

# NOSHA NEWS

## Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association Fall 2009

### New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

520 St. Louis St., Apt. 3  
New Orleans, LA 70130  
[www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info)  
(a 501c3 corporation)

### DIRECTORS/OFFICERS

Harry Greenberger, President  
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Connie Gordon, Treasurer  
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Barbara Forrest  
J. Michael Malec  
Denis Dwyer  
Patrick Lestrade  
Serena Bodellini

### NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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

### MEETINGS

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of month, 2:00 pm  
Dominion Learning Center  
Audubon Park Zoo

### N.O. COX CABLE TV

CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"  
Sat. midnight, Sun. noon  
CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"  
Tues. 10:30am; 10:30 pm

### TEN YEARS AND COUNTING CONGRATULATIONS NOSHA

On September 18, 2009, about 65 of us assembled at Smiley's Restaurant in Harahan to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association. We are very proud of our organization and of our members, several of whom have become prominent not only on the local but on the national stage. The keynote speaker for our festivities was Sean Faircloth, the Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America.

Pictured below are several board members and Mr. Faircloth. They are (from left to right) **Dave Schultz, Charlotte Klasson, Sean Faircloth, Harry Greenberger, Connie Gordon, and Doug Stewart**. More photos from the banquet may be seen on page 7 of this newsletter.



Ten years ago, about a dozen of us held our first meeting at a local bookstore. That meeting, organized by Gina Cedotal, was to organize as the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association. Our first and only president, Harry Greenberger, was elected at the second meeting about a month later, and the rest is history.

The list of folks who have requested inclusion on our mailing list has grown to over 500, with more than 100 being dues-paying members, many of whom regularly participate in our monthly meetings. We know that our 500 represent only a few of the secularists in our area, so we continue to try to reach a larger audience through our meeting notices, billboard and other advertising, letters to the editors of local newspapers, appearances on local TV and radio programs, as well as appearances before the New Orleans City Council. Perhaps our biggest accomplishment has been the establishment of an annual Darwin Day event in the city. After our first such event at Tulane University, the University of New Orleans took over the organization and continuing production of the annual event.

We have also established two public access television programs on Cox Cable New Orleans. The "New Orleans Humanist Perspective" is locally produced, and together with "Atheist Viewpoint" may be viewed several times a week on New Orleans cable channels 76 and 78.

Although we lost our original meeting place to the floods of Hurricane Katrina, and many members were scattered around the country, we have reconstituted and plan to be around for many more decades. Join us.

## PUBLISHED LETTERS

*(The first two letters printed here were inadvertently omitted from the Summer newsletter, for which this editor apologizes to the authors.)*

The following letter by **Charlotte Klasson** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on June 17, 2009:

Two very important pieces of legislation were recently knocked down by those we elected to stand up for us: House Bill 705 (the Pay Equity Bill presented by Rep. Barbara Norton) and Senate Concurrent Resolution 7 (a resolution to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment presented by Sen. Yvonne Dorsey).

Louisiana's working women got shoved to the back of the line again as HB 705 was short-changed in votes just as women are every day in our workplaces. Fifty-nine members of the House of Representatives voted that it was OK for their daughters, sisters, wives and mothers to be paid 65 cents for doing the same work that pays their mail counterparts a dollar.

Since Social Security and pension checks are based upon career earnings, the inequality carries on over into retirement years, too. This puts an even larger burden on taxpayers to support those below the poverty level, and guess who that is? With the largest pay gap in the nation for educated women over age 25, Louisiana female heads of household and single women stand little chance of providing a comparable standard of living for their families or themselves.

There may be those who believe that voting against equal pay for equal work is justified because there's an expense involved. That argument also could have been made when we enacted laws to require mandatory school attendance for children or adherence by restaurants and other businesses to certain health and safety standards. We did those things because they were the right thing to do. So is this!

If women are expected to do the same work, they must be guaranteed to earn the same pay. The vote against that by the Louisiana House should not be the last word. The women of Louisiana deserve better. Rep. Norton, who authored HIB 705, and the 32 House members who voted with her should be proud of their courage of conviction.

