

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Spring 2006

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

330 Julia St., Apt. 233
New Orleans, LA 70130

(a 501c3 corporation)

<http://nosha.secularhumanism.net>

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism
American Humanist Association
Atheist Alliance International
American Atheists, Inc.

MEETINGS

3rd Saturday of month, 2:00 pm
Old Metairie Branch
Jefferson Parish Public Library

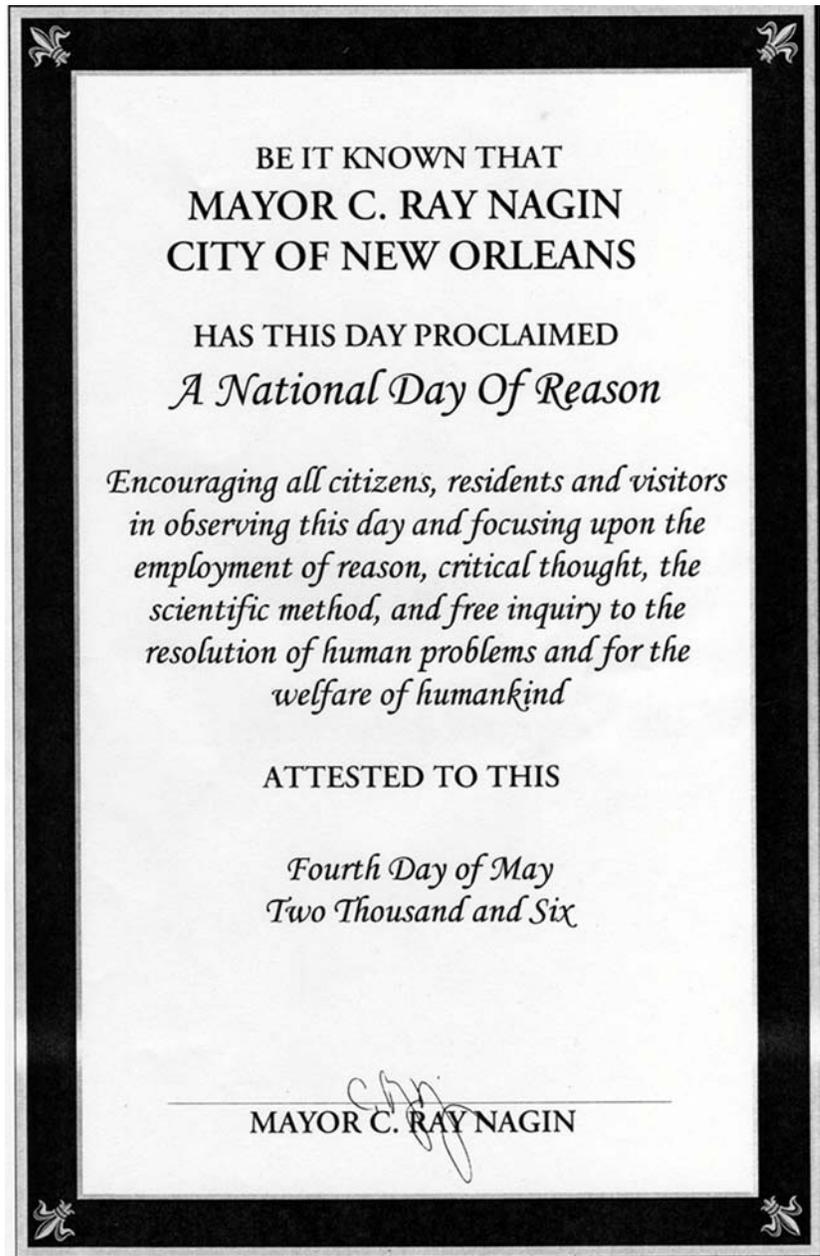
N.O. COX CABLE TV

CH 77 "Humanist Perspective"
Sat. midnight; Sun. noon

CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"

Tues. 10:30 am; 10:30 pm

NATIONAL DAY OF "REASON" COINCIDES WITH
UNCONSTITUTIONAL NATIONAL DAY OF "PRAYER"



Once again, NOSHA President Harry Greenberger was successful in having New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin sign a proclamation for a "National Day of Reason" (at least in New Orleans) to coincide with the "National day of Prayer" established by Congress in 1952. Unfortunately, local media ignored the press release.

