Howdy and happy Winter Solstice! It’s a crisp, cool Fall day, as we slowly tilt farther and farther towards our maximum tilt of 23.5 degrees, in relation to our sun. It’s a beautiful natural occurrence that affects all life on Earth, and it’s worth celebrating. We often take for granted the wonder of our natural universe. More about the Winter Solstice inside.

As you may have heard, Atheism is in the news a lot more these days. Recently, Elton John said something we rarely hear from even the most liberal of characters in the celebrity world. A strong criticism of organized religion:

"From my point of view, I would ban religion completely. Organized religion doesn’t seem to work. It turns people into really hateful lemmings and it’s not really compassionate."

I think most Atheists in America agree with all of that, except the ban part. We’d like to see an end to religion, but most of us want that to come about due to a lack of interest, and not by force of law, or any other kind of force. The freedom of conscience that religious people require in order to be free in their beliefs and religions, well that’s the same freedom of conscience that we Atheists and other non-religious Americans require, in order to be free from religion in our personal lives.

The rest of Elton’s statement is right on the money. Organized religion is an old-world way of addressing reality, and since the Enlightenment, humanity has been moving towards realistic ways of addressing reality. That squeezes out irrational and ineffective religion from the sphere of serious consideration when serious issues have to be addressed now. Our Congress is overwhelmingly religious, but when the Congressional Chaplains finish their opening day prayer, it’s down to business for Congress, and they usually work in a secular fashion. When they break out in prayer themselves, in the middle of a political or military crisis, without the chaplains even being there, THAT’s when you know that they’re abandoning reason and logic, and letting fantasy take the reins. Fortunately, that is a very rare occurrence.

Religion also turns people into really hateful lemmings, as Elton says. Many religious people, not all, but hey, who’s kidding who? Every single day we can turn on the TV news and watch as religious people stomp on each other over religion, sometimes the same religion. The Haj is still the deadliest religious ritual of the year, sometimes claiming the lives of over 300 worshippers in a single incident. Some governments in the modern world still tax their citizens to directly financially benefit the churches in their countries. Some cable news networks have been running specials about the harm that some religions are causing, although those reports seem to be coming to us a bit late in the game.

Well there is good news in Atheism, VERY good news indeed. One facet of that news is that you too can transcend the negative parts of religion, whether yours or someone else’s, and you can do better. The human in you is evolutionarily shaped to be helpful to your fellow human, and can potentially be the best human ever. You can be all that, without a need for whichever religion is on your back now. We Atheists are walking, talking, living proof that religion is superfluous. We are happy, peaceful, intelligent, compassionate, and patriotic people—all without the heavy hand of mental babysitting team in the form of a group of religious people, also known as a church. We know that people can do better, and not waste time, effort and money on harmful pursuits that benefit only the greedy leaders of perverted scams. The good news of Atheism is that you and I, and the rest of humanity can do better, with the tools we already have—ourselves. The most important and powerful tool you’ll ever own, you already own. It’s safely housed in your skull, and you need to take care of it.

More good news: It’s calendar time! Enclosed, as we’re sure you’ve already discovered, you’ll find your 2007 ACA calendar. (If yours is missing, please call or e-mail the ACN editing team, and we’ll get you that calendar.)

We’d like to thank ACA Board Member Chuck Clark for donating his time, effort, and money to make the calendar available to the ACA. As we’ve said before, some of the best work done by local Atheist groups is initiated, worked on, and completed by one or two members. If you’d like to follow Chuck’s example by helping the ACA to acquire something it needs, please feel free to do so! Of course it always helps to find out first what the group really needs, and if anyone is currently working on it already. We still need a lot of things, and in this issue, we’ll explore a few of those things.

