

## Bigotry (continued from page 3)

One must naturally ask: *What would Jesus do?*

That question is, as always, first and foremost in the minds of many of fair Largo's most staunch moralists, like for example, Ron Sanders, pastor, Lighthouse Baptist Church of Largo, who was quoted as saying: "Mr. Stanton is not a role model. He's proven that. I think for the sake of our young people today, you need to do what's right, and that's terminate him. If Jesus was here tonight, I can guarantee you he'd want him terminated. Make no mistake about it." It must be a great comfort to Pastor Ron's flock to know that he possesses such eternal insights into personal integrity, what is best for our youth, and what the offspring of the creator and lord of the universe would say and do regarding such issues.

What, exactly, did Jesus have to say regarding transsexuals? Nothing. St. Paul, ever the moralizing gasbag, did not address the issue of transsexuals, per se, although he did have few choice words on homosexuality, *effeminate* behavior and dress.

Nevertheless, this writer, for one, would be interested in hearing what pearls of wisdom Jesus might render unto us regarding the myriad sex and financial scandals in both of the major Christian churches, various sects, numerous parishes, synods, etc.

The recurring theme of discontent toward Stanton seemed to center on the issues of integrity and honesty. Peggy Schaefer from Indian

Rocks Beach First Baptist Church said: "I don't want that man in office. I don't think we should be paying him \$150,000 a year when he's not been truthful. We have to speak up. Of course [we] don't believe in sex changes or lesbianism. They have their rights, but we do, too."

Yes, indeed [they] do have rights; it was good of Ms. Schaefer to recognize that. But how, exactly, would her rights be compromised in any way, by allowing a demonstrably competent public servant to remain in a position for which he (she) is demonstrably qualified?

Where do the rights of one very loud large group end, and those of other smaller groups begin? Where is the ethical boundary? Are such boundaries best defined and drawn by so-called eternal values of faith and belief (absolutism), or by an ever-evolving civil society based on empirical, scientific, and philosophical insights (relativism)?

But more to the point, what was Stanton dishonest about? Clearly, he did a lot of soul-searching and gave his decision a great deal of thought. He made a plan, confided to an inner circle of family and friends, and was set to *voluntarily disclose* his decision *publicly*. If the much vaunted character traits of honesty, forthrightness, and personal accountability, so lauded and coveted by social conservatives, are the 'values' we wish to imbue in children and all of society, then this writer cannot imagine a better role model than Steven, no - Susan Stanton.

—THE EDITOR

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# Atheists of Florida

*Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church*

A Founding Member Society of the Atheist Alliance International  
(The Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies)



Volume XIII No. 4 March 2007

## Atheists of Florida Annual Board of Directors Meeting

TAMPA—THE HILTON TAMPA AIRPORT WESTSHORE was the site of the 2007 Board of Director's meeting on January 28.

The Treasurer's report indicated a significant increase in the financial status of A of F with the inclusion of the Norma E. Cossey estate distribution of over \$63,000.

Founder of both Atheists of Florida and the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, Christos Tzanetakis, reported that state and federal employees have contributed over \$2,000.00 to the Fund this year. However, the Board had decided last year to discontinue the Fund, so all remaining funds will be delivered to the A of F account when all receipts are collected.

A of F President Joe Reinhardt announced that the *Atheist Forum* has survived production in spite of some crew turnover and remains the most productive outreach project of our organization. Reinhardt indicated we require persons who can devote more time to meeting the proposals of A of F, including potentially some full-time people. He reminded the board of the fundraising events of the past year that had generated income. Reinhardt proposed to the board that A of F address the status of the property tax exemption for religious organizations in the State of Florida. He had discussed with board member Jack Basart the effort instigated several years ago by Michael Murphy to eliminate property tax exemptions for religious organizations in the state of Colorado since Basart had been involved in that effort. Reinhardt expressed an interest in seeing A of F enact a similar movement in Florida. This would essentially enforce existing law that prohibits expenditure of any state money to support religion. In Reinhardt's opinion, it would be considered the greatest legacy of Atheists of Florida if we could accomplish this.