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AAI KATRINA FUND GOES TO NEW ORLEANS ARE SCHOOL



NOSHA, a member of Atheist Alliance International (AAI), was asked to designate a deserving recipient of the \$2,000 AIA fund established to help in the recovery from the hurricane and flood devastation, specifically for a school library or science department.

A NOSHA member, a resident of St. Bernard Parish, which was decimated by the Katrina Cataclysm, recommended the St. Bernard Unified School District. With all of the parish schools severely damaged, they managed to open a single school, calling it the St. Bernard Unified School, in November 2005, with 334 students; now with an enrollment of about 2,300 for all grades. Pre-Katrina school enrollment was about 8,800, but most families are still unable to return to live in the flooded parish. Presentation of the donation was made to the school's principal on Thursday, May 4.

School Board Donation Coordinator, Carol "Cookie" Mundt, was delighted at the contribution offer for science education, especially since the funds can be used as a 10% match with 90% FEMA funding for purchases for the school's science department. She said "That contribution will be multiplied nine times."

Harry Greenberger, NOSHA president said, "AAI can be rightfully pleased with its contribution to the future education of these displaced and distressed young people recovering from a historic disaster. NOSHA thanks AIA for its concern and generosity."

Pictured in the above photo at the presentation of the funds are (from the left) Joseph Kirchem, NOSHA member and alumnus of St. Bernard schools, Harry Greenberger, NOSHA president, and school principal, Wayne Warner.

COMPASSION FROM CALIFORNIA

A group of retirees, The Atheists and Agnostics Group of Rossmoor, in Walnut Creek, California, recently contacted NOSHA for assistance in locating a deserving recipient for their Katrina donation. They offered to send a laptop computer and printer to a graduating high school senior planning to attend college in the Fall.

The NOSHA Board selected Daniel Duarte, a neighbor of board member Lanny Goldfinch, and Lanny's nominee for the gift. NOSHA will present the computer to Daniel at a short ceremony followed by a tea and coffee social on Saturday, May 20 at Lanny's home. Photographs of the presentation will be available in the Summer NOSHA NEWS.

If you would like to know more about the donors, visit their website: <http://rossmooratheists.info/>.

NOSHA has received letters of concern and sympathy from secular groups around the country, wishing successful recovery for our group and all victims of the storm. It is good to know that our morality and the "golden rule" is not exclusive to the religious claimants.

LIBRARY DONATIONS

The past president of the NYC Atheists recently contacted NOSHA with an offer of books to replenish our Katrina-decimated library. The following titles are on the way to us now:

Storm from the East: The Struggle between the Arab World and the Christian West, Milton Viorst

Being Logical, D. W. McInerney

The Silence We Keep: A Nun's View of the Catholic Priest Scandal, Karol Jackowski

The Pontiff in Winter, John Cornwell

Intelligent Thought: Science versus the ID Movement, ed. John Brockman

The Darwin Conspiracy, John Darnton (fiction)

These and other books can be borrowed from the NOSHA library simply by e-mailing Harry Greenberger with your request. He will bring the books to the next NOSHA meeting or mail them to you. His e-mail address is: hpgreenx@yahoo.com.

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"Personal religious convictions have no place in political campaigns or in dictating public policy."

--Geraldine Ferraro, U.S. Vice Presidential Candidate

NO POWER IN PRAYER

In the largest study of its kind, Harvard Medical School researchers recently reported that prayer has no discernible effect on illness. The research followed 1800 patients divided into three groups at six different medical centers.

