

A U S T I N

Atheist

July 2008 • Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin **ACA**

Volume 2 • Issue 1

ACA at the Pride Festival —by Don Baker

Equality Texas hosted the 2008 Pride Festival on Saturday, June 14, this year at Auditorium Shores, just north of the new Long Center. The festival is a community-building event primarily for the gay and lesbian community in Austin. It has grown up in recent years with thousands of participants, eight bands, and 130 vendors and organizations. The ACA has participated in the event for over four years.

While there has been some controversy along the way, the ACA has embraced gay rights as primarily a church-state separation issue. We view the freedom to marry as one of many freedoms and rights granted to all citizens as the natural consequence of true equality and the complete separation of church and state. Our nation has made great strides toward ensuring equal rights for women and minorities, yet true equality remains elusive and some segments of our population remain “fair game” for bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination. Gays and atheists are among those minorities.

The Pride Festival is also a great opportunity to gain visibility in a setting where most of the participants are progressive and more likely to be receptive to our message. Other like-minded groups had booths at the festival, including the ACLU and Texas Freedom Network. Our very presence sends a message that we exist and that we are happy to come out in support of others. While the ACA has been active and visible in Austin for 11 years, there are still a lot of people who are surprised that we exist. Community events like this give us a chance to interact with those people and tell them a little about what we do as a group.

At the booth this year, we interacted with dozens of people who ranged from hard-core atheist to those who were just curious. We were happy to share information about our group, our *Austin Atheist* newsletter, a press release that we issued in support of same-sex marriage, and fun items like bumper stickers. It is possible that some of our visitors will become members. If we do have new people

at events, please make them feel welcome.

Our participation in the Pride Festival would not be possible without the enthusiastic support of ACA members. This year we had nine volunteers: Matt Dillahunty, John Iacoletti, Shelley Roberts, Sandra Jaramillo, Shilling Cadena, Mike Swift, Cody Casterline, and Steve Elliott. Give these people a pat on the back when you see them

for their efforts. The event was organized by Don Baker. A special thanks goes to the Atheist Longhorns, who loaned us their canopy for the event. For readers who appreciate the ACA doing activities of this nature, please consider donating to the ACA to help offset the costs of our participation. We would also be interested in doing other community events like this, depending on member support. ■



Left: People walking along the row of food vendors.



Right: Squinting from the sun. Don, Matt, Cody, John, and a passer by.



Left: Our view of downtown from the booth.

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About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of Freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

ACA Board of Directors

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Submission Deadlines

Issue	Deadline
Jan. _____	Dec. 1
Feb. _____	Jan. 1
March _____	Feb. 1
April _____	March 1
May _____	April 1
June _____	May 1
July _____	June 1
Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

Society of Edmonton Atheists Gets Started

—by Don Bakerr

ACA members may not realize it, but our group is well respected around the world for the things we do, especially by atheists. We are contacted regularly by atheists who do not know of a group in their town, but who would like to connect to other atheists. Often, we are able to supply such people with pointers to local groups, but for others, the only option is to create one. Ambitious people actually ask for advice about how to create their own. Edmonton Alberta resident Michael Vester is just such a person. Michael has been the organizing force behind the new Society of Edmonton Atheists, a group that is now an officially recognized group in Canada.

Michael took a lot of inspiration from the ACA. He even became an ACA member and became familiar with how we got started, things we do, and generally, what makes our organization tick. He tapped in to a latent demand for a group in Edmonton with early meet-ups attended by 70 people, including a few families. By contrast, the ACA had a relatively modest early draw some 11 years ago when we got started. The society now has its own Web site <<http://www.edmontonatheists.ca>> and has regular bi-weekly meetings and a monthly happy hour social. Michael was elected as the society's president.

The group has already had a busy month. They participated in the Edmonton Gay Parade on June 15. He says, "... the Society of Edmonton Atheists had a very successful Pride Festival on Saturday. We only had five participants in the parade. By the end of the parade,

we had more than 30. People wanted to walk in the parade with us. ... At the end of the parade, we outnumbered all the churches put together." He also commented that his booth was well attended. Like the ACA, he views the SEA's participation in the city's festival as a means of gaining visibility



Top: Society of Edmonton Atheists. Above top: Top: Michael Vester, president.

and building allies. The analogy of coming out has not been lost on him. Before the event he commented, "We are all really excited. This is our first public function as an official society. I am coming out of the closet, as an atheist." Moreover, "... we can learn a lot from the gay community. They have been coming out of the closet for more than 30 years. Their acceptance in Canadian society demonstrates that they know what they are doing."

On March 28, Michael was on as a guest on the University of Alberta's radio station, CJSR along with the president of the University of Alberta's Atheist and Agnostic Club. The show focused on the topic of *what is atheism?* On the air, he pointed out some of the atrocities in the Bible. Although he did not get too many "interesting" calls while he was on the radio, he did get some threatening calls at his home

that night, urging him to repent. Michael took it in stride, noting that the individual lacked the guts to confront him directly. Michael is in a fortunate position in many ways that allows him not to worry too much about his visibility. His old car with the Darwin Fish and Flying Spaghetti Monster emblem on its bumper, for example, takes a little vandalism in stride. Eventually, Edmonton (like Austin) will learn that atheists are here to stay. Edmonton is a liberal town, like Austin, but with an energy economy.

