

Freethinkers to Hold Convention

Heidi Shaffer

The Red River Freethinkers hope to encourage new perspectives on religious and independent thought through Fargo's first major free-thought convention this fall, said Jon Lindgren, the group's president and former mayor of Fargo.

The local group has been criticized for its attempts to remove a Ten Commandments monument near the Fargo Civic Auditorium, but Lindgren said the September 18th convention is open to supporters and critics.

"I do think that some people who disagree with us will register and attend," Lindgren said.

Lindgren states that "The organization is optimistic about a good turnout, and judging by the number of first-time attendees at local Freethinkers meetings, there will be a lot of interest in the convention."

"It gives us an idea that there are many, many people who are skeptical of religious institutions and religious dogma and are interested in what we are doing," he said.

The convention brings five speakers who will touch on a variety of topics. Annie Laurie Gaylor, author and co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, will speak about the importance of free thought in the women's movement. Gaylor believes the event will serve as an opportunity to help dispel some of the stereotypes and misconceptions around nonreligion.

"A lot of nonreligious people feel like they have to stay in the closet," she said, "but really, if they can afford to speak out ... that's the most important thing they can do."

The Madison, Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation has more than 16,000 members nationwide but only 30 in North Dakota, so the convention can also serve to broaden perspective, Gaylor said.

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Chapter Profile

The Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle

The Ethical Humanist Society of the Triangle (EHST), founded in 1987, is one of 26 societies in the United States which form the American Ethical Union. We meet every Sunday from 1:30 - 3PM at Extraordinary Ventures in Chapel Hill, NC. Platform meetings are on the first and third Sundays of the month. Community leaders, professors, social activists, as well as members from our own society inform the society on ethical issues confronting our local community, as well as issues of national and international importance. This is followed by a question and answer session. Fellowship and refreshments are available before and after the platform meetings. The second and fourth Sunday's meetings are discussions centering on the platform topic of the preceding Sunday. All meetings are open to the public. Beside our Sunday meetings, we hold periodic potlucks for members and friends and a monthly book club.

Our members are involved in a number of community activities. Members volunteer to cook for and serve the homeless once a month at the Interfaith Council Community House in Chapel Hill. We help plan and participate in the Carrboro Memorial Day observation. We participate in annual events such as the Crop Walk, Fayetteville Peace March and NC Gay Pride Parade. At each of our meetings we do a "Change for Change" collection for a different charitable cause each month. Members visit federal prisoners at Butner through the Prisoner Visitation and Support Program.

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Chapter Services Committee

The Chapter Assembly's board has voted to dissolve. For the first time, the AHA is making chapter services a board level program and the new Chapter Services Committee will be developing an innovative structure for improving the effectiveness of chapters. More information to come.

The Fund for Chapter Expansion is presently governed by a committee of trustees and grants in aid (COTG) who are: Ron Renard, Chair; Jan Woodward, Secretary; Flo Wineriter, Treasurer; Chris Lindstrom and Dennis Deshaies, trustees at large.

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“We do routinely get letters saying, ‘I’m the only atheist in North Dakota or Wyoming.’ They’re not, but people feel very much like they are,” she said.

Speakers for the Sept. 18 event include:

- Dan Barker, author and co-president of Freedom From Religion Foundation.
- Annie Laurie Gaylor, author and co-president of FFRF.
- PZ Myers, University of Minnesota-Morris biologist and author of acclaimed science blog.
- Brian Keith Dalton, producer and star of “Mr. Deity,” an online comedy series.
- August Berkshire, a well-known speaker and co-founder of Minnesota Atheists.

If you go:

- What: Project 42: 2010 Valley Freethought Convention
- When: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on September 18th, 2010
- Where: Fargo Civic Center, 207 4th St. N.
- Info: Tickets are \$65 and available at www.project-42convention.org

Registration begins at 8 a.m. on Sept. 18. Readers can reach Forum reporter Heidi Shaffer at (701) 241-5511 

Submit Your Articles!!!