We’d also like to happily announce that ACA member Arlo Pignotti celebrated his fifth wedding anniversary with his wife Gundega last month. Congratulations you two! Many of you will remember Arlo from the early days of our TV show, the Atheist Experience, when he was a regular guest. He also spent years giving presentations to Atheist groups entitled “Holy Paraphernalia Mania.” If you don’t know about that hilarity, check out our next issue, and hey! Guess what? We are Non-Prophet!

We have an online radio show called “The Non-Prophets.”

In This Issue...

----Seattle Atheists — A Shining Star of Atheistic Success
----God-Debating in the Street With the ARM
----A Report on Nazis Inspiring Good People to Gather
----Plus a Whole Lot 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 Incorporated, 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 at board meetings. Board elections are held every year in May. 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.

Your Newsletter Staff: Editor - Joe Zamecki, jozamecki@hotmail.com, Co-Editor - Marla Repka, marlarepka@hotmail.com. Your ACA Board of Directors: President: Matt Dillahunty, Vice-President: Don Baker, Treasurer: Joe Rhodes, Secretary: Steve Elliott, Directors: Don Baker, Keith Berka, Charles Clark, Matt Dillahunty, Steve Elliott, Mark Loewe, Don Rhoades, Joe Rhodes & Joe Zamecki

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. There will be no lecture for December, and we’ll get back on track with that in January.

Atheist Community News is mailed free to paid members of the Atheist Community of Austin as an official publication of the ACA. 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 jozamecki@hotmail.com or call at (512)382-9283, and we’ll make it so. We’re also looking for volunteers to help us distribute this newsletter to public places. It’s easy and free, and helps us get our friendly faces out there under the banner of our proud Atheism. To help in that, e-mail your editor. :o)
Editorial...
Happy Winter Solstice!

What a beautiful time of year this is. This month, we celebrate the Winter Solstice, a very real event that affects ALL life on Earth. The precise moment of the 2006 Winter Solstice will be December 21, 2006 at 6:22 P.M. Central Time. We can nail it down to the very minute because it’s REAL! And it’s highly understandable and logical.

Well we recently had a very good regular meeting at Romeo’s at which we talked extensively about the ACA Building Fund. For years, many of us ACA members have wanted a permanent office of some kind for the ACA. Several members have looked into office space and buildings, to ascertain whether the ACA could afford and would want any of the offices available in Austin. But we never quite found the ideal place or financial plan to make this goal come to fruition. So we still have all of our meetings at restaurants and the Austin History Center.

Today we discussed the building fund that the ACA has. It was created over a year ago and is already an impressive amount of money. Now if you’re like me, you probably want to know how much money the ACA has in the bank, if you don’t already know. Obviously we can’t put that information here, so if you’re a member and would like to know more about that, just contact me. I believe every single paid ACA member deserves to know that information, and we’re an honest group of people, so important information like that is no secret.

Anyway the building fund is there, and it’s gaining us interest. We’d like to someday use that money to buy or rent an office or building of some kind. But that fund must be much larger than it currently is before we can do that. We’d have to do some fundraising for it.

Several members have vocalized their support for an expenditure of this kind for the group. We need to gauge support among more members, and go ahead with some kind of fundraising approach. If you would like to help us get into an office of some kind, you can help by donating to the ACA Building Fund. You’ll need to make sure that your donation is earmarked for the fund specifically, as we have other funds going now too. You can also help by looking for good cheap office space with us.

For those who are new to this topic, here is a list of reasons why the ACA needs office space of some kind:

1. To hold our meetings and lectures at our own location. This would save us the cost of meeting at other places, which initially doesn’t usually cost much of anything. It’s the money we spend on food and renting a room that could be going into the ACA funds. We’ve spent thousands of dollars on restaurants and renting rooms over the last ten years as a group. All of that money could’ve been channeled back into the ACA instead. What’s done is done, and we’ve had some really great food and drinks at our meetings over the years, but an office of our own would bring that money to our group instead, no question about it.