The study looked for any complications within 30 days of the surgery. The results showed no effect of prayer on complication-free recovery. In fact, 59 percent of patients who knew they were being prayed for developed complication, and 52 percent of those who were told there was a possibility of prayer also developed complication. Conversely, only 18 percent of the uninformed prayer group suffered major complications and 13 percent of those who received no prayers at all experienced complications.

At a cost of \$2.4 million, medical researchers proved what secularists could have told them for free. Following is an article written several years ago by NOSHA member Bill Sierichs which explains quite clearly what secularists already knew without spending millions of dollars, but rather using common sense. Thanks, Bill, for sharing.

A SICK PRAYER

William Seirichs, Jr.

The disease [bubonic plague of 1349] spread next through Arab Spain so that the armies confronting Alfonso XI were afflicted before their Christian enemies. It is said that the Arabs were deeply disturbed by this phenomenon and many of them seriously thought of adopting Christianity as a form of preventive medicine. Fortunately for their faith, however, the Black Death was soon raging quite as disastrously among the troops of Castile. "When they learned that the pestilence had now reached Christian men their good intentions died and they returned to their vomit." (says one Christian writer) — from "The Black Death," Philip Ziegler (1971), p. 114.

Once, some local ministers and physicians in Shreveport, Louisiana, held a prayer session in honor of medicine and the alleged benefits of faith.

This is a variation on the idea that prayer somehow magically cures illnesses. Occasionally, some Christian claims that a study "proves" prayer has medical benefit.

Excuse me, but a word of reason is needed for this idea.

Humbug!

In medicine, the faith vs. science battle is one of the most thoroughly fought in history, and faith was decisively beaten. Any match of prayer and medicine is a shotgun wedding.

For most of human history, up until the late 18th century, people had no real way to combat disease. Folk and herbal medicine contained some beneficial

procedures, but much of folk medicine consisted of useless — sometimes dangerous — nostrums and obvious superstitions.

So most people when sick turned to religion — all kinds of religions. And people died in multitudes. Epidemics swept unchecked through populations in every land. In many places, half the children never reached adulthood.

Medieval Europe is considered to be one of the most spiritually-oriented societies in history, and the faithful were laid waste by the many millions during the Black Death. A disease that strikes few today, in only rare situations, killed a third or more of the population of Christian Europe — most presumably being devout Christians. That's not counting its toll among the Muslim, animist, et al peoples of Asia, where it originated. How many prayers, how many Masses and Te Deums, how many acts of penitence or self-flagellation were performed in the churches of Europe as people fell dying in the pews!

"The Archbishop (Zouche of York) prescribed the usual course of prayer, processions and litanies to avert the coming of the dreadful pestilence." (Ziegler, p. 180) He estimates about a third of England's population — perhaps more than a million people — died in the epidemic, while as many as 45 percent of England's clergy were lost to the disease. Presumably, most clergyman offered up bountiful prayers before and during their affliction.

From the earliest civilizations, praising Enki and Inanna, Osiris and Isis, to today's Adventists and snake-handlers, not all the charms and magical amulets, not all the sacrifices and offerings, not all the prayers have ever cured — in any medically certifiable situation — a single person. Faith healers today have repeatedly been exposed as frauds, and there's no reason to believe their ancient predecessors, whatever god they worshiped, were any different. Death rates say faith was defenseless against the stark brutality of disease.

If any religion, if the prayers to any god, had had any beneficial effect, the result would have been evident both to history and to the contemporary world. As Philip Ziegler notes, some Muslims considered converting to Christianity when they thought they saw evidence that Christians were immune to the Black Death. If that had been the case, if Mongols and Muslims had died in the millions while Christians walked about unscathed, can there be any doubt that the entire Eurasian landmass and North Africa would have become Christian just as soon as word of this miracle had spread?