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Have something you would like to share? Well look no further, the Grassroots News (GRN) is now accepting articles from you guys, the members! With an audience of 10,000 people, GRN is the perfect place to voice your opinion and inform your fellow Humanists of issues important to our community. Make your voice count, and submit your piece to GRN@americanhumanist.org!

Ethical Culture

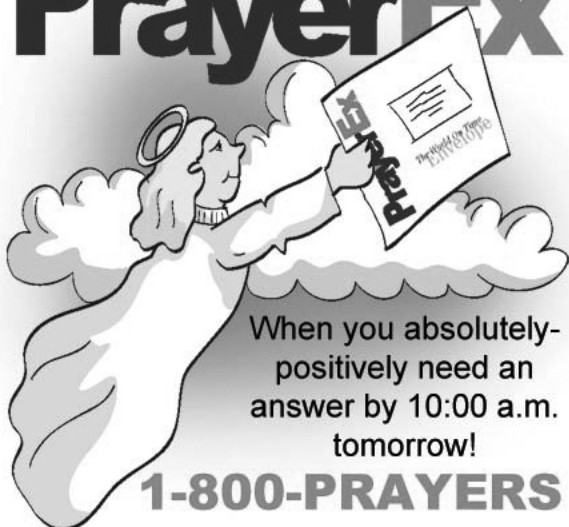
EHST is part of the Ethical Culture movement which was founded by Felix Adler in 1876. Ethical Culture is a humanistic, religious, and educational movement working to create a better world through ethical actions. We are dedicated to the ideal that the highest value is human worth and that our relationships to each other are of greatest ethical concern. Our commitment is to the worth and dignity of the individual and to treating each human being so as to bring out the best in him or her. Members join together in ethical societies to assist each other in developing ethical ideas and ideals, to celebrate life's joys, and support each other through life's crises.

Affiliations

EHST is affiliated with American Humanist Association (AHA). Our affiliation means that we feel a close synergy with the American Humanist Association, while at the same time being primarily dedicated to the goals and mission of the American Ethical Union. We welcome all humanists to our meetings, as well as all people who can place ethics as their ultimate concern. As a member organization of the American Ethical Union, we are also members of the International Humanist Ethical Union (IHEU). 

Cartoon

PrayerFx



When you absolutely-positively need an answer by 10:00 a.m. tomorrow!

1-800-PRAYERS

Chapter Leader Profile

Caryn Goldman

Humanists of San Mateo County

How were you first exposed to Humanism?

While I was in college (around 1973) my parents participated in the Ethical Culture Society of Chicago. About 20 years ago I was involved in the Society for Humanistic Judaism in San Francisco. More recently about 4 years ago I began attending the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley.

How were you first exposed to the group?

My parents told me about the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley.

What keeps you involved with the group?

I consider myself a Humanist, atheist, free-thinker, etc. Our small but steady group has wonderful discussions each month relating to Humanism and since it meets at my home, I am definitely always there.

How did you get into a leadership position?

I started this chapter and it was the logical choice for me to be its first president.

What are your goals for the group?

We would like to grow so we can have more activities than just a discussion group. We would eventually like to be a large chapter like the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley with many ongoing activities and weekly forums.

Where do you see the group in five years?

Hopefully we will have at least 30 active members and have several activities per month.

Have you faced any challenges as group leader?

Not really up to this point.

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What are some things you have learned, or advice you'd like to give to fellow group leaders?

Help facilitate thoughtful discussion and don't let anyone totally monopolize the conversation. Choose topics that are of interest to a wide variety of people. **G**

America vs. China looking more like a tortoise-and-hare race

Wendy Liu

China might be a totalitarian government, but its progress is impressive, writes guest columnist Wendy Liu. She marvels at the difference between China's infrastructure development and the too-often-neglected U.S. infrastructure. Wendy Liu, author of "Everything I Understand about America I Learned in Chinese Proverbs," is also recipient of the AHA's 2010 Humanist Pioneer Award for her work in cross-cultural understanding

I STILL remember the oohs and aahs years ago in China when people admired a souvenir or present from America. Now I get an advance warning from my mother in Xi'an not to buy anything for my visit from Seattle. "America is falling behind," she added.