2. To store our ACA Library at one location, on bookshelves, available to all members, every day our office is open. Currently our library is split up between a few members, and stored at their homes. We certainly appreciate their donation of space in their homes for that, and the work it takes to transport portions of the library to meetings and other events. But with our own office, it could be kept all together in one room, and not have to be moved, since most of our meetings would be held there too. We could even use our books on our bookshelves as a background for interviews with the media. Which brings me to reason number 3.

3. To have a professional place to meet with media and other important non-ACA people. We have a lot to say to the media. As it is now, the best we can do is to speak out is write letters to the editor or op-ed pieces, and place phone calls to the TV stations. If they could come to our office and do an interview with our spokesperson there, many media outlets in town would do just that.

4. Having an office with a storefront would give us free advertising space. We used to do paid advertising, but about a year ago, that ended, and even the volunteered advertising that was being paid for by a very good member of the ACA, has ended. With a glass storefront visible from the street, we can get more advertising effect than we could ever afford to pay for. The Atheist Station in Pennsylvania is a great example of how a visible building can be utilized as a very effective point of advertising. They have big windows on the front of the building, and they put a new display in there every month. The displays portray scenes and writings about lecture topics they’ll be talking about at their lectures. They also put lots of easy to read contact information in the window, and people read it all. Everyone in that small town knows about that building, because of the large block letters on the front of the building that spell out “ATHEIST STATION.” They have taken it upon themselves to do their own advertising, using their building to it’s maximum visual advertising capability. We can do that too, with a building.

5. Having an office would give us some challenging work to do. Usually this is used as a reason to NOT get an office. I consider the challenge to be very rewarding to those who take it on, and rise to that challenge. Many people will get involved in some activity just because there’s a healthy challenge or an outstanding need. I myself worked for eight years in a building dedicated to promoting Atheism and doing the hard work of Atheist activism. I learned a lot, but one thing I learned very well is that it CAN be done. Whenever we aspire to take on a new project, we get volunteer members who step up to help make it happen. A great example of this is our TV show, the Atheist Experience. Our all-volunteer crew works really hard and makes what is probably the best technical quality show on cable access in Austin. We have a lot of talented people in front of the cameras too, but there are several others who make it all come together. Why? Because the ACA NEEDS to have such a good TV show, so some members volunteer their time and effort to make that so, and we have it. In our research on local Atheist groups in America, we discovered that we have the longest TV show at 90 minutes, one of the only live call-in TV shows, one of the longest-running TV shows, and one of the most often-aired TV shows, at once per week, and sometimes repeated for a second time per week. ACA members rose to the challenge, and made it happen.

6. We are sure to get new members with an office. Not just by them seeing our office storefront, reading about our group through the window, and calling us the next day. That will happen too, but I mean by having an office, we will be more established as a membership group, and that will impress more potential members. We need more members, and our growth rate has been at a plateau for quite some time. We know that Atheism is on the rise in America, and that Austin has thousands more Atheists than we’ve met. With an office we can diversify our efforts at outreach and growth even beyond our current diverse approach. We have lots of irons in the fire, and they all help us grow. It’s time to step up as a group, and do more for our group.

Also the ACN editing team needs a proper office to work on the newsletter. We need a fax machine, and someone needs to answer our official ACA phone number, instead of it always being a machine people get. We could get more members if we could just be the ones to answer their questions over the phone, instead of just a recording doing that interaction for us.

Please e-mail: info@atheist-community.org if you would like to help us with fundraising for the ACA Building Fund.

As always, if you’d like to help us get this newsletter into the hands of more people in the general public, you can. This helps the public understand us better. We place copies of this newsletter at many locations in town like convenience stores, coffee shops, restaurants, poetry bars, and other places. We need volunteers to help us spread it out to places like those. It’s easy and oh so helpful to the group. Let us know if you’d like to help out.

