Howdy! Well it’s April of 2006, and guess what that is! It’s the ten year birthday month for our group, the Atheist Community of Austin. In this issue, we present a brief history of the ACA. I’m very proud to say that my name appears there a few times. :o)

This just in: We’ll have a booth at the Austin Gay & Lesbian Pride Festival (http://www.pridetexas.org/), Saturday, June 10th at Waterloo Park (East of Downtown on 15th St.). The festival runs from Noon to 8pm. We’ll be handing out fliers, meeting people, selling products, people watching, and having fun. We’ll need volunteers to help set up, tear down, and staff the booth. If you would like to contact Don Baker, who is coordinating this all, he’s at: dbaker@atheist-community.org.

Also we’re trying something new, to save on the cost of publishing and mailing out this newsletter. If you’d like to pick up your monthly Atheist Community News at a meeting of the ACA, and be removed from our mailing list, so we don’t have to spend the .83 cents it costs to mail it to you each month, please let us know, and we’ll do that for you. Of course we still love the mail and we’d still love to mail you this newsletter, but cost is a concern. It’s your call. Either way, enjoy!

Submissions? Send ‘em! joezamecki@hotmail.com
Thanks and enjoy! :o)

In This Issue...
-----National Convention Month!
-----Letters to the Editor! Finally!
-----Focus on a Texas Local Atheist Group Activism
-----Scouting for All in Action!
-----and much more!
The Atheist Community of Austin is a local non-profit educational 501(c)3 organization founded in 1996, and is affiliated with American Atheists Inc., the American Humanist Association, and the Council for Secular Humanism, and is a member group of the Atheist Alliance International. The ACA is a democratically run organization. Board meetings are held every second Sunday of the month, and all members are welcome to attend, but only board members may vote. Board elections are held every year in May. If you’d like to run for a position, now’s the time to tell the board. Two new positions will be created this May: president and vice-president, so “Don’t stop thinkin’ about tomorrow, don’t stop--It’ll soon be here! It’ll be here, better than before, yesterday’s gone, yesterday’s gone!”

Regular membership in the ACA costs just $24 per year, and the membership year begins in March. You can join anytime though. We also offer student, family, senior and life memberships.

The ACA hosts a monthly lecture at the Austin History Center at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. This is a community service, and a means of disseminating information and ideas of interest to Atheists and the greater Austin community. Lecture topics usually focus on core areas of Atheist interest such as science, skepticism, the impact of religion, philosophy, church-state separation and community activism. Lectures are scheduled on the 3rd Sunday of every month starting at 12:30 pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free.

Atheist Community News is mailed free to paid members of the Atheist Community of Austin as an unofficial benefit of membership. But of course there is a cost to send it in the mail, so if you’d like to save us that postage, we’ll be glad to take you off of our mailing list, and then you can just pick up your copy at the regular meetings. We’ll try to make sure that there are plenty of copies available at each regular meeting. Just e-mail your editor at joezamecki@hotmail.com or call at (512)382-9283, and I’ll make it so.
Editorial...

Everything changes, so do newsletters!

Howdy folks! Well some things have changed in the newsletter printing department lately, so here they are:

We’ve been getting this newsletter reproduced by a couple of different print shops in Austin. This April issue was the third issue we’ve had done by a print shop. Thomas Graphics dropped us, suddenly, and won’t work for us anymore. They said it was because our job was too small, and didn’t justify them putting larger jobs on hold to squeeze us in. Apparently they have only one copy machine suitable for our job.

I don’t really believe that reason though. I think it’s because they’re an extremely conservative business, and our newsletter was just too much for them to stomach. Oh well, no big deal.

So that gave me a great reason to look for a new printer and at a better cost, and I found a very good one.

Austin Business Printing is located on W. Powell Lane, very close to my home, in North Austin. They don’t seem conservative at all, and they said our job was certainly not too small for them. Anyway, the big improvement is in the price.

We paid $180. for the February issue at Thomas Graphics after a sizable discount due to their delays.. Now I can get the same size newsletter done at Austin Business Printing for about $170. The main differences besides the price are: We wouldn’t get color, and the cover page would be the same paper as the rest of the newsletter, not card stock. It will still be a great newsletter. The third difference is that we’d be getting this from a company that charges less in general anyway. Not much savings for such a reduction in quality of the newsletter, right? I agree.

That’s three ways I have reduced the cost, and I will try more with each issue. I have also decided to print a very prominent notice in the newsletter saying that if you’d like to be taken off the mailing list so you can get this at the membership meetings, and save us money on postage, please e-mail or call me, the editor, and it shall be done.

Also I need to apologize to our readers and authors for the shabby editing and print job that was done on the February 2006 issue. We’re with a much better printer now, and I know a lot more about what NOT to do in the editing process. My strongest apologies go to Lt. Todd Walker, whose article had a number of errors in it.

We’ll be working with the members, board, and our new printer to reduce costs and elevate quality. For now, we’re very happy with Austin Business Printing. I pledge to keep you up to date on that situation, and in this issue, we include more discussion about it, in the form of letters to the editor! Finally! :o)

Well April is quite a happening month for us freethinkers. First there will be two simultaneous national conventions of interest for us. The Atheist Alliance in Kansas City, Kansas, and American Atheists in San Antonio, Texas. Decisions, decisions...