It didn't happen. Most people prayed, and most people died young. Yet when a form of the Plague hit India in 1994, the death toll was held to a few hundred, thanks to scientifically-developed antibiotics, which kill the plague bacilli. Christianity failed. And Hinduism didn't protect the people of India either.

Science won.

When medicine and modern methods of sanitation — the single most important weapon against disease — appeared, disease began to lose its fearsome grip upon humanity.

Christianity, Islam and animism have all been powerless against AIDS, while science has begun to provide hope of protection, potentially even a cure. The fearsome influenza epidemic of 1917-1918 killed at least 20 million people — possibly several times that number — in the Christian-dominated nations of Europe and the United States, where it apparently originated. Preachers who claim the million people who have died of AIDS are proof of god's curse on humanity for homosexuality are liars, given the many times greater number of dead in the influenza epidemic, when religion proved helpless. Science was not sufficiently advanced to stop the influenza virus' spread in 1917; now it has slowed and may soon stop the HIV retrovirus — a far-tougher opponent than influenza.

Smallpox was one of the scourges of Europe, and Christian prayers didn't slow its progress one bit. When the army of Cortez introduced smallpox into the Aztec population, their gods offered no more protection than the useless god of Christianity.

Yet George Washington had his army inoculated against smallpox with an early form of vaccine, and many people followed his example, which began to reduce the disease's toll. Improved vaccines later were developed, allowing a worldwide campaign to eradicate smallpox. Science killed a once-dreaded disease after the prayers of several religions failed miserably.

Polio, another nasty scourge, is also on the brink of extinction. Again, science is the sole weapon we used. Religion was helpless. It was a vaccine devised by science that is saving humanity.

Bubonic plague, smallpox, tuberculosis, typhus, measles, scurvy, polio and many types of infection — who reasonably fears these today. They're not exterminated, and some revive briefly at times with painful consequences. But their victims are so relatively few that most people with good reason are more afraid of lightning — a frequent electrical discharge in the air following a pathway to the earth, by the way, not a divine act of judgment.

Tragically, religious belief has led many parents in certain sects to allow their children to die — sometimes horribly — while the parents and pastors prayed ceaselessly for good health. The tragedy is, such deaths often involve diseases that could be relieved by simple, safe medical treatments.

The Christian Scientists have lost court cases over their superstitious folly because their witch doctors persuaded parents to allow children, such as those

suffering from diabetes, to discard life-saving medicine in favor of useless, primitive superstition.

The Christian Scientists are guilty of cold-blooded murder. While the guilty parents might be excused on the basis of temporary insanity, the witchdoctors who gulled them should not be allowed any such excuse but ought to be prosecuted to the utmost extent of the law.

We all must die of something. Faith can only console people, not cure them. Science increases your chances of living to a ripe old age. So put your money into medicine, not the church collection box.

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SEND YOUR KIDS/GRANDKIDS TO SUMMER CAMP

Camp Quest started in 1996 as the first residential summer camp in the history of the United States for the children of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists, Brights, or whatever other terms might be applied to those who hold to a naturalistic, not supernatural world view. Camp Quest is for children ages 8-17.

At Camp Quest campers learn about science and engage in critical thinking in the midst of a well-founded camp experience filled with horseback riding, swimming, crafts, singing around the campfire and more.

Camp Quest will be running at the following dates and locations this summer:

Camp Quest of the Smoky Mountains June 4-11

www.rationalists.org/cq/

Camp Quest Ohio July 15-22

www.camp-quest.org

Camp Quest West (Calif.) July 15-21

www.campquestwest.org

Camp Quest Minnesota July 23-30

www.campquest.org

Camp Quest Michigan August 13-20

www.michigan.camp-quest.com

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IN MEMORIAM

On March 11, NOSHA member George L. Kirchem III lost his battle with cancer. George was a veteran of the 1st Gulf War and a native of Chalmette. Not only will George be missed by NOSHA members who had gotten to know him, but by a host of family and friends to whom he was known as "the big white Kahuna." His friends and family celebrated George's life at a Hawaiian theme sendoff. Aloha, George!