You’ll also notice, hopefully, that this issue is lighter than the November issue was. We lightened the weight of the overall mailing by removing four more pages from this issue, so we could add the calendar to each newsletter without increasing the postage cost. Brains! We’re debating as to whether to keep it this small from now on. Please feel free to e-mail, call or snail-mail your input on the how we present this newsletter. We need input from our readers. Thanks for reading and have a naturally great day! JRZ
Atish Community of Austin Social Calendar for December

Sunday Dec 3
11:30 a.m.
Regular meeting at Romeo’s, a weekly social gathering three Sundays a month, except for lectures and other special events.

3:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Atheist Experience TV show, host: Matt Dillahunty, co-host: Don Baker, topic: Authoritarianism

Thursday Dec 7
7:30 p.m.
Happy Hour at Ninfa’s Restaurant, on East Anderson/183 Northbound, just West of I-35. Their phone number: (512)832-1883

Sunday Dec 10
11:30 a.m.
Regular meeting at Romeo’s

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.
Board Meeting at Romeo’s - Immediately follows the regular meeting.

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Atheist Experience TV show, Host: Matt Dillahunty, co-host: Russell Glasser

Thursday Dec 14
7:30 p.m.
Happy Hour at Ninfa’s in North Austin

Saturday Dec 16
6:00 - 12:00 p.m.
Winter Solstice Party Mike Swift will be hosting ACA’s Winter Solstice Party this year. Members, spouses, and family only. Details coming soon.

Sunday Dec 17
11:30 a.m.
Regular meeting at Romeo’s

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Atheist Experience TV, host: Matt Dillahunty, co-host: Russell Glasser

Thursday Dec 21
7:30 p.m.
Happy Hour at Ninfa’s in North Austin

Sunday Dec 24
11:30 a.m.
Regular meeting at Romeo’s

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Atheist Experience, host: Matt Dillahunty, co-host: Tracie Harris, cartoonist and author of Atheist Eve

Thursday Dec 28
7:30 p.m.
Happy Hour at Ninfa’s in North Austin

Sunday Dec 31
11:30 a.m.
Regular meeting at Romeo’s

4:30 - 6:00 p.m.
Atheist Experience TV, host: Matt Dillahunty, co-host: Don Baker

ACA Event Details

---Lecture Series We hold our monthly lectures at the Austin History Center, at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. They start at 12:30pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free, and it’s open to the public. There will be no lecture for December. If you know of a good lecturer or if YOU have an interesting topic to talk about to the group, please e-mail us at: info@atheist-community.org or call and leave a message at our voicemail number: (512)371-2911

---Board Meetings This month’s ACA Board meeting will be held at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant, right after the regular meeting. That usually means the board meeting starts around 1:30pm. All ACA members are welcome to attend, and we invite you to, and we also invite you to speak up about issues of concern to you, but only board members may vote at those meetings. Current board issues include funding for this newsletter and whether to meet at Ventana Del Soul again.

---Happy Hour! We meet for Happy Hour at Ninfa’s on E. Anderson/183, which is just west of I-35 by about a block. It’s on the Northbound side of 183. If you’re coming north on I-35, be sure to take the 183/St. Johns exit, go through St. Johns, and then left onto 183 Northbound, under the overpass. Ninfa’s is famous for their Tex Mex and Margaritas, aka Ninfaritas, but spending money there is not required.

---Regular Weekly Meetings Sundays at 11:30am at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Springs Rd. just West of South Lamar. We usually meet inside near the bar. When we have board meetings, we move out into the patio area outside. Romeo’s is simply beautiful.

---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 talk show, and we invite ACA members, as well as the rest of the cable-viewing community to call in and talk Atheism with us. This is another form of outreach to the general public, so we enjoy getting challenges from religious callers. Guests are listed above in the calendar. The website for the show is www.atheist-experience.org

---Online Radio Show The Non-Prophets is our online radio show. It airs live every other Saturday. Please feel free to tune in live at http://nonprophets.gotdns.org and visit our archive to hear recent episodes.

---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. Our one regularly scheduled annual picket is our protest of the National Day of Prayer ceremonies and rituals which happen yearly at the Texas State Capitol.