In this issue, we feature more updated information about both conventions. Please speak up at a meeting or through e-mail if you’d like to car-pool or share a train with someone going to one of these events.

April is also a very active month for lots of religious groups. In April, Pagans will be celebrating Beltane by dancing around maypoles, symbolizing the mystery of the Sacred Marriage of Goddess and God, Hindus will be celebrating Hanuman Jayanti, the festival that marks the birth of Hanuman, the Monkey God, and Sikhs will be celebrating Vaisakhi, the Sikh New Year Festival, which also commemorates the founding of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) in 1699.

Oh boy! Isn’t Christianity boring! Also, and this may be of more importance to Atheists than anything else above, Buddhists will be celebrating Therevada New Year, the New Year festival for Theravada Buddhists, celebrated for three days from the first full moon day in April.

Since a whole lot of Buddhists are also Atheists, Happy New Year! April 22nd is Earth Day, April 13th is Thomas Jefferson’s and Madalyn O’Hair’s birthday, and April 28th is Arbor Day.

I’d also like to take some space here to invite you to Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Spring Road, just West of South Lamar. That’s where we have our regular weekly membership meetings. One thing that Romeo’s has on every other place we’ve had meetings at is the food department. This is high quality Italian food, and on Sundays, there’s a good Sunday brunch menu that includes eggs Benedict, shrimp cocktail, and spicy Bloody Marys.

We have a very nice meeting area in the front window of the restaurant, and it fits us well. Now that’s where the irony is, it fits us well now, but we’d like to have the old familiar “problem” of having too many people at a meeting and not enough space. We should have such problems!

As a local Atheist group, we have a lot of members, but the vast majority of you don’t come to any of our meetings. Frankly, you’re missing out, because our meetings are great fun. So c’mon to a meeting! You’ll be glad you did. :o)

Now, two very important things:

If you would like to save the ACA a few dollars per year on postage, and just pick up your monthly ACA newsletter at regular weekly meetings, instead of us mailing it to you, please let us know, and we’ll take you off of the mailing list. You can e-mail us at: joezamecki@hotmail.com or call 512-382-9283. Also March is membership renewal month. Notice that we have included an ACA membership application in this and other newsletter issues. Please feel free to cut it out and snail-mail it to our PO Box. And if you have an Atheist friend who doesn’t yet know about our group, please feel free to share this copy of the newsletter with them. We have plenty more newsletters at the regular membership meetings. See you there! JZ
## ACA Event Details

--- **Lecture Series**
We hold our monthly lectures at the Austin History Center, at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. We hold them on the third Sunday of each month and they start at 12:30pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free, and it’s open to the public.

--- **Board Meetings**
We hold our board meetings on the second Sunday of the month, and lately we’ve held them at the very large Schlotzky’s at the corner of South Lamar and Toomey St., just South of Town Lake. That starts at 10:00am and usually lasts till 11:30am. All members are welcome, but only board members may vote at those board meetings.

--- **Happy Hour!**
We meet for Happy Hour at Antonio’s Tex Mex on Thursdays, at 7:30pm. That’s on I-35 Southbound side, just South of Research/183 and just North of St. Johns.

--- **Regular Weekly Meetings**
Sundays at 11:30am at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Springs Rd. just West of South Lamar. We meet in the front room, that’s separated a bit from the rest of the place.

--- **TV Show**
The Atheist Experience is our tv show. It airs on Time-Warner Cable, public access channel 10, from 4:30pm - 6:00pm every Sunday. It’s a live call-in talkshow, so feel free to call in with comments and questions for the show and their audience. Members of the ACA are also invited to visit the tv studio during the show, as live studio audience members. This show is also repeated, taped, on Tuesdays at 4:30pm on Channel 10. We also need volunteer help on the show from time to time, so if you’re interested in helping out, or if you think you’d like to be a guest on the show, please e-mail: tv@atheist-community.org

--- **Radio Show**
“The Non-Prophets” is a regular live internet radio show on the Freethought Radio Network. It airs on alternate Saturdays from 2 PM to 3:30 PM (3-4:30 PM Eastern time) at www.freethoughtradio.com. Just click on “Listen”. The show is hosted by Jeff Dee, co-hosted by Denis Loubet and produced by Russell Glasser.

--- **Public Demonstrations**
Once in a while, we grab picket signs and cameras and hit the pavement in public on issues of importance to us. Usually these can’t be scheduled far in advance, so announcements about demonstrations will likely only be heard at regular membership meetings. The last demonstration we held was at the Texas State Capitol Building on 11th at Congress Ave. We picketed the National Day of Prayer ritual/rally/bad concert held on the steps of the Capitol Building. Around 20 Atheists picketed. It was fun!

--- **Godless Gamers**
is held at Russell Glasser’s house, email rglasser@apollowebsworks.com for address and directions. We play all sorts of games. Strategy games, board games, role playing games, party games. It just depends on what people bring. Some recent favorites: Siege of Avalon: a board game where all the players work together to fight back the forces of darkness, find the holy grail, and fill the round table with good knights. The interesting part is that there is sometimes a traitor who works against the others. Apples to Apples: A subjective word association game, where players vote on each other’s use of random objects to match a description. For instance, “scary” is matched with “Michael Jackson”; “enormous” with “black holes”, and so on.