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YOU SWEAR TO UPHOLD WHAT?

On Wednesday, March 1st, 2006, in Annapolis at a hearing on a proposed amendment to the Constitution to prohibit gay marriage, Jamie Raskin, professor of law at American University, was requested to testify.

At the end of his testimony, Republican Senator Nancy Jacobs said: “Mr. Raskin, my Bible says marriage is only between a man and a woman. What do you have to say about that?”

Raskin replied: “Senator, when you took your oath of office, you placed your hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. You did not place your hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible.”

*(Touché, Professor Raskin! And thanks to NOSHA member **Jeanne Okamoto** who discovered this delicious tidbit and shared it with us.)*

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OF INTEREST TO HUMANISTS . . .

JEFFERSON CITY, MO—Missouri legislators are considering a bill that would name Christianity the state’s official “majority” religion. The resolution would recognize “a Christian god,” and would not protect minority religions, but would “protect the majority’s right to express their religious beliefs. The resolution further recognizes that “a greater power exists,” and only Christianity receives what the resolution calls, “justified recognition.”

NEW YORK—Contending that women have more options than they do in the event of an unintended pregnancy, men’s rights activists are launching a legal campaign which would give them the chance to opt out of financial responsibility for raising a child. The suit was filed by the National Center for Men on behalf of a 25-year-old computer programmer who was ordered to pay child support for his girlfriend’s child. His argument is basically if she has a choice, why doesn’t he?

BOSTON—In March, the Boston Archdiocese’s Catholic Charities said it would stop providing adoption services because of the Massachusetts state law which allows gays and lesbians to adopt. Over the last 20 years, Catholic Charities has placed 720 children in adoptive homes, 13 with same-sex couples. But in 2003, the Vatican said gay adoption was “gravely immoral”, so now it’s better to leave the kids in the orphanage with 20 numbs rather than place them in a loving 2-parent home where they might have two mommies.

PIERRE, SD—Legislation was passed in March, which would outlaw all abortions with the only exception being the life of the mother. There are no exceptions for rape,

incest or threat to a woman’s health. Ditto here in Louisiana.

TOPEKA, KS—The Rev. Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church has been attending military funerals of soldiers killed in Iraq. The Rev. Phelps and his followers believe American deaths in Iraq are divine punishment for a country that harbors homosexuals. “The scriptures are crystal clear,” Phelps said. “When God sets out to punish a nation, it is with the sword.”

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INTERESTING STATISTICS

*(NOSHA member, **Charlotte Klasson** recently shared some interesting statistics regarding abortion with us.)*

- 54% of women having an abortion said they used some form of contraception during the month they became pregnant.
- 90% of women who are at risk for unplanned pregnancies are using contraception.
- 8% of women having an abortion say they have never used contraception.
- It is possible that up to 43% of the decline in abortion from 1994-2000 can be attributed to using emergency contraception.
- Approximately 1,370,000 abortions occur annual in the U.S. according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute.
- 88% of abortions occur during the first 6-12 weeks of pregnancy.
- 60% of abortions are performed on women who already have one or more children.

Considering all these numbers, it is difficult to see how the FDA could continue to stall at making emergency contraception available over-the-counter.

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MEMBERS’ PUBLISHED LETTERS

Former NOSHA board member, **Howard Bostock**, who has relocated to The Woodlands, Texas had the following letter published in *The Villager* (published in Montgomery County, Texas) on February 23, 2006:

The letter to the editor “Darwinian reasoning,” published in the Jan. 26 edition of *The Villager*, could have been better titled, “Biblical reasoning.” To believe that a god created everything in six days denies all accepted, documented, obvious evidence of our billion year cosmic history.

Isaac Asimov best expressed by scary concern about the trend of religious belief and political influence in America. To quote Asimov:

“Imagine the people who believe such things and are not ashamed to ignore, totally, all the patient finding of thinking minds through all the centuries since the bible was written.