---Outings We like to go places as a group, and see some wonderful things, like a field trip. Recently, we took a cruise on Town Lake together. This month we’ll be having a Winter Solstice Party at the home of one of our members, Mike Swift. If you have an idea for an outing, please let us know. There are many wonderful things in Austin for a happy group like ours to go see.

The Atheist Community of Austin

PO Box 3798
Austin TX 78764
Voicemail: (512)371-2911
Website: www.atheist-community.org

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. Our ten year anniversary is coming soon, and if you’d like to help us celebrate it, and have some ideas about how we should do that, please let us know. Ten years! Woohoo! Party!

A Joke

A soldier ran up to a fork in the road and saw a nun standing there. Out of breath he asked: “Please Sister, may I hide under your habit for a few minutes? I’ll explain why later.” The nun agreed. So he hid under her habit, and just a moment later, two military police officers came running along and asked: “Sister, have you seen a soldier running by here?” The nun pointed down the road and said: “He went that way.” After the MPs disappeared, the soldier crawled out from under her habit and said: “I can’t thank you enough Sister, Y’see I’m hiding from them because I don’t want to go to Iraq.” The nun replied: “I think I can fully understand your concerns.” The soldier added: “I hope you don’t think I’m rude or impertinent, but you have a great pair of legs!” The nun replied: “Thanks! If you had looked a little higher, you would have seen a great pair of balls…. I don’t want to go to Iraq either.”
Some Upcoming Freethought Group Events and Announcements

Here are some event announcements from the national groups which the ACA is affiliated with, and some info about local groups.

On October 1, 2006 a tally of votes revealed that a great majority of member groups want to hold the annual AAI convention the last weekend in September 2007 instead of the traditional weekend that Christian’s refer to as “Easter.” The AAI 2007 Convention which will take place on the east coast. Pre-convention activities will start on Thursday, September 27. The convention will end the afternoon of Sunday, September 30, 2007. www.atheistalliance.org or: 1-866-HERETIC

From the American Atheists website:  www.atheists.org/convention:

AACON XXXIII – The 33rd Annual National Convention of AMERICAN ATHISTS
April 6-8, 2007, Seattle, Washington
Speakers include: Luigi Cascioli, former candidate for the Catholic priesthood, and Fleming Rose, cultural editor of the Danish publication Jyllands-Posten, which published the cartoons of Mohammed that caused such a fuss. Some ACA members will be going to this convention and we’d like to hook up with as many as we can, and perhaps go together. The ACN editing team will be taking an Amtrak! :o)

The American Humanist Association’s next national conference will be June 7-10, 2007 in Portland, Oregon. We’ll get you more info about that when we get it. The American Humanist Association’s Washington DC office:(800) 837-3792 or: americanhumanist.org

Council for Secular Humanism  www.secularhumanism.org
The Center For Inquiry also has a new online radio show and podcast. Check it out at: www.pointofinquiry.org

A new local group exists here in Austin, the Center for Inquiry Community of Austin, and they’re already having social events. Wednesday Game Night at Thor’s Hammer, 6-11pm Bring your favorite board or card game! Their first regular meeting was at Little Walnut Creek Library in November. We here at Atheist Community News feel that CFI Austin has great potential for growth, and we wish them all the best. www.centerforinquiry.net/austin

The Atheist Experience Public Access TV Show + Dinner
Our TV show airs on Time Warner Cable every Sunday at 4:30pm CST on channel 10. It’s a live call-in talk show, and viewers are invited to call in and inquire about Atheism, and even challenge the Atheist hosts. Now, there is dinner after the show. Currently, we have dinner after the live TV show on Sunday at Threadgill’s South Austin, 301 West Riverside Drive (Riverside at Barton Springs Rd.) Sundays around 6:45 pm Note: We won’t be there if the show isn’t live! (Sometimes the TV station has to mix up the schedule, and we go on the air, taped instead of live.) The URL for the AE website is: www.atheist-experience.org