--- **May 4 is the National Day of Prayer. We intend to picket again. More info soon<<<<**
The 2006 national convention for the Atheist Alliance will be held this month, at the Airport Marriott in Kansas City, where their special room rate for one to four people is $65 a night. Julia Sweeney will be there to accept the Richard Dawkins award. The first freethought lobbyist in Washington, DC, Lori Lipman Brown will speak, and author-activist Fred Whitehead will talk. Atheist Alliance 1-866-HERETIC or try this: http://atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.html

The 2006 American Atheists national convention will be held this month in San Antonio, Texas at the Marriott Rivercenter in the heart of the Riverwalk District. Among their speakers will be Michael Shermer. Further into this newsletter, we feature more info on that, and for more info from American Atheists: (908)276-7300 and www.atheists.org

The American Humanist Association’s next national event will be the 2006 AHA CONFERENCE: “The Wave of Reason.” It’ll be the 65th annual Conference of the AHA, and will be held May 11-14, 2006 at the lovely Tampa Airport Marriott in Tampa, Florida at the Tampa International Airport Phone: 1-813-879-5151, Toll-Free: 1-800-564-3440. Make sure to mention the American Humanist Association to take advantage of the $99 special guest room rate (single/double.) Reservations must be made before April 18 for this rate to apply. Speakers will include Lori Lipman Brown, Margaret Downey, and Michael Newdow. The American Humanist Association’s Washington DC office has more info: (800) 837-3792 or: Conference@AmericanHumanist.org

The Council for Secular Humanism had its national convention this year in Tampa, Florida, and the Center for Inquiry of Florida hosted.

When another national event is announced on their website, we’ll reprint that info here.

In the immortal words of Northview Harvest Ministries, “staying in bed shouting ‘oh God’ does not constitute going to church.” Activism Now!
ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, Inc.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please print) Last Name ____________________ Name ____________________ Initial _______

Street Address ____________________

City ____________________ State ______ ZIP__________

Phone (_______)__________________ e-mail ______________________________________

ACA PURPOSES (ACA Constitution, April 6, 1997)

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community, to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the first amendment principle of state-church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

I affirm that I am without belief in god(s), and, that I have read and agree with the "Purposes" of the Atheist Community of Austin.

Affirmation Signature ________________________ Date ___________

ACA membership begins on March 1 of every year.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

$________ Individual $24 per year. Prorated at $2 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Student/Retired $12 per year. Prorated at $1 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Family $36 per year. Prorated at $3 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Lifetime membership. $1,000.

And lastly, how did you first hear of the Atheist Community of Austin?
Action Alert from Scouting for All

For Immediate Release and Distribution
(Please distribute this action alert)

February 26, 2006

For further Information Contact
Scott Cozza, Pres. Scouting for All
Tel. 707-778-0564
Email: Cozzahived@aol.com

www.scoutingforall.org

Rally / Protest & Candlelight Vigil at the Boy Scouts of America’s National Conference, Washington DC

Scouting for All is asking for your support in getting the word out to current and past BSA members and to those who believe in social justice. We will be holding a protest / rally and candlelight vigil at the BSA’s annual national conference. This year the national conference is being held in Washington, DC May 24-26.

We will be reading the names of those scouts who have turned in their scouting awards to Scouting for All in protest of the BSA’s national leadership’s policy of discrimination against gay and atheist youth and adults. We’d like current and prior BSA members to wear their uniforms. We want the National Leadership to see that members oppose its bigoted policy. National leaders from BSA National and BSA leaders from throughout the country will be in attendance at this conference. So a large number wearing uniforms will send a strong message to BSA leadership, that there is no room in scouting for bigotry and discrimination.

We are asking you to please get the word out to especially Eagle Scouts, current BSA members and prior members to stand with us on May 24th and 25th. The issue at hand is pretty simple. How can we as a nation support any organization that discriminates against any segment of our society? Those who believe in justice and human rights for all should be offended by the BSA’s policy. The Boy Scouts of America’s national leadership through its exclusive policy gives out a dehumanizing message about the homosexual and atheist / non theist communities. According to the BSA’s national leadership, GLBT and atheist people are not moral and are not good Americans simply because of their sexual orientation and atheistic belief. Currently our own Federal Government supports this discriminatory organization. President Bush is even the Honorary President of the BSA. Our own tax payer money is used to support the Boy Scouts of America and its discriminatory practice.

Scouting for All is asking YOU to step forth and speak out. Join us on May 24th and 25th. Become a courageous voice against discrimination, bigotry, and homophobia.

This Year's Theme - “Let's Include All Youth In Scouting: Gay & Atheist / Nontheist

Program of Events

- Press Conference - May 24, Wednesday, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, 2660 Woodley Rd. NW; Washington, DC, 10:30 - 12:00 Noon

1. We are looking for speakers from the BSA current and prior member, PFLAG, GLSEN, HRC, NGLTF, NOW, LGBT leaders and youth from the DC area, religious and atheist leaders. Each speaker will have 2-3 minutes to speak.

Please call or email Scott Cozza

- Protest / Rally - May 24, Wednesday, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, 2660 Woodley Rd. NW; Washington, DC, 09:00 AM - 05:00 PM

- May 25, Wednesday, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, 2660 Woodley Rd. NW; Washington, DC, 09:00 AM - 12:00 Noon

- Candlelight Vigil - May 24, Wednesday, meeting at 07:00 PM; The parade route for the Candlelight Vigil is yet to be determined. It will end in front of the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. The Candlelight Vigil is being held in memory of those GLBT and Q youth who committed suicide because they felt like they did not belong, rejected.

