

A U S T I N

Atheist

July-August 2009 • Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin **ACA**

Volume 2 • Issue 12

The Show Must Go On

—by Don Baker

The *Atheist Experience* crew got some unwelcome news in May. The Channel Austin studios would be closed for the entire summer for renovations, leaving *The Atheist Experience* without a studio home. While the studio is getting a much-needed upgrade, a three-month hiatus would erode the show's momentum and viewer interest. On the other hand, the crew has been putting on shows nearly every week for years and a "summer vacation" would be a welcome time to take a break from the grind. Consider that most prime-time television shows produce about 40 hours of television a year and we produce over 70. That's a lot of content.

Several things tipped the balance in favor of keeping the show going. First, being without a studio provided a good excuse to see whether we could really produce a show on our own. We have various members who have seriously considered creating new content streams. Gaining experience is

good. We are also moving toward having our own building and we will definitely have a studio in it. Next, we know that Austin's cable access situation is based on a re-newing contract between the cable companies and the city. It could all go away with a few months' notice. It wouldn't hurt to have some sort of backup plan in case things went sour there. Finally, we are starting to have a solid, international viewer base watching via our live video stream of the show on ustream. With several hundred live viewers, it shouldn't be too hard to scare up a stream of live callers for the summer.

Atheist Experience producer Frank Paschal took up the challenge. He took our video camcorder that we use for lectures, combined it with a video splitter and a computer or two, a DVD recorder, and a few other items and came up with a mini-studio on a portable piece of pegboard (see the picture). What a guy! Matt Dillahunty adapted the soundboard that he uses for the *Non-Prophets* radio shows



Frank Paschal with video portion of the portable studio.

and set up a Skype (Internet telephone) input for our callers via his own computer. The summer shows are being broadcast from a 100-square-foot portion of Matt's bedroom, affectionately known as *Dillahunty International Studios*. Matt's couch serves as the seat for the hosts. Matt and Martin Wagner did the first show on June 14th, which went off without a hitch. Martin called the setup "Guerilla TV," and the name seems to have stuck.

We've learned that we can do the show without a studio on relatively short notice. That should give us some confidence in setting up future Guerilla TV efforts. Skype is a good combination with ustream as that portion of our audience is

already at their computers watching the show and they're pretty tech-savvy. As a bonus, the audio quality is much better than the Channel Austin studios due to the *Non-Prophets* soundboard, Skype, and our full control over the electronics. With luck, the summer studio upgrades will improve the audio quality there. We may try to use Skype in the upgraded studio when we return at the end of the summer, but that decision is pending. We're looking forward to getting back to the real studio at the end of the summer. Matt wants his room back. ■

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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.

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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

ACA at the 2009 Pride Festival

—by Don Baker

ACA was one of about 100 organizations with booths at the 2009 Pride Festival this year. The half-day event was held June 6, in Republic Square Park. This year's shorter time frame and relatively limited space made for a more intense and fun experience, with less heat exhaustion for the volunteers.

The event was similar to previous years with food, community organizations, bands, and interesting people. The headlining group was the Austin Baptist Women, who sang religious themed songs with slightly modified lyrics. The event ran from 4 p.m.–8 p.m. with the Pride Parade following after and into the night. ACA member Joe Zamecki shot festival video that gives a sense of what was going on. Jen Peeples held "man on the street" interviews, asking people, "what does 'atheist' mean to you?" The results were surprising.

ACA UPDATES

ACA Business Items

- The ACA is up to 130 members.
- Keith Berka will replace Shilling Cadena, who resigned his board position. Keith will be confirmed at the August 2 membership meeting, where members will confirm Treasurer (John Iacoletti) and Secretary (Don Baker).
- Membership fees will rise for the March 2010 renewal period. Fees will be \$30, \$15, and \$45 for individuals, students, and families, respectively.

2009 Bat Cruise

ACA will hold the popular Bat Cruise, September 26, 2009, 6 p.m.–8 p.m. We encourage out-of-town visitors to join us for the cruise and other festivities that day. Members are encouraged to invite friends and purchase tickets early. Tickets are \$20. More details will be on the Web site as they become available.



Above: Russell, John, and Chuck man the booth. Jen (left) conducts interviews.

The Pride Festival is a great opportunity to gain visibility in a setting where most participants are progressive and more likely receptive to our message. Our presence sends a message that we exist and are happy to support others. While the ACA has been active and visible in Austin for 11 years, there are still many people who are surprised we exist. These Community events allow us to interact with those people and tell them a little about what we do as a group.

Below is an excerpt from our *Why Atheists Care about Gay Rights* handout:

With regard to same-sex marriage, we have yet to hear of a valid secular reason for barring consenting adults from entering contracts, which is what marriage is. Nearly all of the obstacles to gay rights stem from religious conservatives as a result of their religious beliefs. While they are entitled to their opinions, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees that the government cannot make laws that favor particular religions, even if they are in the majority. Our Constitution exists to protect the minority from the whims of the majority.

We had a very visible booth. We situated it against the flow

of people, and our new banner was clearly visible from a distance through the crowd. We gave out FFRF non-tracts, stickers, newsletters, tri-folds, and a blurb about why the ACA supports gay rights. About 80 people visited our booth, many admitting they are atheists and a maddening few who said they never knew there was an Austin atheist group. We got two memberships at the event.