HumanLight - December 23rd, 2006
From www.humanlight.org: In Western societies, late December is a season of good cheer and a time for gatherings of friends and families. During the winter holiday season, where the word “holiday” has taken on a more secular meaning, many events are observed. This tradition of celebrations, however, is grounded in supernatural religious beliefs that many people in modern society cannot accept. HumanLight presents an alternative reason to celebrate: a Humanist’s vision of a good future. It is a future in which all people can identify with one another, care for each other, behave with the highest moral standards, and work together toward a happy, just and peaceful world. It is a vision that we not only wish to celebrate, but which we also wish to communicate to our children, families and friends. We want the people important to us to understand the ideals that we hold most dear to our hearts and, in so doing, to have a fuller understanding of who we are as people.

The Atheist Community News editing team would also like to joyfully announce that we are grandparents again! Joe Zamecki and Marla Repka now have a healthy granddaughter named Makinley Ann. Kids are great! :o)

If you have an announcement about a freethought event or a rite of passage in our membership, please let us know.
--- North Dakota “Jesus Camp” to be Shut Down

Recently the movie “Jesus Camp” shocked America by revealing what happens at certain extremist Christian Summer camps for kids of Christians. “Kids on Fire,” a real weeklong summer camp featured in the movie is based in Devils Lake, North Dakota, and the negative publicity that the movie has generated inspired the leaders of that camp to shut it down. One notable feature of the movie was the preacher Ted Haggard saying things to the audience like “I think I know what you did last night. If you send me a thousand dollars, I won’t tell your wife.” And this to the filmmakers: “If you use any of this, I’ll sue you.” After the movie was released, Mr. Haggard fell from grace by being exposed as a homosexual alcoholic meth user and a john to a male prostitute. His verbal attacks on gays and lesbians over the years seem to have all been bluff and lies from a hypocrite. This did not help the already floundering reputation of Jesus camps like the one featured in the movie. A large portion of America found that Summer camp to be frightening in its extremism, and disturbing when the children echoed the extremism. So its Pentecostal pastor featured in the movie, Becky Fischer announced that “Right now, we’re just not a safe ministry.” When asked if the camp will continue, she said “I don’t think we’ll be doing it for a while.” For three years now, “Kids on Fire” summer camp has been happening at a campground in Devils Lake, ND, rented out from the Assemblies of God. But after the movie went to theaters across America, vandals broke windows and caused $1,500 in damage to the campground in October. It was then that the Assemblies of God asked “Kids on Fire” not to return.

We here at ACN theorize that most if not all of that vandalism must’ve been done by Christians, since that camp hurt no ideology more than it hurt Christianity.

--- Nazi Rally Goes On Peacefully, Inspiring Leftist Gathering

On Veteran’s Day last month, around 14 members of the National Socialist Movement had a rally on the steps of the Texas State Capitol Building right here in Austin. Your editor was there. At least a few thousand people showed up to oppose the National Socialists, aka “Nazis.” The Nazis didn’t have any amplification though, not even a small bullhorn, so it was almost impossible to hear what they were saying. The crowd against them were very loud and some were visibly angry and shaken over it all. Most people seemed relaxed though, as if the Nazis were a traveling sideshow. We’ve all seen them on TV, but to see them rally in person was cartoonish and surreal. They didn’t look unorganized though, in fact as a change of pace, they all looked very clean cut, organized, motivated, and not at all slovenly or unkempt. Their rally was against immigration of all kinds, and they shouted some really racist things, too ugly to print here. One good thing that the Nazis did was that they inspired hundreds of like-minded liberals to gather and meet and greet. The largest group visible in the crowd was the group called Anti-Racist Action, and they were a bit startling too. Dressed in all black, some wore black hoods and covered their faces with black and bandanas. We all noticed that the police didn’t mind them covering their faces, but followed them anyway, expecting trouble. Well thanks to the strong and absolutely huge police presence, it was a peaceful event. We met with people of like mind, and even ran into some Atheists and at least one ACA member. It was a great opportunity to hook up and trade e-mail addresses with fellow non-religious folks. Thanks Nazis!