* Please join us at the Press Conference, Protest / Rally and Candlelight Vigil. Let Scott Cozza know if you’ll be joining us.

For more info: 707-778-0564 or www.scoutingforall.org
Thursday, February 16, 2006

To: ACA board of Directors

From: ACA Board member Keith Berka

As most of you know, I am ever watchful against waste with respect to unnecessary spending from the ACA treasury. Last week I outlined what I felt was wasteful and foolhardy spending from the treasury. By this letter I hope to go on record in writing with my protest against the continued printing and mailing of the paper version of the newsletter to our membership. Last week the board voted to table the matter of suspending money on the paper version of the newsletter for later consideration. I voted against tabling the issue because it will cause us to spend money unnecessarily. Here are the facts as I brought them to everyone’s attention and I want them to go on record.

Facts:

1. The newsletter is free for everyone to read at our web site and a paper version is not needed.
2. The cost of printing and snail mailing the newsletters is not necessary and cannot be justified through critical reasoning.
3. The cost per person to provide the snail mail version of the newsletter per year is $45.60 per each member. Roughly $3465.00 per year.
4. Many members would rather read the newsletter for free from our website than for the board to waste any money from the treasury for it.
5. Every month that the board allows the snail mail version to be mailed out cost the ACA a minimum of $288.00. $577.60 will be spent while we table the matter of the snail mail paper version of the newsletter.
6. ACA takes in only about $24.00 per person per year from membership dues. Roughly $1824.00 from members. It costs us $3465.00 for the newsletters. We don’t need to spend any of it on the newsletter because people can get the newsletter for free from the web site.
7. I cannot in good conscience accept this. We could use this money for the TV programs and equipment.

In view of these facts, please remove me from the mailing list with respect to receiving the paper version of the newsletter. Please add this letter to the minutes of the last ACA board meeting. Please supply a copy of this letter for publication by the editor of the next ACA newsletter. Please direct that it be added to the next web (free version) newsletter.

Respectfully Yours,

Keith Berka
Board Member
To the Editor,

There is a proposal before the Board of Directors to cease the publication and distribution of the paper copies of the ACA newsletter. Before any action is taken by the Board, I do hope that the feelings of the general membership are taken into consideration.

The printed newsletter is a somewhat expensive undertaking; however, it does provide several valuable functions, and there are some good reasons for keeping it.

An argument was made that the newsletter can be read online. This does not take into consideration that not all members have internet access. If we cease publication, we may be cutting off communication with a number of our members. Do we have so many members that those without easy access to computers are expendable?

Some members who work in front of a computer 8+ hours per day need to limit the amount of reading they do on a monitor for medical reasons.

It seems that at least half of our paid members don't attend any ACA events, and the newsletter is a tangible reminder of our organization, as well as a "benefit". Why should they pay dues if they aren't getting anything? We may "save" money by not printing it, but "lose" money in dues by losing paid members. I belong to a lot of organizations and get lots of e-mail links to newsletters for them, but getting that paper newsletter/magazine/newspaper in the mail gives me a connection to the group that keeps the organization in the forefront of my mind in a way that a link to an online newsletter doesn't.

Also, the newsletter should at least be continued for 2006, since anyone who has paid dues for this year was probably expecting to receive the newsletter. This is "bait and switch." The membership renewal form for next year (2007) should state that members will no longer receive a printed newsletter, if that is the case.

If the paper copy of the newsletter is discontinued, will there be a corresponding reduction in dues? Why not ask the members what they prefer? Perhaps a survey in the next newsletter?

Perhaps we could get some advertising to recoup some of the expenses? (of course, I'm not sure that anyone would pay for something that goes out to such a small group.) Or just print 10 issues a year? (or 10 big issues and 2 smaller issues that include a calendar of the next month's events? or 8/4 big/small?)

Sometimes you have to spend money to grow. The newsletter could be viewed as an investment. Let's make sure that discontinuing the printed version is not a false economy.

I am enclosing a check for $50 to be used toward the publication of a printed newsletter, and I encourage other ACA members to contribute what they can toward this and/or other ACA projects.

Susan Brown, ACA Member and Former Co-Chair

Dear Fellow Board Members -

I appreciate Keith's concern for spending. I consider myself a conservative concerning the spending of ACA funds, and want to resist unnecessary and/or frivolous expenses as much as we can. It is important to guard these funds closely, and spend them wisely, and carefully.

Having said that, I still would favor a printed newsletter. I find that only a copy on our website does not entirely fulfill what it can do for me. To give an example or two, I like to display a copy on my coffee table for those who would have no intention of visiting our site. I carry a copy in my car to show or give to someone that would never visit our site. It's a way to select just a specific article of interest to show someone that would not go to our site. I've even been known to leave a copy in a waiting room with other magazines, and newsletters. A hard copy can do things that only a copy at our website can't. In this case, I consider it money well spent.

Finally, not that this is a reason to provide a hard printed version of the newsletter in itself, but every other atheist/freethinker/humanist organization I know of has one. Even those with much smaller, and limited treasuries than ours.

