

A U S T I N Atheist

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A Decade of Experience

—by Matt Dillahunt

On October 17, 1997, something wonderful happened. A small but growing and ambitious group of atheists threw caution to the winds and debuted a live, call-in television program on the local public access station; *The Atheist Experience* was born. The original episode was filmed by Joe Zamecki at ACA meetings and later aired. The team quickly moved to a live call-in format with Ray Blevins as host. Current ACA member Arlo Pignotti was the original producer. In the early years, most of the ACA members had a chance to show their faces and air their concerns to the entire city of Austin through the magic of cable access TV. One show even featured the entire group who crowded into the studio before later going off to the Hot Jumbo Bagel shop where the ACA met. Over the past 10 years, the length of the show increased to 90 minutes, its time slot has shifted several times and the on-air personalities have changed a number of times—but the show has continued to provide the ACA

with a significant opportunity for outreach and interaction.

On October 28, we'll be celebrating the 10th anniversary of *The Atheist Experience* by inviting many of the show's former hosts back on to the set. We'd like to invite all of you to participate in this show by calling in to the studio to discuss your memories and favorite moments from the show. It should be a fun afternoon and a slight departure from our standard show.

In addition to the on-air personalities, our show could not exist without the tireless efforts of the crew. Steven Elliott, Joe Rhodes and Shelly Roberts are not only certified producers, but also tireless professionals who consistently ensure that our program is the best it can be. Many other members have met the PACT requirements for crew certification, which allows them to run all of the equipment required for our show. On any given week, you're likely to find John Iacoletti, Shilling Cadena, Chuck Clark, and others helping



Shelley Roberts, John Iacoletti, and Tim Suto at a PACT crew training.

with the setup and operation of the show. Over the years, a host of dedicated volunteers too numerous to mention have made *The Atheist Experience* possible. We'd like to thank them.

Producing our live show is a substantial effort that requires the talent and cooperation of many individuals, and as a volunteer organization, that effort has been performed by many of the same individuals for many years. Each week, these same folks arrive at the studio an hour or two before the show in order to begin the setup. After setting up the backdrop, they have to adjust the lights and cameras, setup microphones and laptops, adjust audio and video levels, modify the on-screen credits, perform a test call to verify the phone lines, setup the recording equipment and perform a number of last minute fixes and adjustments—all before we ever go on the air. During the show they're responsible for

screening calls, tweaking audio levels, switching camera shots, broadcasting CG overlays and on far too many occasions, fixing problems that arise with the equipment. And when the show is over, they've got to tear down the set, clean out the space and return the equipment. The work doesn't stop there. There is post-processing of each episode for audio and video downloads and packaging as products. These last efforts have helped *The Atheist Experience* reach an enthusiastic international audience.

If you're interested in helping out with the show as a producer or crew, please talk to one of our current producers to find out what sort of help is required. There are opportunities with different levels of commitment, and it's a lot of fun. ■

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About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of Freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

ACA Board of Directors

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Austin Atheist Newsletter

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Submission Deadlines

Issue	Deadline
Jan. _____	Dec. 1
Feb. _____	Jan. 1
March _____	Feb. 1
April _____	March 1
May _____	April 1
June _____	May 1
July _____	June 1
Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

INSIDE THE ACA

Roles and Apprenticeship

—by Don Baker

The ACA is a purely volunteer organization, and as such, it must deal with many of the same challenges as any volunteer organization. People's lives and interests change over time, and as a result, even the most dedicated volunteers will eventually move on to other things, hopefully within the ACA. It's normal, then, for volunteers to flow through the organization. The challenge is to keep continuity and momentum in the face of this continuous change.

To address the continuity challenge, the ACA has a number of standing roles for well defined "jobs" that the ACA as a whole would like to fill over the long haul. Ideally, the volunteer serving in a role is thinking about the practices related to that role and how to make them better. An important part of a role is passing on that knowledge to the next volunteer, so that he or she won't have to reinvent the wheel. We also try to find apprentices for important roles so that future leaders can get some practical

experience before taking on larger responsibilities. A number of our long-standing roles involve some specialized skill sets, but there are always people around with those skills to help fill in gaps that a volunteer might have.