--- HumanLight Gains Popularity

Many non-religious Americans have longed for a holiday all their own in December, to counter all of the religious holiday hoopla at that time of year. The Winter Solstice is much older than other holidays celebrated these days, but it isn’t celebrated by all non-religious people, so some Humanists in New Jersey came up with HumanLight. It’s a celebration of humanity and humanism. From the HumanLight website at www.humanlight.org: “In Western societies, late December is a season of good cheer and a time for gatherings of friends and families. During the winter holiday season, where the word “holiday” has taken on a more secular meaning, many events are observed. This tradition of celebrations, however, is grounded in supernatural religious beliefs that many people in modern society cannot accept. HumanLight presents an alternative reason to celebrate: a Humanist’s vision of a good future. It is a future in which all people can identify with one another, care for each other, behave with the highest moral standards, and work together toward a happy, just and peaceful world. It is a vision that we not only wish to celebrate, but which we also wish to communicate to our children, families and friends. We want the people important to us to understand the ideals that we hold most dear to our hearts and, in so doing, to have a fuller understanding of who we are as people. The very first HumanLight celebration was held in New Jersey on December 23, 2001 at a gala event attended by close to 100 people. It has grown in popularity around the country every year since. HumanLight is December 23rd, and should always be celebrated on or around this date. This date was chosen for several reasons. A critical objective was to be part of the peak celebration time of the holiday season, yet to have a distinct date that did not coincide exactly (and thus interfere) with other holidays such as the Winter Solstice, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, etc. December 23rd was close to the shortest day of the year, a natural event of note, as well as very close to vacation days that typically lead to family gatherings. Also, because of this, Humanists at family gatherings and other holiday social events are able to say “Happy Holidays” and mean it; to have a positive, constructive way to start a conversation in which to explain to loved ones what Humanism is about.” HumanLight is more popular than ever, and we wish the humanists succeed with that far into the future.

--- Secular Yoga in the Park

Gundega and Arlo Pignotti enjoy Yoga, but often yoga classes involve new age mysticism, talk of chakras, enlightenment, etc. As Atheists, this is quite uncomfortable sometimes, and it’s hard to hold balance if you’re rolling your eyes at some spiritual mumbo jumbo. Gundega Pignotti is a certified Yoga instructor and teaches Yoga all over Austin that is completely secular, focusing on building strength, balance, flexibility and relaxation. Gundega now hosts Yoga in the Park for donations! Please join us in Shipe Park in the Hyde Park area on 45th Street and Avenue F at 7 pm on Wednesdays. For photos and more information, visit www.yogainthepark.net. 512-294-5524 bhealthy4ever@hotmail.com www.YogainthePark.net

--- ACA Winter Solstice Party

The ACA Winter Solstice Party will be on Saturday, December 16, 2006 from 6pm - midnight at Mike Swift’s house. Thanks to Mike for his hospitality! The party is for ACA members, their spouses, family, and atheist-friendly friends. Kids are welcome. RSVPs are encouraged so that Mike can gauge the size of the event. (Send him an e-mail: mswift@austin.rr.com). Also, e-mail him if you’d like to volunteer to help set up. The early part of the evening will be a potluck dinner. Bring a dish to share, should you wish to participate. Mike will provide snacks and beer. Mike has a game room, arcade machine, and pool table. Mike will be performing some card magic and others may perform, as well. Mike’s address, a map to his house, and his phone number are now available on the ACA member log-in website. Details will be posted later on the ACA members only list. Come and celebrate the new year without any of that Xmas stuff!
Another Local Atheist Group Success Story