My $.02 worth - Chuck Clark, ACA Board Member

Your Editor responds:

Well a vote was held at the March board meeting, Sunday March 12. The vote was on whether to end publication of the print newsletter for now, until further arrangements are made with respect to the newsletter. It was a landslide in favor of keeping the print newsletter going for now. There will be more votes on this issue at future board meetings, for sure. For now, I pledge to find more ways to reduce the cost of the print newsletter while holding onto the quality of this publication. I believe that the ACA deserves nothing less than to have the finest print newsletter that any local Atheist group ever had. I'd also like it to be known that I appreciate Keith for doing this. We need a fiscally conservative voice on the board to remind us of our responsibility to use only cost effective methods of operating this group. I thank everyone who spoke up on both sides. JZ :o)
National Convention Time!

American Atheists 32nd National Convention 2006 ~ San Antonio, Texas, April 14-16. Here is some updated info on speakers:

FRANK ZINDLER is Editor of American Atheist Magazine and Director of American Atheists Press. A former university biology instructor, he is also a professional linguist with a specialty involving ancient languages.

Mr. Zindler is the author of numerous articles and several books on Atheism and related history, including a special annotated edition of Part Three of THE AGE OF REASON by Thomas Paine. He is a member of several learned societies including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, New York Academy of Science, Society of Biblical Literature and the American Schools of Oriental Research. Mr. Zindler is also nationally recognized figure in the ongoing debate over creationist pseudoscience and evolution. In his recent book The Jesus the Jews Never Knew, Zindler examines all Jewish writings surviving from the first centuries of the current era and concludes that the ancient Jews not only never heard of Jesus of Nazareth, they never heard of Nazareth either! At the Convention, Mr. Zindler will speak on “The Theopolitics of Intelligent Design Creationism.” There will be a book signing following his talk.

EDDIE TABASH is a constitutional lawyer in Beverly Hills, California. He graduated magna cum laude from UCLA in 1973 and obtained his law degree from Loyola Law School of Los Angeles in 1976. He is a life member of American Atheists. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Council for Secular Humanism.

From 1995--2002, he chaired the national legal committee of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He has represented the Atheistic viewpoint in formal debates against some of the world’s foremost Christian philosophers, including Peter Van Inwaagen, William Lane Craig, and Richard Swinburne. His topics for public speeches and debates include the separation of church and state and the question of the existence of God.

Tabash is a member of the California State Bar, the American Bar Association, the Los Angeles County Bar Association, and the Beverly Hills Bar Association. He has successfully argued cases before the California Supreme Court. He serves as a part time judge on the Los Angeles County Superior Court. Eddie Tabash is also one of the founders of the effort to organize Atheists in the quest to elect people who don’t believe in God to significant public office. In 2000, he was the only known Atheist to be a major contender for a seat in a state legislature, coming in second out of four in a Democratic Primary for the California State Assembly. He serves on the state central committee and platform committee of the California Democratic Party. Eddie’s topic will be: The True Meaning of “Separation of Church and State”

The Sunday Morning Forum

AACON XXXII Inaugurates a “New Tradition” at our conventions, The Sunday Morning Forum…

The Forum will feature debates, panels and other formal discussions to provoke, enlighten and inform! This year’s Convention will feature a 2-hour formal debate between constitutional attorney Edwin Kagin and Christian evangelist and writer Bob Siegel. The Proposition is: “RESOLVED: There is a God”

Representing the YEA position will be Bob Siegel, Christian evangelist, apologist, writer, actor and radio talk show host, Bob Siege. Mr. Siegel converted to Christianity out of a Jewish family during his second year of college. He obtained his B.A. in Theater Arts from San Jose State University, and an M.A. in Bible Studies from Denver Theological Seminary. He is the author of two books, both dealing with Christianity; 13 full length plays; and has collaborated on and written/composed several musicals. He has also spoken to audiences throughout the country on religious and related issues, and debated leading freethinkers including the late Gordon Stein, Dan Barker, and Dr. Robert Price of the Jesus Seminar. Rev. Siegel is listed in Who’s Who In The West, and is the recipient of numerous outstanding professional reviews, nominations and awards for his dramatic literary work. More information can be found at bobsiegel.net.

Representing the NEA position will be Edwin Kagin, constitutional attorney and National legal Director for American Atheists. Edwin Kagin. Mr. Kagin is the son of a Presbyterian minister. He studied at the College of Wooster in Wooster Ohio; Park College in Parkville, Missouri; and took his law degree from the University of Louisville (School of Law) in Louisville, KT. He and wife Helen Kagin, a retired anesthesiologist, were co-founders of Camp Quest, a nationally prominent camp for Atheist, Freethinking, Humanist other non-believer youngsters. His the author of numerous articles dealing with legal and philosophical issues, and co-author of the book The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America. His latest work is Baubles of Blasphemy, a gathering of irreverent and insightful essays and poetry. Mr. Kagin is listed in Who’s Who in Hell published by Barricade Books. More information is available at edwinkagin.com.

www.atheists.org/convention or 908-276-7300
"We're not in Kansas anymore"

AAI Heads to the Heartland

For the first ever joint convention of the Atheist Alliance International with the Secular Student Alliance!

April 14-16, 2006 in beautiful Kansas City, Missouri

Speakers to date are:

Julia Sweeney, writer-actress, winner of this year’s Dawkins Award and author of Letting Go of God: My Beautiful Loss of Faith Story.

Lori Lipman Brown, freethought's first Washington lobbyist and Executive Director of the Secular Coalition of America.

Matt Cherry, President of the United Nations NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Executive Director of the Institute for Humanist Studies.