Like the ACA, the SEA is building a strong relationship with the University and many of its members are students. Like the ACA, the SEA has many events that do not require paid membership, which is an attractive feature for starving students. In June, the group will be doing a road trip to Calgary to see a lecture by Dr. Victor Stenger in promoting his book, *God: The Failed Hypoth-*

esis. ACA members may recall that CFI Austin hosted Dr. Stenger here in Austin in May 2007 and he appeared as a guest on *The Atheist Experience*. The group is planning a fancier Web site, and maybe even a TV show. However, that is still a ways off. The SEA has a number of members with high tech experience.

Michael's only regret is not starting the group many years ago. He says, "Thank you, ACA for providing the inspiration and direction. I am having a lot of fun doing this. And I am

very proud to be an ACA member. The ACA is the benchmark for all atheist groups." He and other SEA members are enthusiastic fans of both *The Non-Prophets* and *The Atheist Experience* shows. We, in the ACA, are flattered that some of what has worked for us has been successfully replicated in another city. Hats off to Michael Vester and the new Society of Edmonton Atheists; we wish them every success. ■

2008 Atheist Alliance International Convention in September

The 2008 Atheist Alliance International convention will be held on the weekend of September 25-28 on the historic Queen Mary ocean liner, permanently docked in Long Beach, California. This year's convention theme is "Unsinkable Atheism". The speaker lineup includes Matt Cherry, Ellen Johnson, Lori Lipman Brown, PZ Myers, Herb Silverman, Margaret Downey, Michael Newdow, Eddie Tabash, Michael Shermer, Greydon Square, Julia Sweeney, and many others. More information and can be found on the Web at <www.atheistalliance.org>. National conventions are a great way to meet enthusiastic people, share ideas, and make friends, so consider making plans to go. The ACA is affiliated with AAI, American Atheists, the American Humanist Association, and the Council for Secular Humanism. ■

ACA MAILBAG

Debate Invitation —by Matt Dillahunty

"I would like to invite your students and teachers to debate the most important issues, (God, morality, psychology, law, evolution, nutrition, economics, etc.) at: www.debatejim.com. Thanks, Jim"

Response: I'm afraid our group doesn't have "students" or "teachers"... which makes me suspect that this is some sort of cut/paste invitation to draw people to your web site (given that you have very few members and an unfinished site that includes opportunities for advertisement, my suspicions are heightened.)

If you're actually interested in a debate of some sort, that might be workable, but I don't need another website to argue on...especially one that is moderated by someone who I couldn't possibly trust. You're only going to publish the most "on point" responses, yet the phrasing of nearly all of the issues listed on your "issues" page is not only biased, but off-point.

Only someone who has grossly misunderstood evolutionary theory could argue; "how many existing named life forms can you list that are obviously in the process of becoming a higher named life form?" Your other listed issues include similar bias and misunderstanding and are phrased in such a way that they would make poor topics for debate (though, admittedly, the person advocating those positions would be in the unfair position).

Your site is just absurd enough for me to think it's actually parody. Especially when you state that it's a site dedicated to promoting "traditional American values". That's not the purpose of debate. Debate exists as a forum for people to discuss and challenge ideas in order to form new values or re-affirm existing values based on the merits. Appeals to tradition and patriotism won't carry much weight with rational folk.

If the site is a parody, you're off to a good start, but you didn't add enough bling. ■

ACA CALENDAR

THURSDAY, JULY 3

- **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)
- **7-9 p.m.:** *CFI Food for Thought Lecture* (Old Quarry Branch Library, 7051 Village Center Dr) Pastor Sid Hall: "The Bible: Fact, Fiction, or Myth?"; Free

SUNDAY, JULY 6

- **12:15-1:45 p.m.:** *ACA Lecture Series* (Austin History Center) Dr. Rory Coker: "Pseudoscience, Antiscience and Nonscience!"; Free
- **3-4:30 p.m.:** *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

- **5 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, JULY 10

- **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, JULY 12

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

SUNDAY, JULY 13

- **10:30-11:30 a.m.:** *Board Meeting* (Romeo's (outside))
- **11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.:** *Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo's* (Romeo's)

- **3-4:30 p.m.:** *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

- **5 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, JULY 17

- **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, JULY 19

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

SUNDAY, JULY 20

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

- **3-4:30 p.m.:** *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

- **5 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, JULY 24

- **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, JULY 26

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

SUNDAY, JULY 27

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

- **3-4:30 p.m.:** *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

- **5 p.m.-?:** *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (Threadgill's)

THURSDAY, JULY 31

- **7 p.m.-?:** *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

- **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- **Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas**, 4300 North Lamar Boulevard, 512.206.1266.
- **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.
- **Romeo's**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.
- **Threadgill's**, 301 West Riverside Drive (at Barton Springs Rd.)

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <www.atheist-community.org/calendar> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin
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ATHEIST EVE

CONCEPT BY DON BAKER — ILLUSTRATED BY [CT] DESIGN ©2008

"It's the World Religion Extreme Fighting Event for the title of most powerful god and world domination!"



IN THIS CORNER, WE HAVE JUDAISM!



"We are Yahweh's CHOSEN people!"

...AND IN THIS CORNER, WE HAVE CHRISSTIANITY!



"The one TRUE God!"

FINALLY, IN THIS CORNER, WE HAVE THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK... ISSSSLAM!

"There is no god but ALLAH!"

"Mohammed is his prophet!"



DING POW

CRASH

BANG

MORE!

MORE!

MORE!



WHERE will we EVER find a cage BIG enough for ALL of them?