In our last issue, we listed and rated a number of the most active local Atheist groups in America, but we missed a few local groups which are doing very well. Here's one we missed because they're not yet affiliated with any national groups, and they're still fairly new. Seattle Atheists is an active new group in Washington State, and was founded by a former member of the ACA. Wendy Britton sent us this report about the group:

“Seattle Atheists is really an offshoot of ACA. I moved back up to Seattle after 9/11 to be near family and I founded this group with 2 others. The whole premise of SA is patterned after that of ACA. Also, American Atheists is having their national convention in Seattle in 2007 Easter weekend, and if anyone from ACA wants to attend, they should contact our group about possibly staying with someone to save on hotel costs. I have some room at my house to host some people. Wendy Britton wendita99@hotmail.com “

Seattle Atheists was founded in 2003, is now a registered 501( c ) 3 non-profit group that also has a board of directors. That board consists of four officers plus five at large/committee members for a total of nine board members. Pretty much the standard board size for local Atheist groups. They’re currently working on getting a TV show on public access. Their website url is www.seattleatheists.org They have members who occasionally picket with their own groups, but Seattle Atheists has yet to have its own official picket. They do have public events. They do the Summer Solstice Fremont Fair and have a booth, and they plan to be in the parade next time. They also do Winter Solstice potluck gatherings.

Wendy reports that Seattle Atheists has 65 paid members and 305 unpaid members on a Yahoo group only. The cost of a regular membership in Seattle Atheists is $25./year, and they offer a life membership for $250. As far as trouble for religious people, they got some scowling from a few people at the bookstore at X-mas when they wrapped gifts and collected donations for a children’s hospital.

As far as sales, they sell t-shirts with the Seattle Atheists logo and buttons and business card magnets with funny sayings on them. For meeting locations, they've been using library conference rooms, and for big events, they've used Wendy’s house. Great volunteering! We’re also told that they’re currently thinking about having a print newsletter as well.

For a group that just came into being about three years ago, they’re doing pretty well! Of course they’re in the highest density population area for Atheists in America. That whole region is crawling with Atheists and other non-religious people. I've seen studies that say 20% of Seattle and Portland are godless. They’re like sister cities with Austin. Thanks to Wendy Britton for the information and permission to use their logo here. :o)

God-Debating in the Street with the Austin Restoration Ministries

By Joe Zamecki

You may have noticed more religious sales work being done at certain street intersections, in North Austin at least. Just about any day of the week, you can drive to the intersection of I-35 and Anderson/183, and be asked for a donation to the Austin Restoration Ministries. ARM is an Austin-based religious group without a church building as yet. They have their members go out to certain intersections, and beg for money, next to the window washers and homeless veterans and amputees who all panhandle to drivers stuck at intolerably long red lights.

I have taken advantage of the easy audience among the ARM people to hand out something of my own. ACA newsletters, one per person. I say “Hey instead of me giving you just a dollar, I’d like to give you something worth more. A look into an alternative way of thinking and living.” I have found that many really really religious people are very curious about Atheism. In addition to giving them a piece of our minds in the form of a newsletter, I also engage them in friendly smiling debate about religion versus Atheism. The first thing one of them said to me upon seeing my newsletter was “Oh there aren’t any Atheists. Just look at the beauty of nature!” and it was ON! I’m very happy to have a print newsletter ready to give to anyone who isn’t aware of any Atheists. Just look at the beauty of nature!” and it was ON! I’m very happy to have a print newsletter ready to give to anyone who isn’t aware of any Atheism. That whole region is crawling with Atheists and other non-religious people. I’ve seen studies that say 20% of Seattle and Portland are godless. They’re like sister cities with Austin. Thanks to Wendy Britton for the information and permission to use their logo here. :o)
Atheist Community News

The Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin

PO Box 3798, Austin TX  78764

I pray to Joe Pesci... He looks like a guy who can get things done.

George Carlin, Comedian,
Best-Selling Author,
Godless American