Dr. Fred Whitehead, freethought historian and author of Freethought on the American Frontier.

Dr. Ron Pine, Research Associate, Field Museum of Chicago and Permanent Visiting Scholar at the Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center, University of Kansas.

Dr. Paul Mirecki, Professor and past Departmental Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, the first to propose teaching ID as mythology.

August E. Brunsman IV, Executive Director of the Secular Student Alliance and Director of Camp Quest Classic.

Sessions on atheist parenting, lobbying for separation of church and state, as well as "Leaving the Fold: How Ex-ministers Did It" by Don Bell, Lee Dietz, and Mark Killingsworth and "Selling Atheism" hands-on training by Woody Kaplan ... And much more!

Reserve your space now!

Rooms are ready to be booked at the luxurious KC Marriott Hotel Airport for only $65 per night. You can also call the number below and ask for the Atheist Alliance's rate: code athatha.  (816) 464-2200  75 Brasilia Ave  Kansas City, Missouri 64153

Rates

Adults, full program ($195 after March 15)  $175 each*

Full-Time Students under 30.  (Student ID and proof of age will be required at desk)  No Cost

Meals with group for high school and adult students, under 30  $80*

Camp Quest, for children 4-14  $75*

Children under four, child care  $75

*Includes all meals: two dinners, two breakfasts, one lunch and Friday reception

For more information:  info@atheistalliance.org

Meet out lobbyist, Lori Lipman Brown here: www.secular.org
A Brief History of the ACA

In April of 1996, Kellen Von Houser contacted a few local atheists by e-mail. She proposed getting together at some centrally located eatery for the purpose of discussing atheism. Some time later, she placed an advertisement in the back of The Austin Chronicle. That small ad attracted the attention of a number of atheists, many of whom became very active in the group. The ACA exists because of one woman’s desire to end her atheist isolation and meet other atheists, and because of her willingness to work for it with her own time and money. Spike Tyson, director of American Atheists, also contacted local members and let them know about the new local group.

The group met at the Hot Jumbo Bagelery on the corner of West Fifth and Lavaca in downtown Austin. Things remained very informal for a number of months. In April and May there were about 12-14 people present, mostly members of American Atheists.

Early on, an Atheist e-mail discussion group was set up. This allowed atheists who couldn't make it to the bagel shop meetings a chance to engage in intelligent, reality-based conversation. By September however, meetings were down to only 8-10 people. Although 25-30 people had been attending meetings that summer, the disorganization and difficulty in hearing others talk in the bagelery must have frustrated many who showed up. Howard Thompson and Kellen discussed giving the meetings more structure so people knew what to expect. The group needed a “greeter”, (Keith Berka started it right from the first), identification of who showed up, a newsletter, business time, and social/discussion time. It was decided that at least a semi-formal group structure was needed and planning for more formally establishing the group commenced.

One of the first tasks was the naming of the group. The choices were narrowed down to: Atheist Community of Austin, Atheist Society of Austin, and Capital City Atheists. The name Atheist Community of Austin won by a landslide.

Through the efforts of Rodney Florence and others, Austin Mayor Todd signed our proclamation of November 21 1996 proclaiming November 22 - 29, 1996 as Give Thanks for State/Church Separation Week in Austin. While ACA itself cannot endorse candidates or political parties, a number of our members have become active in the political process. ACA has also taken part in a number of marches and walks to support civil liberties and other worthy causes.

On December 15th, 1996, twenty-one Austin area atheists gathered at the Hot Jumbo Bagelery for our 10:30 A.M. weekly Sunday meeting to establish our group as the: ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN. Our little ceremony included a brief speech, comments from each member, the reading of our Declaration of Intent, the signing of our Declaration and a toast. We now had about 30 members showing up during a month. Our newsletter was going out to about 60 Austin area atheists.

During the Sunday, February 1st meeting, the group approved the preamble (Statement of Purpose) of the ACA charter. Diane Mankedick, Jeff Dee, Howard Thompson, Cyndi Miller, Keith Berka, and others worked on the preamble. As of February 10th 1997, our small group was recognized by the Secretary of the State of Texas as the Atheist Community of Austin Inc. A Steering Committee, headed by Howard Thompson, began to meet to hammer out the organizational details. A separate Charter Committee was approved by the steering committee to write our charter. Our charter, constitution, and bylaws took some time to complete as many people had strong feelings as to how these important documents should be worded. Eventually consensus was reached and our charter and constitution were voted on and adopted in May of 1997. Don Rhodes and Kellen Von Houser served as the groups first Co-Coordinators and initial board members under the new charter.

If there are two things atheists like doing, they're reading and talking. It seems that many people come to the Bagelry armed with magazines, books and newspaper clippings to share with the group. To assist atheists in finding reading material, we established a lending library. Over the years it has been growing steadily. The Oral History Project is our effort to record the histories of atheists. It’s important to our stories be recorded.

By June of 1997, we had our web site. On it, internet surfers could find links to many other atheist sites. Eventually, a questionnaire was added as well as the newsletter. Now the newsletter, "The Atheist", including any images it may contain, can be downloaded as an Adobe Acrobat PDF file.