That may be a little exaggeration. The more popular refrain is that everything you buy in America is made in China, why carry the luggage? Why indeed. One almost had to resort to ripping the "Made in China" label from the presents one buys.

But if you think China only as the "world's factory," wait till you see what it is doing at home: building a new country.

Take for example a tiny part of it from my hometown Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi Province and starting point of the ancient Silk Road.

A few years ago, when my mother first moved into this new residential compound on the bank of Ba River in the east of the city, there were at most a few dozen buildings. They were built on a patch of wasteland by an entrepreneur-developer. This year, the compound boasts more than 650 buildings, complete with its own shopping street, schools, farmers market, public square, clock tower, theater stage, park, not to say its own shuttle bus service to downtown Xi'an.

That was just one residential community in the Chan-Ba Ecological District, a newly developed environment-friendly district named after Rivers Chan and Ba. Driving around, one could also see the new 355-room five-star Kempinski Hotel, the permanent venue of Euro-Asia Economic Forum, a tall white suspension bridge spanning the water, a new international cargo center under construction, and all the preparations going on for the 2011 World Horticultural Expo the district was hosting.

The compound and district are really typical of China today. So is the China Pavilion at the World Expo in Shanghai, standing head and shoulders above all other pavilions. Same with its high-speed rail, already the world's longest, soon to connect all its provincial capitals.

Then it was back in Seattle. Our long-standing Alaskan Way Viaduct was in the news again. Mayor Mike McGinn had just hired his own consultant to study the proposed tunnel. But other City Council members believed he was trying to stop the project.

As a voter, I am at a complete loss as to how a highway project could have been drawn out for so long. A decade after the earthquake damage, several election cycles and numerous state, city, county and port meetings later, not to say a projected cost of \$2 billion growing to \$4 billion, we are still just talking about replacing the viaduct.

Don't get me wrong, I love the free speech and direct elections we American citizens enjoy. But there seems to be some things missing from our system, things like decisiveness and efficiency.

China, of course, is an authoritarian country, with the Communist Party in power, even though communist in name only now. But the party and the people do share a sense of urgency about their nation-building. They are working hard against the clock for the time lost in the Mao

Rant & Reason

Humanist perspectives on breaking news and politics

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RANT & REASON, providing
Humanist perspectives on
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and raise your Humanist voice!

era and for China's re-emergence as a world power it had once been.

America is lucky not to have had a Cultural Revolution, a catastrophe to China's economic as well as cultural development. But our infrastructure is decades old and crumbling.

The collapse of the Interstate 35 Bridge in Minneapolis, the failure of levees in New Orleans and the steam pipe explosion in New York City were disasters that happened. Those waiting to happen are deadly silent. For them, former U.S. Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta warned long ago, we need a constant beating of the drum.


Maybe an alarm clock, too. America may have a better system. But we seem to be either napping on it like the hare or driving while texting. China, the tortoise, however, is clearheaded, determined and racing ahead! 



Chapter Sessions wanted for upcoming Podcast!

The *Humanist Network News (HNN) Audio Podcast* is a monthly one-hour talk show produced by the American Humanist Association and available to stream or download over the Internet and iTunes. Our current listenership is around 2400, worldwide. We are offering each AHA local chapter the opportunity to publicize the great work that your group is doing. These updates can be in the form of text updates that Jes reads/mentions on air, a phone conversation that gets recorded, or an audio file that you record and send in to Jes to play over the show.

If any chapter is interested in participating in the upcoming Podcast, please think about the relevant topics or items you'd like to discuss and contact Jes Constantine at jconstantine@americanhumanist.org. Please be ready to discuss what your technological capabilities (do you have access to microphone, portable recorder, and/or computer with recording software) are to minimize the difficulties of long distance recording issues, etc.