As the committee reports began, board member Nan Owens announced she would need to resign from all committees in which she was involved due to the conflict of interest with her employment as Executive Director of the Center for Inquiry-Florida.

The approved budget for 2007 came to just under \$10,000.00, including \$1,000 for advertising, \$2,000 for wholesale merchandise for outreach events, and \$2,500 for our annual meeting and banquet.

Jim Young, head of the Publications Committee, announced that several of his publications had been approved by the committee and published in 2006.

Reinhardt, head of the Fund Raising Committee, described our efforts to have outreach tables at the Plant City Strawberry Festival and the Florida State Fair. (Ultimately, the Festival never responded to our request for space, but the State Fair contacted us less than a week before the Fair opened to offer us a space, which we ultimately fulfilled. A full report will be in the next issue.) We have improved our efforts to renew memberships and anticipate Pay-Pal receipts through our Web site this year. Reinhardt had offered several ideas for fund raising from bake sales to bingo to charity poker, but we have had been unable to fulfill these efforts due to the additional

effort that would be required from the membership. However, he anticipated that we could accomplish several fund raising events if we could secure a full-time paid employee of the organization.

Outreach is handled by Jim Young, who reported on all the activities of A of F. These include the *Atheist Forum*, the *Old Time Atheist Hour* Web cast, and his outreach table at USF when classes are in session, and our weekly Ybor City street appearances by members who spend four hours distributing information about atheism. We also participated in the *St. Petersburg Times* Festival of Readings, Guavaween, and the St. Petersburg Gay Pride Festival. Young allowed that Atheists of Florida has evolved into an outreach organization and expressed his appreciation for all the time and energy contributed by volunteers which had led to the evening dinner banquet that followed the board meeting.

Print advertising has become prohibitively expensive, according to committee chairman Ed Golly. But we will maintain a budget to procure other means of advertising, such as hand-out items like pens or key chains at our numerous outreach events.

Golly is also committee chair for Hillsborough County public access TV and Web cast production. The *Forum* has now expanded to include the original source of Bright House Network, Verizon, and Comcast networks and we intend to continue with the public access production indefinitely. The \$10-per-hour charge formerly required to broadcast the *Old Time Atheist Hour* has been eliminated so the Web cast, just like the TV show, can now be produced primarily at a cost of the time of the participants. The Pinellas County *Forum* had been discontinued due to difficulty of utilizing the production facilities.

Webmaster Jim Peterson reported that there have not been many changes to the Web site ([AtheistAlliance.org/florida](http://AtheistAlliance.org/florida)) but expected the addition of a links page that would concentrate on links specifically relevant to atheism. One significant addition is that every newsletter we publish is now available for viewing on our Web page.

Election of officers was held after a motion was passed allowing the president to serve a third consecutive term. All officers were re-elected except the position of vice president. Brent Yactw was unable to accept nomination because he would be relocating away from the area. Rob Curry was subsequently elected to the position.

The meeting was followed that evening by the first Atheist of Florida Volunteer Recognition Banquet conceived, planned and hosted by Jim Young. Approximately 50 members and guests were treated to a banquet dinner followed by recognition of the contributions made by each member, then two video presentations. We plan to make this an annual event coordinated with the board of directors meetings.

Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect

an evolutionary impact for stabilization.

It does seem impossible that we could reduce the population on earth to 2 billion people without a catastrophe. Obviously wars, famine, disease, and birth control have helped very little in population control when competing with human reproductive power.