On October 17 1997, our cable access television show The Atheist Experience made its debut. One of the important features of the show was the live call-in format. Ray Blevins, the host of the show, was willing to take a chance on this highly unpredictable format. He was joined by co-host and ACA board member Joe Zamecki. At that time, the show was only an hour long and aired live every other Sunday. In September of 1998, the show was extended by half an hour. In December of 1999, the show began going out over the internet. Now anyone in the world with a computer could watch our show.

As with any new organization, we had our growing pains too. During the spring of 1998 our board of directors worked through its process for making formal decisions. We tried to reach a general consensus.

Also in the spring of 1998, ACA joined the Atheist Alliance and the board began discussing the possibility of hosting the 1999 convention here in Austin. Don Rhoades had attended the ’98 Atheist Alliance convention in St. Louis, and asked to take on the responsibility of being the event organizer. Assisting Don in this massive effort were Mary Osborne and Kellen Von Houser.

In early 1999, the board considered becoming affiliated with American Atheists. There was a lot of discussion and considerable disagreement as to the value of becoming an American Atheist affiliate. It was decided to run both a pro and a con essay in "The Atheist" and then leave the matter up to the general membership in a special meeting. The membership of ACA voted overwhelmingly not to affiliate with the American Atheist organization.
On the first weekend after the first full moon after the spring equinox in 1999, ACA hosted the Atheist Alliance convention. Don Rhoades and Mary Sue Osborne were assisted by a number of ACA members including Keith Berka, Vie Farrow, Maria Laudenslager, and many others. The event was held at the Omni Hotel in downtown Austin. The theme of the convention was ‘Positive Atheism.’ A number of well known atheist authors as well as some of our own members gave workshops. Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation spoke at the banquet and played some of his freethought songs for us. The convention was a success, and it placed the ACA clearly on the map as an important organization.

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In May of 1999, Kellen Von Houser and Don Rhoades stepped down co-leaders. In our annual election, John Koonz and Susan Brown were elected as new co-leaders. This transition, as well as others within the group, went smoothly. During the summer of 1999, the board surveyed the membership as to what direction ACA should take. There were a number of good ideas offered up. With new members all the time, many think that the time has come for us to find our own building. Our building fund has been growing for some time. What direction will we take? That largely depends on what you want to see happen. ACA is driven by it’s members. If you have an idea, then don't be shy. Let's hear it!

The Atheist Community of Austin is proud to produce one of the few atheist television shows in the country. Our program, The Atheist Experience, uses a live call-in format. The show airs from 4:30 - 6 p.m. every Sunday on cable access channel 10.

The Atheist Experience is made possible through the hard work of a number of volunteers. The TV committee is always looking for help on the set. The show needs a camera operator, a producer, a call screener, and of course two hosts and usually a guest. In other words, there is plenty to do.

Participation in the Godless Americans March on Washington D.C.

On Saturday, November 2, 2002, around 2,400 Atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, realists, freethinkers and others along those lines marched across the National Mall in Washington D.C. to a rally point in front of the US Capitol Building, where Congress meets. We’re very proud to say that the ACA sent a contingent to that event, complete with our official ACA banner.

Another Affiliation Vote — This time, it’s a YES!

In the Spring of 2005, the Atheist Community of Austin voted to affiliate with American Atheists, the Council for Secular Humanism, and the American Humanist Association. We are now affiliated with FOUR (4) national freethought groups.

Monthly Lecture Series

Over the years, we’ve hosted lots of great speakers our monthly lectures. For years we held those lectures in the banquet room of the old Furr’s Cafeteria in Northcross Mall. But sadly, that Furr’s closed its doors. We now have our lectures at the Austin History Center.

Some of the speakers who have given lectures for the ACA include: Dr. Alan Cline on The Disregard of Science and the Responsibility of Citizens, Joe Zamecki, A special atheist tour of Inner Space Cavern, DJ Grothe, Center for Inquiry, Arguing for America: Secularism and the Culture Wars, Don Baker on Universal Darwinism: How Computer Science has Validated the Theory of Evolution, Craig Nazor, The Hartman Prehistoric Garden - a Place for Ancient Plants in a Modern World, Deece Eckstein of People for the American Way Challenges to church-state separation, Several ACA Members A panel discussion on debating theists, Heather Alden, Church-state separation and the Texas Freedom Network, Joe Zamecki, former Office Manager of the American Atheist Center in New Jersey, on Tales from the Trenches: A Report on Atheist Activism, Moon Draper on Darwin and Mendel were clueless: Why we shouldn't teach evolution in schools, Dr. Elaine Rich, Our Quest for Machines that Act (and Look) Like Us, Shannon Rauh, Texas, Health Education and the Textbook Debates, ACLU Attorney Jay Jacobson on A ‘quick and dirty’ guide on the history of the establishment of religion clause in the First Amendment, Thomas van Orden, litigant in a case to remove the Ten Commandments monument from the lawn of the Texas State Capitol Building, Arlo Pignotti, Atheist artist and business owner, Holy Paraphernalia-Mania, John Koontz, public school biology teacher on evolution, and several others.

The Rebirth of our Newsletter

In 2005, Joe Zamecki and Marla Repka brought back a print monthly newsletter to the ACA. The old newsletter name was “The Atheist,” and the last editor of that newsletter was Jill Ford. Now it’s edited by Joe Zamecki and Marla Repka, with great pride and much pleasure.