Besides the obvious roles of the officers of the organization, the ACA has a number of major and minor roles. The major roles usually take the form of committee heads for various committees. The current list of committees and committee heads can be found on our Web site at <www.atheist-community.org/activism/committees>. Committee heads have some leeway in breaking up a fairly complex job into manageable pieces and recruiting help. If it's done right, the committee head can identify some minor roles that people can fill to help out. For example, the TV show is a permanent activity of the ACA and there is a TV committee head. In putting on the show, there is a need for producers, camera operator, call screener, host, and co-hosts. While the

people who fill these roles may change over time, the role they play is relatively permanent. For many of these roles, multiple people can fill them and, in some cases, there are apprentices who are in various stages of learning the ropes for the more challenging roles.

One of the things that is not so obvious from the committee Web page is the fact that there are some vacancies and a number of places where more volunteer help is needed. Currently, we would like to find people to fill (or apprentice) in a number of major roles:

- **Fundraising coordinator** — a person who would help the ACA meet long term fundraising needs.
- **Lecture coordinator** — a person to find speakers for the ACA lecture series, handle publicity, and run the event.
- **Newsletter editor** — a person who would handle the logistics of finding high quality articles for the newsletter and making sure deadlines are met.
- **TV producer** — We would like to return to having a second weekly showing of *The Atheist Experience*, but weekly work would be needed in transforming the video of the show so that it would meet the technical requirements for re-airing.

Besides these roles, there are smaller opportunities for volunteers related to all the committees. If you are interested in helping, your contribution would be welcome. You don't need to jump in with both feet, but some commitment will be required. Please use the committee structure to contact the appropriate person and see how you might best help out. ■

ACA CALENDAR

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4

- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5

- 7:30-10 p.m.: Movie Night (Mike Swift's House)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6

- 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7

- 12:15-1:45 p.m.: ACA Lecture Series: Speaker & Topic TBA (Austin History Center)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7

- 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10), will not air due to pre-emption.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11

- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

- 10-11 a.m.: Board Meeting (Romeo's, outside)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

- 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

- 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17

- 7 p.m.-?: Bowling Night (300 Austin Lanes)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18

- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

- 11 a.m.-12 p.m.: Adopt-a-street Clean Up (Jack-in-the-Box, Burnet Rd. & Anderson Ln.)

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State/Church Separation Rally at the Capitol

—by Don Baker

On Saturday, September 8, 2007, American Atheists hosted a State/Church Separation Rally at the Texas State Capitol. The main purposes of the rally was to raise support for church-state separation and draw attention to the large number of religiously motivated bills that the Texas State legislature has considered and passed in the recent session. The rally also drew support for the Croft family in Carrollton who has sued over the moment of silence in their public school.

The rally, which was held on the South steps of the Capitol building, drew speakers from all over Texas and a few representing national organizations including American Atheists, Alabama Atheists, Austin Brights, Freethinkers at the University of Texas at Arlington, Freethinkers Association of Central Texas, Corpus Christi Atheists, The Rational Response Squad, Activist Patrick Greene of San Antonio, Metroplex Atheists, Atheist Agenda at UT San Antonio, UT San Antonio Chapter of the Secular Student Alliance, and the Atheist Community of Austin. Board member

Shilling Cadena spoke on behalf of the ACA. Joe Broome performed a song for the event.

The event drew over 100 people, who unfortunately had to huddle in the shade from the midday Texas heat. Many of the groups from around the state brought signs and banners to display. Only a handful of ACA members turned out on what was a busy weekend for our members.

The event drew a good amount of media attention from Austin, around the state, and even from some Christian radio stations. *The Austin American-Statesman* ran a photo from the event, but no story.

The event was organized and publicized through the efforts of ACA member Joe Zamecki in his capacity as the Texas state director of American Atheists. Joe put on a great event and promoted it in nearly every atheist-friendly venue. Without a doubt, the event was a success. He hopes to do it again next year—even bigger, of course. ■

Photos by Chuck Poutas.



Joe Zamecki speaks on the Capitol steps.



Protestors display individual messages.



Protestors display banner message.

ACA CALENDAR

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20

• 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21

• 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24

• 8 p.m.-?: Billiards Night (Side Pocket Billiards)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25

• 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

• 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

- **300 Austin Lanes**, 9504 N IH 35, Southbound feeder, just North of Rundberg, 512.834.7733.
- **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- **Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas**, 4300 North Lamar Boulevard, 512.206.1266.
- **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.
- **Mike Swift's house**, log in to the ACA Web site for details.
- **Romeo's**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.
- **Side Pocket Billiards**, 10701 N Lamar Blvd., between Rundberg and Braker, 512.834.2742.

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <<http://www.atheist-community.org/calendar>> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin

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ATHEIST EVE

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