To learn more about the Humanist Network News podcast, visit us on the web at: <http://humanistpodcast.org> or on iTunes at: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/humanist-network-news-podcast/id99193025> 

Help us take action!


Below are the 2010 Texas Republican Party Platform planks:

- Gay people shouldn't have custody of children.
- Issuing a marriage license or performing a marriage ceremony for same-sex couples should be punishable by jail time.
- 19th-century Texas statutes outlawing sex between men should be restored.
- Homosexuality "tears at the fabric of society"

Is this really what the national Republican Party chair wants voters to think his party stands for?

Please sign a petition to the Republican Party chair asking him to reject these ideas. The petition can be found online at:

https://secure3.convio.net/hrc/site/Advocacy?s_oo=tBCeA7b9NsMtT2DJkS3QLg.&id=885

If you are reading a hard copy of *Grassroots News*, please contact Lindsay at lgerberling@americanhumanist.org and she will send you the link via email. 

WEDDINGS, UNIONS, MEMORIALS, & CEREMONIES

Humanist Celebrants conduct Humanist, nonreligious, and interreligious weddings, commitments, and same-sex unions; memorials; baby namings; and other life cycle ceremonies.

**Need celebrant services?
Interested in becoming a celebrant?**

Visit www.humanist-society.org or contact R.J. DeSmedt, Program Coordinator, Humanist Society 1777 T Street NW, Washington DC 20009
800.837.3792 | RJ@humanist-society.org



The Kochhar Humanist Education Center

Reading, Watching, Talking

Recently, AHA chapters nationwide received a request to send copies of their newsletters to the *Kochhar Humanist Education Center* so that we can share useful sources of information on educational programs. Book and video discussions are a popular educational activity. Those recently discussed and recommended by a few AHA chapters include:

Books:

- *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* by Peter Godfrey-Smith
- *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* by John Meacham
- *The Portable Atheist* by Christopher Hitchens
- *Letting Go of God*, Julia Sweeney's one person show (for more information, please go to www.juliasweeney.com/letting_go_mini/)

Films:

- *Arranged* (Directed by Diane Crespo and Stefan Schaefer, starring Zoe Lister-Jones),
- *Religulous* (Directed by Larry Charles, starring Bill Maher)

Forums:

- Past forums of the *Humanist Community in Silicon Valley* can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/user2798508/videos/sort:newest> or the Humanist Community Blog at www.humanistcommunity.org/wp

Additionally, Jen Hancock, former executive director of the Humanists of Florida Association, has developed a DVD designed for use by local groups to provide members – especially new ones – an introduction to humanism. For information and to view a sample clip, check the DVD website at <http://introdvd.jen-hancock.com/> or contact Jen at www.jen-hancock.com.

Lastly, several chapters have organized Socrates Café (<http://www.socratescafemn.org/>) in which questions of ethical and/or philosophical content are discussed.

Please continue to send your newsletters to me at rbhaerman@americanhumanist.org.

Bob Bhaerman, Coordinator, Kochhar Humanist Education Center 

The Marvelous Member Magnetism of Meetup

What is Meetup.com?

The short answer? A fast way to get *NEW MEMBERS for FREE!!!* The textbook answer - Meetup.com (also called Meetup) is an online social networking portal that facilitates local face-to-face group meetings. There are over 6 million members and 55,567 groups already! Meetup allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest, such as politics, books, Humanism, pets, careers, etc. Users enter their ZIP code and topics of interest and the site helps arrange a place and time to meet.

Why would my chapter want to have a Meetup site?

- Find new members VERY quickly and inexpensively (especially the younger demographic)
- Send broadcast member e-mails thru the site
- Schedule meetings and track RSVPs automatically
- The system automatically sends your pre-scripted 'welcome' message to new members
- Gives your chapter a web presence – e.g. www.meetup.com/SunValleyHumanists

Grass Roots News

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Grass Roots News

Dedicated to Promoting Chapter Development

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