

# THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprofit Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

512-371-2911

[www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org)

22 October 2000 CE

Volume # 4 No. #10

## AIDS Walk Austin



The Atheist Community of Austin made a stunning showing at Aids Walk Austin, bringing in \$355 in donations to that worthy cause and drawing almost two dozen group members out to march under the hot sun. Our banner was carried high and proud, and we were interviewed by K-EYE News. They didn't ask about the ACA at all, but our banner should be in the shot if they use it.



The only hitch came when I went to hand in the donations; somehow our Atheist Community of Austin team, which I registered at the Aids Walk site a week ago, did not make it into the listings that the folks at the sign-in booth had with them. They accepted the money anyway, of course, and I filled out a new registration on site. I plan on calling Aids Walk tomorrow to make sure we're now on their list of contributors.

~Jeff Dee

## Freethought Day Celebration In Comfort October 21st

Join us in Comfort, Texas on Saturday, October 21st to celebrate Freethought Day! Freethought Day commemorates the day, October 12, in 1692 when Governor William Phips of Massachusetts brought a halt to the Salem witch trials and set a critical legal precedent by declaring that "spectral" evidence could no longer be used in trials.

On October 12, Howard Peak, Mayor of San Antonio, declared Freethought Day and presented FACT members with an official Proclamation in a brief ceremony. The proclamation will be displayed at our celebration in Comfort.

Our celebration on October 21 will include a program at the ROCK in Comfort Park, a visit to the Treue Der Union monument, lunch at the barbecue place, antiquing at the annual Antique Fair in the park, and a possible research visit to the old cemetery. Our program will include singing Die Gedanken Sind Frei, historical information presentations, a best-atheist-garb contest, and other exciting events. This is a friendly, casual, fun day. Bring your atheist-friendly friends and family. Atheist dogs always welcome too.

Comfort Park is in downtown Comfort, fronting on Highway 27. We will meet in the gazebo if it is available, otherwise at the ROCK, at 11:00 AM. If you would like to visit the Treue Der Union monument just a few blocks away on High Street on the other side of Highway 27, be there at 10:30 AM. This monument memorializes the freethinker settlers who refused to join the Confederate Army and were massacred.

## Are We an Atheist Movement?

What makes a movement?

When I research revolutionary movements, I am struck by how simplification distorts past reality. History books tell us stories of big-ideas and broad movements that develop in an orderly progression towards a goal. The focus is on leaders, organizations, ideas and events as if those few things were history.

History's orderly big-picture shatters when you examine personal activity. Only then is human history more accurately seen as the collective result of individual activities, not just leaders, big-ideas and institutions. This more accurate individual view of history can help us better understand the nature of the atheist movement.

In one sense, there is no "atheist movement." There are a few tiny, ineffective national organizations, perhaps 50 local groups, a few publications and maybe 1,000 active individuals, not counting passive group members. This hardly describes a movement in comparison with past political, economic, social and religious movements.

Is it reasonable to even talk about an atheist movement?

Historical hindsight:

Atheism appears unlike historical movements because we are living it in the now, not looking back in time. With historical movements we know what happened. We know the important factors and events. This knowledge allows our minds to imagine movements as orderly some things, as opposed to the disorderly confusion the participants experienced.

Viewed as individual experiences, atheism does appear similar to past movements. We appear just as disorganized, contradictory and aimless as individuals in historical movements. In a movement's early years, historical revolutionaries would share our difficulty in recognizing their activities as a movement.

Christianity's thousands of variants are an excellent example. There were never ANY growing Christian groups that were not mostly a contentious, squabbling, judgmental, disorganized crowd of strong personalities trying to promote their own idea of perfect Christianity. All failed to achieve their perfect goal. They were collectively, however, a smashing success in subjecting a billion minds to a magical fantasy.

Collective individuality

Notice that it is the sum of often disparate activities that

collectively creates the successful Christian movement. One is left with the impression that Christianity would have lacked the vitality and flexibility for success if it were not for all those passionate holy men and denominations struggling mightily against each other.

Developing movements

As a movement progresses, participants disagree, promote divergent ideas, squabble vigorously, and seldom cooperate with much commitment or coordination. The key to a growing movement seems to be that passionate individual activities attract people with similar ideas and hopes. People get involved because they see others who share their ideas and worries trying to take action. They want to be part of doing something, so they help with their own actions. Passion, disagreements and persistence seem to be key ingredients for developing a movement.