Paul Ehrlich is still teaching about population and there are still many who disagree with him. Right or wrong, he gives a point of view that evolutionists must consider:

*"The standard that biologists use and environmental scientists is very simple and that is you're overpopulated when you*

*no longer can live on your interest, when you've got to live on your capital. And the three main forms of capital that we're getting rid of very, very rapidly at today's density and today's consumption patterns are deep rich agricultural soils; biodiversity, which is critical; and maybe the most short-term critical is our supplies of groundwater everywhere, which are being over-drafted. So, we are like the profligate child who has inherited a vast pile of resources, in this case from the planet, but every year we write a bigger check on it. Nobody bothers to look at what's happening to the balance, and that's the critical thing."*

**A**

**W**hat does a sleepy Florida town near the beach, full of moral, god-fearing folk, do with a city manager who has given 14 years of exemplary service? Call for his dismissal, naturally; especially when that city manager has become an unseemly abomination in the eyes of the Biblical god, or more accurately, an abomination

ment, and emotional agony. One might say it was his hell on earth; denying ones nature and happiness usually is a kind of hell. Years of private cross dressing, counseling, and self-examination brought him to the realization that he is a woman in a man's body. The Biblical god is indeed a cruel jokester, or not quite the intelligent designer as envisioned by his earthly envoys. Either way, Stanton has begun receiving female hormones and plans to soon start dressing and living as a woman. Welcome, Susan!

Three years ago, a proposed human rights ordinance was bitterly opposed and shot down in lovely Largo, where conservative churches and vocal Evangelicals apparently wield an unhealthy degree of political influence, all the while, of course, playing the role of beleaguered, besieged victims who, 'because of their faith' are being pushed out of the public arena. Evidently, morals are everything in Largo, crime and punishment are next to everything, and civil and constitutional rights are out there on the periphery, unless we're talking about churches.

Like most towns in the south, one cannot travel very far without seeing a tax-exempt house of worship. One hears a great deal of talk about love, tolerance, acceptance, and charity, but interestingly enough such fine, noble human qualities are (and have been) practiced selectively. During the fateful four-hour meeting in which 480 people packed City Hall, and some 60 speakers were heard, gay and lesbian advocate Nadine Smith was arrested for passing out pink leaflets that read "*Don't Discriminate.*"

Based on such a disturbing message rendered by a lone 41 year old woman, one can understand why Ms. Smith had to be taken to the floor by four of *Largo's finest*, then charged with resisting arrest with violence (a felony), and the lesser misdemeanor of disturbing the assembly. It would seem that the assembly was plenty *disturbed* long before the meeting was gaveled to order. After the vote that effectively ousted Stanton from his position, he told the *St. Petersburg Times*: "*the commission did what they felt was best for the community*". Such grace, such understanding, such *Christ-like* behavior!

*(continued on back page)*

A OF F EDITORIAL

## Bigotry: Alive, Well, and As Ugly As Ever in Largo, Florida

in the eyes of god's self-appointed earthly envoys. Thus is the unfortunate case with one Mr. Steve Stanton, the future Ms. Susan Stanton, and future ex-city manager of Largo. On Tuesday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, Largo city commissioners voted 5-2 to fire Stanton, following his disclosure that he intended to have a sex-change operation.

In certain circles, such behavior is construed as messing with an otherwise perfectly good divine plan. In Largo, it means just that, and apparently also indicates (by some strange twist of logic alien to this world) that the one who voluntarily discloses such a contentious decision is also *not* being truthful. The writer can only empathize with the rational readers confusion on that second point, as he, too, is confused as to how anyone can accuse Stanton of being anything *but* honest, thoughtful, and courageous.

By all accounts, Stanton served the city of Largo honorably, having received many glowing reviews, with the most recent resulting in a 9 percent salary increase. Furthermore, he has run marathons, joined Largo firefighters for training, and reputedly has an assertive, take-charge personality. In other words: he was a *get things done kind of guy*. This writer would be willing to bet that he'll be a *get things done kind of gal*. For most of his life Stanton lived a life of quiet confusion, psychological displace-

*More to the point, what was Stanton dishonest about?*

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