.

¿Cómo empezó todo esto? Originalmente, la Declaración de los Derechos (Bill of Rights), incluyendo la Cláusula de Establecimientos, que no tenía por qué incluir la exención de impuestos, se refería solamente al gobierno federal, dejando a los Estados en libertad de dictaminar lo que quisieran respecto a religiones. En 1777, Virginia eximió las iglesias del pago de impuestos sobre bienes raíces; Nueva York lo hizo así en 1799, y Washington en 1802. Actualmente todos los Estados eximen de impuestos a las iglesias. La enmienda 14, ratificada en 1868, extendió la Declaración de Derechos a los Estados tanto como al gobierno federal, pero ya para entonces la exención de las iglesias se encontraba firmemente establecida. Dicha exención fue puesta a prueba en las cortes en 1970 en el caso de Walz vs. la Comisión de Impuestos de la Ciudad de Nueva York. Walz alegaba que el efecto de la exención equivalía a un subsidio gubernamental. Lamentablemente, Walz perdió el caso. El Director de Justicia Burger escribió que la relación entre la iglesia y el estado creada por la exención era mínima y remota y mucho menor que (la que resultaría) de la imposición de impuestos a las iglesias.

Por la minoría, el Magistrado William Douglas dijo: "La cuestión en el caso... es si los creyentes, organizados en grupos eclesíásticos, pueden ser exentos de impuestos sobre bienes raíces simplemente por ser creyentes, mientras que los no creyentes, organizados o no, tienen que pagar esos impuestos." Añadió, "... una de las mejores formas de establecer una o más religiones es subvencionarlas, que es lo que hace la exención de impuestos."

Todo dólar que una iglesia o un negocio se libra de pagar, usted, como pagador individual de impuestos, debe reponerlo. Si se necesitan los impuestos para el funcionamiento de la nación, y la Iglesia extrae un porcentaje de esos impuestos, a alguien hay que aumentarle los suyos.

Las iglesias de Estados Unidos son dueñas de alrededor del 20 por ciento de toda la tierra que es propiedad privada en todos los Estados de la nación. Cuando el 20% de los bienes raíces se libera de impuestos, los restantes dueños individuales de tierras y hogares tienen que cubrir la diferencia. Si las Iglesias pagasen su parte justa del impuesto sobre bienes inmuebles en la comunidad, no tendrían que elevarse tanto nuestros impuestos todos los años para compensar los crecientes costes de los servicios comunitarios.

Ciudadanos de Colorado por la Imposición Equitativa de Tributos

NEWSNOTES

Monthly Bulletin for the members of
ATHEISTS of FLORIDA Inc. Chapter DADE&BROWARD

Our next meeting is planned for



August 18, 2002

at 2pm

Meet up in the patio
of the world famous

BOOKS&BOOKS

265 Aragon Ave.

Coral Gables, FL

Please come to offer your suggestions on how
to make this new meeting room successful.

New Meeting Room

EastEnders and Atheism

And you thought there was no atheism on TV? Since 1984, PBS has brought to Miami/Fort Lauderdale and the Palm Beaches Britain's most famous soap:

(I've watched every episode religiously, yes weekly—since 1984!)

One of the vicar's house guests is too: "I've watched every episode religiously, yes weekly—since 1984!"

In it, the vicar's father is an atheist. One of the vicar's house guests is too: "I've watched every episode religiously, yes weekly—since 1984!"

It's all mumbo jumbo... "Ruth (daughter of another cleric) and Mark don't marry in the church because "we don't believe in all that..."

Jules tells his granddaughter: "We atheists don't have these problems..."

He means superstition. Who will be the next to keep up the good word? Watch PBS this Sunday!

Science exam.p2

NOOSENOTES

EXPOSING THE DANGERS OF RELIGION

REACH OUT AND

TOUCH SOME JUAN.

By Patrick Bens, Chapter Director

It's no longer a phenomenon just for Miami. It's no longer just for Broward or Palm Beach counties either. The need for SPANISH SPOKEN HERE is fanning out across the country, according to a recent article by M a u r e n G l a b m a n , (Writersgroupink@aol.com) the expert organizer of the January 14 meeting with Lou Appignani, our fellow member and philanthropist of the LOUIS APPIGNANI FOUNDATION (FOR THE PROMOTION OF ATHEISM).

With her April 2, 2002 article "Hablo Español?" in the bi-weekly FLORIDA MEDICAL BUSINESS NEWSPAPER, Florida's first and only health business newspaper, Maureen cautions American physicians of the necessity to become proficient in Spanish in the face of an increasing number of Hispanic patients, not just in large cities like Miami, Chicago or L.A. but in rural communities in Colorado, Arkansas and Indiana. Doctors have started to immerse South of the Border to learn to roll their Rs. Medical schools like Vanderbilt and others from San Antonio to Chicago urge doctors to become bi-lingual.

I TOLD YOU SO

Since I took over the directorship of this chapter my efforts to post on the Internet quality atheist classics by Charles Darwin, Percy B. Shelley, Voltaire and others, translated by talented members or their congenial friends have been bucked by the Publications Committee for all these years. This has frustrated many members. To further delay these publications is like tearing open a healing wound.

In order to ride the wave into the new U.S.A., what our group needs is what our chapter can no longer live

(Continued on page 3)