Groups begin, grow, split, die, transform, resurrect and continue with sometimes bewildering rapidity. When you look at a single geographic area, however, the activity appears less confusing. The same people keep reappearing in new groups with similar ideas and goals. Their ideas and capabilities grow with experience. As people come and go, a growing core of active members accumulates.

The positive of this confusion is that it gives movements a flexibility to rapidly adjust tactics and ideas. In an evolutionary sense, all that turmoil is really a movement adapting its structure and ideas into something that ever more effectively survives and reproduces by attracting more support.

Accepting the reality of movements

This realistic view of movements will help us better understand our atheist movement. We can add to our understanding of atheism a knowledge of human behavior that arises from evolutionary natural selection as a competitive process.

We are evolved human individuals. Let's accept the reality of atheists thinking and acting with a lot of independence. Let's accept that whatever the atheist movement becomes arises from our individual thoughts and feelings, our social/family interactions, and our public actions as an atheist. Let's accept that we'll always express our individuality and differences -- even more so than most movements because we value skepticism, freethinking and rationality. Let's also understand that our proudly won individual ideas of unbelief are also no barrier to exercising our social instincts to join together for common goals and socializing.

In our early attempts to develop an effective atheist movement, there is no more important activity than individual actions. Yes, it is a great step forward when we can join and act with others. We should seek out and develop joint actions as opportunities arise. We should, however, also realize that our individual thoughts, emotions and actions expressing materialistic ideas are vital factors for creating an atheist movement.

Our actions decide:

Our search for knowledge, the ideas we develop, the emotions we invest, the actions we take tiny or large, few or frequent -- these are the ingredients of history, individuals changing reality by the actions of their lives. By leading our lives without magic, by acting from materialism, we collectively become the living process of a movement that is growing as we touch more isolated unbelievers who roughly share our ideas.

Atheism is a movement because we make it a movement by our actions. We are a movement if we think of ourselves as a movement and act as if we are a movement to change the course of human history. We develop our movement's effectiveness as more unbelievers begin to act individually and join together in groups which can multiply our individual impact.

We will only free humanity from supernaturalism one mind at a time. The process has begun, no matter how tiny, scattered and disorganized it appears. Our success will be played out in the competition of natural selection that will determine which ideas and groups best help humanity survive and prosper.

If we are successful, future history books may tell a story of the orderly development of atheism with clear growth phases and goals. We can hope for this future, knowing that it was never that orderly.

*~Howard Thompson (gofreemind@aol.com)*

## Quote to put on your refrigerator

**“There I was looking death in the face. Not one of you bastards prayed for me. . . and I’m doing just fine.”**

Our own **Keith Berka** in the hospital after a recent heart attack.

## And The Survey Says:

**Q.** Why are you an Atheist?:

**A.** Upon reaching college, and for the first time in my life I heard an adult authority figure (my Anthropology professor) discuss religion as the human invention that it is, pointing out the similarities and differences among and between the 200+ different (and mostly mutually exclusive) belief systems that humans have created for themselves around the world. That made my own doubt "legitimate" for the first time, and "gave me permission" to ask a long series of questions that led, very logically, to a complete rejection of the dogma that had been fed to me since early childhood.

## Exchange Student Opportunity

I got a call from a woman who is with a program called SHARE, which works with high school study-abroad students. She said that up to 20% of the students who contact them looking for host families here in Austin list "atheist" or "I don't want to go to church" under religion, and it's kind of hard to place these students. She wanted to contact our organization to see if any of us would be interested in being a host family. Most of the students who indicate they are atheist are from Europe -- most specifically, Germany.

If you would like more information about sponsoring a religion free student please contact Susan Brown (liatris@mail.utexas.edu)

### Your ACA board of directors:

Co-chairs:

Susan Brown

John Koonz

Treasurer:

Don Rhoades

Secretary:

Howard Thompson

Board members:

Keith Berka

Paul Wilson

Michelle Gadush

Russell Glasser

Arval Bohn

Vic Farrow

Jeff Dee

Howard King

Manda Dee

## Notes From the Board

### Old Business

- Treasurer's report - Don R. gave financial statements to board members
- ACTION - Susan Brown will contact the Texas Civil Rights Project via letter/phone call to thank them for filing a lawsuit against "Charitable Choice" and to invite someone to come as a speaker to our group as early as the first Sunday in January.
- New Sign - Jeff Dee said he'll follow up and get this done.
- 1st Sunday Programs
  - November: Panel Discussion - Atheists in Foxholes
  - December: Panel Discussion - Advantages & Hopes of Atheism
- TV Show: Vic & Jeff explained ACATV problem with show. TV Committee working to get new producer qualified in case Vic's 90 day suspension remains. New show may be delayed until January.
- Library - Now in our cabinet at Bagelry. Several people have keys.
- Products - Michelle reports \$239 in product funds available to buy new items. This \$239 is not included in the Treasurer's report.
- Website - Russell reports no significant activity/needs.
- Newsletter Distribution - Howard said was past problem with Vol. 4 # 8. Now have records organized to support e-mail and snail-mail. Will provide list of subscribers at meeting when John brings new hardcopies so everyone who gets a copy can check off that they got it.
- Membership. Reported 68 members (verifying possible miscount on one). Data on source of new members not fully available. TV show main source of new contacts followed by recent snail & e-mailings, followed by Austin Chronicle.

- All new member applications since last meeting approved. Secretary (Howard) will work to now maintain a separate list of new members for the most recent month so we know which batch we are approving.
- Howard & Don voted in as Temporary Nomination Committee Co-Chairs to develop initial concept for Nomination Committee goals and perhaps new voting procedures. Don & I will assume that we can invite other members to participate in this temporary committee. Generally, there seemed to be approval for the idea of having the 1st Sunday meeting before the election meeting be available for nominations and for people to discuss issues/goals they think important for ACA. We may develop new procedures that require additions/modifications to current By-Laws procedures, but we have plenty of time to do that.
- Keith Berka. Jeff & Vic will organize a visit to Keith in the hospital. We talked about the availability of ACA donated blood to help Keith.
- Freethought Awards - Scheduled for January. Jeff Dee volunteered to head-up this effort and will presumably enlist others to assist. John K. will give Jeff info he already has.

## Announcements

- **Weekly Meetings** Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.
- **ACA Board meetings** are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
- Annual Freethought and Thought-Free Awards Jeff is heading up this effort. These awards will be given on January 4th, 2001, the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tripoli. Send nominations to Jeff Dee (antix@io.com)
- **Guest Speakers**
  - Our November 5th lecture will be a panel discussion on Atheists in Foxholes. ACA members who are veterans are invited to participate.

- The December 3rd Lecture will be a panel discussion. The subject will be: The Advantages & Hopes of Atheism. Howard Thompson will be the moderator and Virginia Glasser, Paul Wilson and Suzette Krubbe will be the panelists.
- Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am on the first Sunday of the month. Susan Brown (liatris@mail.utexas.edu) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.



*Susan Brown*  
Lecture Coordinator and  
ACA Co-Chair,  
liatris@mail.utexas.edu

- The **TV committee** is always looking for volunteers on Sunday mornings. They also need donations to pay for tapes and training. ACA TV Tapes are now available for \$20.00 each and will be offered over the web soon.
- **Products** New t-shirts have arrived. We still have our original ACA t-shirts which list a number of famous atheists. We also have 'top ten reasons beer is better than Jesus' beer mugs. See Michelle Gadush (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.
- **Library** Our library is now stored at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry! If you would like to donate a book, please be sure to put your name in it so we know who to thank. See Rodney if you would like to check out the newsletters from other atheist groups.
- The next **blood drive** will be September 23rd. Meet at the blood bank at 10:00AM at the Regional Blood and Tissue Center on N. Lamar.. Vic Farrow has taken of the role of blood drive coordinator. After you donate, be sure to give him your coupon so that our account can be credited.
- **Randalls Donations** Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail liatris@mail.utexas.edu

The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper!

## WE WANT YOU!

The Atheist Community of Austin is having a membership drive this fall. Our goal is to have at least 100 members by the end of October. This will allow new members time to get involved with ACA activities, and time to qualify to be voted onto the board of directors at next years election.



**If you have not renewed your membership, please do so. Don't make us send Howard out to find you!**

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.**

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone : (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

**Purpose**

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.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month u n t i l next March, is enclosed.

I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .Please direct my donation to the following fund:

General Fund       Building Fund       Permanent Fund

I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.

I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.

I wish to receive a hard copy of The Atheist in the mail. \$10 is enclosed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

Atheist Community of Austin  
P.O. Box 3798  
Austin, TX 78764