Austin's mascot, Leslie, dropped by to chat with us about his lack of belief. One young woman came by and dramatically told us we changed her life. She said she had been a fence-sitter on the atheism thing for many years; after hearing our arguments (on the *Atheist Experience*) she became an avowed atheist. We had three people come to the Festival just to see us. A couple from Philadelphia visited for a few hours and joined us for dinner afterward. This year's volunteer crew included Jen Peeples, John Iacoletti, Chuck Clark, Russell Tomlinson, and Lisa Mais. Don Baker organized the ACA's participation. Thanks to the Atheist Longhorns for loaning us their canopy. ■

Pride 2009 Walkabout

—by Jen Peeples

This year's Pride Festival was an interesting experience for me. For awhile now I've been curious about why so many LGBT people cling to religion, especially since their religions are often explicitly hostile to the LGBT community. I had originally planned to put together a written survey to explore this topic. Then, as we got closer to the day of the Festival and reality set in, I realized that what I had originally planned to do was unworkable. It was at that point that a new idea crystallized in my head—instead of a formal written survey, I'd do informal interviews. The result was what I call my

"Walkabout Interviews."

In these interviews, I had just a few basic questions. The first of these was, "If I say the word 'atheist', what does that mean to you?" The second was essentially the same question about the word "agnostic." I asked these questions because I have long suspected there is widespread confusion about what those words mean. Turns out, my suspicions were correct. I put together a compilation of some of these interviews, which Don Baker has posted on the ACA Pride Festival scrapbook page <atheist-community.org/scrapbooks/2009pride.php>. Head over and have a listen

when you get a spare six minutes. Keep these responses in mind the next time you see a survey of the number of atheists in America. Depending on how well (or how poorly) the survey was constructed, the respondents might not be answering the question the researchers asked!

The next two questions I asked each respondent were more personal. The first of these was, "What are your religious beliefs?" Answers ranged from none/atheist to assorted Christian denominations to the vague "look at the trees/I'm spiritual" bullshit.

As you may have guessed, the previous question was a staging point for my real interest: "How do you reconcile your religious beliefs with your sexuality?" Most people will, when confronted with information that conflicts with a deeply held belief, go to almost any length to rationalize the belief. I didn't realize just how poignantly that was illustrated in my interviews until I listened to them later. I interviewed people who choose to ignore their religion's condemnation of them, others who embrace it and claim that it's something that brings them closer to their god, and a very interesting interview in which a MTF transsexual told me that the Bible passages that condemn homosexuality were just mistranslated! I'm slowly putting together a compilation of those portions of the interviews and will post them, probably on YouTube, once they're finished.

The Walkabout Interviews were not only fun, they were enlightening. The audio-only format seemed less intimidating to people, and I'm willing to sacrifice video to get people to talk. I also took great care to be as nonconfrontational as possible. Even with that approach, I did get some refusals. I wish I could've filmed the refusals; every one of them happened when I said I was from the Atheist Community of Austin. The instant they heard the word "atheist," everything changed. Some of them even refused to look at me after that, and one woman nearly tripped while trying to get away from me. I'm not that scary—really! I guess it just goes to show that we still have a lot of work to do.

I'll definitely be doing more Walkabouts in the future, and I have a few ideas for possible venues and other topics. If anyone in the ACA has any ideas, I'd love to hear them. ■

ACA CALENDAR

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

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

• **5:30 p.m.-?:** *Dark Flow night out* (Contact Lisa Mais)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2

• **12:15-1:45 p.m.:** *ACA Lecture Series* (Austin History Center) *Former Texas State Science Director Chris Comer on "Standing up for Science in Texas"; free.*

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Live only on ustream for the summer)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Pluckers at Lakeline Mall)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

• **12:30-1:30 p.m.:** *Board Meeting* (Romeo's (outside))

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Live only on ustream for the summer)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Pluckers at Lakeline Mall)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

• **7-8:15 p.m.:** *CFI Austin Food for Thought Lecture* (Old Quarry Branch Library, 7051 Village Center Dr.) *Dr. Ernest Lundelius on "One Million BC: What the Pleistocene Fauna tells us about our Past Climate"; Free.*

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

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

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

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Live only on ustream for the summer)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Pluckers at Lakeline Mall)

TUESDAY, AUGUST 18

• **6 p.m.-?:** *Dark Flow Happy Hour* (Contact Lisa Mais)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Live only on ustream for the summer)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Pluckers at Lakeline Mall)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

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

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

• **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting* at Romeo's (Romeo's)

• **4:30-6 p.m.:** *The Atheist Experience* (Live only on ustream for the summer)

• **6:30 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Pluckers at Lakeline Mall)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

• **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.

• **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.

• **Romeo's**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.

• **Threadgill's**, 301 West Riverside Drive (at Barton Springs Rd.)

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 <www.atheist-community.org/calendar> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin

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ATHEIST EVE

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Why atheists and theists have trouble communicating.

It's not just different ways of looking at the same thing.
It's a fundamental divide in the understanding of how to navigate reality.

What an atheist expects

...with regard to rejecting a claim:

1. We hear a claim.
2. We check to make sure the claim corresponds to the best and most current information available to us regarding reality.
3. If the claim fails to correspond we judge that it is false.

What an atheist gets

...from a fundamentalist Christian:

1. Theist hears a claim.
2. Theist checks to make sure the claim corresponds to their religious doctrine, model of god, and/or Biblical interpretation.
3. If the claim fails to correspond, the theist judges the claim is false, even if it is based upon the best and most current information available to us regarding reality.

Why an atheist gives up:

The universe can't be more than 10,000 years old -- Cosmologists must be wrong. The Earth is probably the same age -- Geologists use untrustworthy dating methods. Evolution isn't happening, biologists are mistaken. But I'm sure Jesus walked on water, Jonah spent 3 days in the stomach of a giant fish, and there once was a talking serpent.



Atheist wear available at www.cafepress.com/atheist_eve