And it is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the most unthinking among us who would make themselves the guides and leaders of us all: who would invade our schools and libraries and homes.”

(Though the following letter from NOSHA member Charlotte Klasson to Border's Books wasn't published anywhere, it did elicit a response. We publish both here. Charlotte's letter speaks for itself.)

To the managers who made the decision not carry Free Inquiry:

I'm deeply dismayed that a BOOKSTORE would decide not to carry a publication that represents freedom of opinion, tolerance and secular ideas because it printed the Muslim cartoons.

How very cowardly of all of you!

Do you not realize that there are people in our own country who are as bad or worse about shoving religion and intolerance down our throats any chance they get and would think nothing of demanding which products a business can carry in a free society? If I'm not mistaken, this has happened before to bookstores in our country.

Shame on you. I have always been a big fan of yours, but this moronic decision will cause me to take a good look at Barnes & Noble from now on for my corporate bookstore experience.

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist;

Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew;

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak out for me.

If we're not careful, and if you're not careful, there will be no one left to speak for the bookstores. Have some courage and stand up to these people.

Regards,
Charlotte Klasson

The response - -

Dear Charlotte:

Thank you for your expression of concern about our decision not to carry the issue of Free Inquiry magazine

featuring cartoons depicting Muhammad. Borders is committed to our customers' right to choose what to read and what to buy and to the First Amendment right of Free Inquiry to publish the cartoons. In this particular case, we decided not to stock this issue in our stores because we place a priority on the safety and security of our customers and our employees. We believe that carrying this issue presented a challenge to that priority.

We value your thoughts and sincerely appreciate that you invested your time to tell us how you feel about the issue. I can assure you that our management team gave careful deliberation to this decision and considered all sides of the issue before reaching this conclusion. As always, we are interested in customer feedback about our choices and while we know you do not agree with our position, we hope you can understand the challenge of balancing the needs of our customers, employees and our communities.

I hope that this information is helpful. If you should have any other questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Stacey
Borders Customer Care

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Attention NOSHA Members!

We need more diversity in newsletter content. We would love letters to the editor, humor, notable quotes, personal stories, essays, poetry, or whatever you would like to submit. This is your organization, and we really want to hear from you!. Please send anything you want either to me, Connie Gordon, at ergordo@bellsouth.net or to 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

PERMANENTLY TAX EXEMPT

When NOSHA first incorporated, tax-exempt status was applied for, allowing all contributions to be tax deductible. Our application was approved, allowing the 501c3 status for an “advance ruling period” of five years.

2005 was our fifth year, so paperwork was filed to demonstrate we had operated as originally stated. On March 13, 2006 we received word from the IRS that NOSHA is “classified as a public charity” and that we are “exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Code.”

This means that we are permanently tax exempt. All contributions will be sincerely appreciated.

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DARWIN DAY 2006**Dave Schultz**

On February 18, 2006 NOSHA hosted New Orleans Darwin Day 2006, the seventh Darwin Day in New Orleans. The speakers this year were Dr. **Steven Darwin** of Tulane University and Dr. **Barbara Forrest** of Southeastern Louisiana University. Both Steve and Barbara had spoken at previous Darwin Day celebrations, Steve in 2000, and Barbara in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005.

Steve's talk, entitled "Charles Darwin and Intelligent Design" was a scholarly review of Charles Darwin's initial acceptance, and later total rejection, of ideas similar to what is now known as "intelligent design theory." Early in his academic career Darwin was a scholar of William Paley, the originator of an argument that is still used today to support the concept of intelligent design - *if a watch exists there must have been a watchmaker*. Darwin, like many other naturalists of his day, accepted Paley's idea and could recite passages from his writings in support of the concept of a grand designer of the universe. However, Darwin's discovery of natural selection led to a complete reversal in his thinking, but knowledge of Paley's work served Darwin well, for he knew the arguments that he had to overthrow in order to make his case for natural selection.