The activities at ACA are very much driven by the members. If you have an opinion you would like voiced, a poem, an essay or a cartoon that would be of interest to other atheists, please submit it to the editor of “Atheist Community News”. Our monthly newsletter focuses on events that take place within the Austin community and feature local and national activism news and opinions, plus a whole lot more. To be continued...
FACT is a nonprofit educational association of freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, rationalists, secular humanists, and skeptics. A membership of critical thinking individuals who prefer to determine truth by replacing authority, superstition and tradition with reason, logic and evidence.

History In early 1990, two discussion groups were started by Beni T. Dean and Catherine Fahringer. The groups had mixed success but together were able to adopt a first set of Rules & Bylaws on September 17, 1990. This was the official beginning of the Secular Humanist Association of San Antonio. Then, in January of 1999, the membership elected to change the name to the Freethinkers Association of Central Texas. Today FACT is composed of a dedicated group of freethinkers working hard to achieve objectives of great importance.

Objectives The objectives of the Freethinkers Association of Central Texas are ambitious. To accomplish them will take intelligence, vigilance, perseverance and courage.

- Prevent the encroachment of religion into government by promoting the separation of church and state.
- Support reasoned and scientific solutions to the problems of mankind.
- Provide fellowship and the opportunity for members to learn, discuss, and share information.
- Expose and fight against all discriminations and limitations imposed upon our civil rights.
- Help members become more aware through the distribution of incisive educational materials and focused guest-speaker presentations.

P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, Texas 78280-3081

or: www.freethinkersact.org

An Upcoming Atheist Community of Austin Event

IRA GLASS & JULIA SWEENEY: "Letting Go of God"

Some of us will be going as a group to watch "Letting Go of God" at the Paramount Theater ((8th and Congress) on Sunday, May 7th, 2006. Doors/Bar open at 7 pm and the show starts at 8 pm. Tickets we be $45.

Following the June 3, 2005 broadcast of the #290 episode of "This American Life", host Ira Glass was pleased but surprised to discover that in the show's ten year history, that program that generated the most email, mail, and requests for CDs. The title of the show was "Godless America" and its centerpiece is a 29-minute piece by actress and writer, Julia Sweeney called "Letting Go of God".

In hindsight, it is probably no real surprise that this program brought about such a strong response: faith and God are pivotal and polarized subjects within our culture. "This American Life" describes "Letting Go of God" as follows: "Julia Sweeney, a Catholic, tells the story of how her faith began to crack after reading a most alarming book...called the Bible." 'Letting Go of God' was Critics' Choice for the Los Angeles Times, Pick of the Week for the LA Weekly, and Critic'su2019s Pick for Backstage West.

"An Evening with Ira Glass & Julia Sweeney: Letting Go of God" is a special event in which Julia Sweeney will perform a one-hour edited / condensed version of the longer "Letting Go of God" after which Julia Sweeney and Ira Glass come together onstage and Ira interviews and hosts a second hour of conversation to more deeply discuss the themes of the evening.

For more information about this and other social events in the ACA calendar, check with: www.atheist-community.org or: (512)371-9211

San Antonio Atheist Seeks Help with City Council Prayer Situation

Patrick Greene, an Atheist in San Antonio, Texas is looking for individual Atheists or Atheist groups to help him research and address the ongoing mostly Christian prayer invocations which are given at each city council meeting in San Antonio. If you'd like to help Patrick in some way, please e-mail him at: peewee_91762@yahoo.com or if you don't have e-mail, call me, your editor, Joe Zamecki at (512)382-9283
headline news: south dakota bans most abortions

i am the most dangerous person in the universe
i am a free thinker
i do not care what you do
really
seriously
wear pink poodles on your head and screw turtles
(only with their permission, of course!)
icould care less
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
i think who you love and who loves you
is your concern
not mine
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
i do not care what hole you poke with whatever particular appendage
turns you on
or who's hole you poke
or who pokes you
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
i think everyone over the age of 21 should smoke marijuana every day in
every way
and booze should be illegal
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
is god talking to you?
then listen to her, damn it, instead of the bone eaters at church
who tell you god is love and kill rag heads
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
screw the health insurance!
give me an abortion!
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
and when they put me in prison
will you visit me every sunday?
okay, every other sunday?
i am the most dangerous person in the universe
and when the assassins aim for my heart
will you step in front of the bullet?
will you take my place?
you are the most dangerous person in the universe

sm

Above is a bit of poetry written by a local person who wishes to remain mostly anonymous. We don’t normally give opinions on abortion within this group, as we are not all united in opinion on it, and that’s ok. So feel free to send in a rebuttal poem. Or cartoon, or letter to the editor, or article or book review or, well you get the idea…your input is needed!

And once again, if you’d like to save the ACA some postage, let us know and we’ll remove your info from the newsletter mailing list, and you can get your copy of ACN at a group meeting. Otherwise the snail-mail also works well.

“i control my destiny, not some half-mystical energy field.”

Han Solo, from the BOOK, Star Wars

Episode IV, A New Hope
Philosophically, diversity that exists in our beautiful city, Austin, Texas, side by side with hidden prejudices. You can think the very valuable cultural and religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and liberty to include a real existence of freedom FROM religion. Non-belief is to include a real existence of freedom FROM religion, and a free and open level of religious government and religion, and a free and open level of religious belief. We advocate a rational and necessary separation between Atheist in Austin and help the public understand us, the Atheist Community of Austin is a non-profit educational and social organization, founded in 1996 to help Atheists meet other like-minded believers.