Barbara's talk, entitled "Slam-Dunk for Science and the Constitution: The Dover Intelligent Design Trial," was a victorious review of the most recent, and perhaps most powerful, legal overthrow of the teaching of creationist ideas in science classes in public schools. Barbara was personally involved in that trial and testified for two days, under grueling cross-examination, about the creationist roots of the ID conspiracy. In her biting witty talk, Barbara reviewed the major players on both sides of the trial. While almost all the heavyweights on the ID side initially planned to testify, most withdrew when they were not allowed to bring their own lawyers into the case. This left the already thin case for ID emaciated. The defense initially tried to have Barbara disqualified from testimony because of her association with such nefarious organizations as NOSHA and the ACLU. (They all but painted horns and a tail on her.) Barbara's testimony was ultimately the keystone in the case against the teaching of ID in Pennsylvania public schools. The judge, John E. Jones III, (a Bush appointee) clearly saw the creationist (and therefore religious) underpinnings of ID and accused several of the Dover Area School Board members of lying and attempting to disguise their real purpose. He ultimately ruled that ID could not be included in the science curriculum of the Dover School District. This ruling was deemed critical because actions similar to those of the Dover School Board are, or were, being initiated in several other states. Barbara deserves a resounding

nationwide thank you, from everyone interested in maintaining our First Amendment rights of church/state separation, for her sustained efforts against the ID conspiracy.

Barbara and Steve both deserve a collective thank you from NOSHA for stepping up at a difficult time to help to keep New Orleans Darwin Day going. We look forward to returning the reins to the University of New Orleans in 2007.

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SPECIAL EVENT COMING UP

NOSHA will join Community Church (Unitarian) and the Rev. Jim VanderWeele in sponsoring the August 6 appearance of Rev. Roger A Brewin of Chicago who will give a service-long performance as Clarence Darrow. Rev. Brewin is a Unitarian Universalist atheist and leader in the UU Humanists. More information is forthcoming, but mark the date on your calendar.

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NOSHA MEETING DATES

June 17 – Glen and GiGi Sandberg will discuss events at
The recent AAAS Meeting
July 15 – To be announced
August 19 – To be announced
September 23 – To be announced
October 21 – To be announced
November 18 – To be announced
December 16 – Celebration of the Winter Solstice

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A BIG THANK YOU

Thanks to **Serena Bodellini** for opening her lovely home for a potluck dinner last Saturday night. And thanks to **Sally Mooney** for coordinating attendees and dishes. More of you should come next time. We had a great time.

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“Humanity has the stars in its future, and that future is too important to be lost under the burden of juvenile folly and ignorant superstition.”

-- Isaac Asimov

“As men’s prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect.”

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Say what you will about the sweet miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider a capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile.”

-- Kurt Vonnegut

“It may be that ministers really think that their prayers do good and it may be that frogs imagine that their croaking brings spring.

-- Robert Ingersoll

The New Orleans Secular Humanist Association (NOSHA) was formed to provide an opportunity for like-minded people to meet and exchange ideas and to promote awareness of secular humanist viewpoints in the community. We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to explain the world in supernatural terms and to look outside nature for salvation. We strive to make the public aware of the importance of the separation of church and state, to oppose the teaching of creationism and other religious doctrines in the public schools, and to provide a voice of reason when superstition is presented in the media. We believe in enjoying life here and now, and in cultivating moral excellence. We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

To become a friend of THE NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION, complete, clip, and mail in the following form:

Check one: New Member Renewing Member Mailing list only Newsletter by mail

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone and/or e-mail: _____

2006 Annual dues are only \$5.00. Make checks payable to "NOSHA" and mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

NOTE: For those of you who receive the newsletter by standard mail, the year for which you have last paid membership dues is reflected in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

**NOSHA
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