But the crowing blow as that SCR 7 was sent to the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee and was defeated by a vote of 3 to 2. While chivalry may be alive and well, let's admit it, our leaders continue to slam the door of equality in our faces.

The following letter by **Barbara Forrest** appeared in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* on June 17, 2009:

If the Louisiana Family Forum thinks that our Louisiana Constitution needs changing, we should be

worried. The LFF's meddling during this legislative session shows – again – that they are taking advantage of their alliance with Gov. Bobby Jindal to enact as much regressive legislation as possible.

House Bill 340, the "freedom of religion" amendment, is the latest example. This proposed constitutional amendment "fixes" something that isn't broken. Section 8 of the 1974 Louisiana Constitution, like the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, says, "No law shall be enacted respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Section 8 protects Louisiana citizens' religious freedom just as the First Amendment does.

Why does the LFF want to amend that? Wording in the proposed amendment answers this question: "The free exercise of religion shall include the right of every person to freely express his sincerely held religious belief and to engage in or refrain from activity based on a sincerely held religious belief."

One can easily envision (1) a creationist teacher using this amendment to "engage in" bringing her "sincerely held religious beliefs" into her classroom and (2) a health-care provider using it to "refrain from" providing necessary services to a patient.

Readers should know that Michelle Ghetti, the Southern University law professor who is promoting HB 340, also helped the LFF promote the creationist Louisiana Science Education Act in 2008. She also helped convince BESE to gut the policy implementing the LSEA on Jan. 13. Her Web page at the Southern University Law Center states her affiliation with the Alliance Defense Fund, whose purpose is to destroy the separation of church and state.

In his June 12 "End of Week" newsletter, LFF director Rev. Gene Mills, shown politicking at the Capitol on the front page of the June 11 Advocate, states, "Friends and foes alike have questioned the need for a Religious Freedom Amendment. ... The purpose of the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution was to protect citizens from government. It wasn't to protect government from citizens." He is referring to the Religious Right view that the First Amendment guarantees "freedom of religion, not freedom from religion."

Mills is dead wrong. The establishment clause in both the the First Amendment and Section 8 of the Louisiana Constitution prohibits organizations such as the LFF from imposing their religious views on the rest of us by usurping the authority of the state. This is precisely why Mills wants to change it, and so far, he is getting away with it. Where is the voice of the mainstream religious community on this issue? Don't you realize that the LFF is dictating policies that will affect you?

The following letter by **Mark Meunier** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on August 19, 2009:

Leave it to the single-minded Cal Thomas to exacerbate the already contentious health care debate by driving the wedge of religion into its heart.

The monolithic “secular left” straw man he creates is a figment of his conspiratorial imagination. This lurking caricature believes that humans are “accidents” with “nonspecial significance,” “burdens” who deserve no better than to be “snuff(ed) out.”

Belief in evolution, we are lectured, inexorable leads to belief in health care “rationing” and a desire to “get rid of granny.” “Those who believe that God made us...will have a completely different understanding of life’s value,” he intones.

Thomas’ blinkered crusade to divide us, when what we most need is to forge a unified vision of a more livable world, is reprehensible. The fact is that belief in a deity has no bearing on the value one places on human life; theists and atheists alike occasionally succumb to sociopathy.

Don’t let fearmongers like Thomas separate us. Civil, informed discourse, free of simplistic slogans and “us vs. them” rhetoric, is the most promising way to address this vital issue.

The following letter by **Harry Greenberger** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on October 18, 2009:

Your Health & Science article reported on studies suggesting that “palliative” care for the dying elderly should be considered as a partial solution to the unsustainable and increasing costs of medical care in this country.

It has been reported that 30 percent of all Medicare dollars are spent on patients in their last year of life, and half of that is expended in the final 60 days. An estimate of \$70 billion a year goes to care that simply prolongs suffering, with no cure expected.

When one health care reform proposal included Medicare reimbursement for doctors to consult with patients regarding end-of-life decisions, it was dropped after being maligned as “death panels.”

However, hospice care, death with dignity, is more loving and humanitarian than useless, aggressive and expensive treatments – and needs to be explained, promoted and included in any health care reform legislation.

The following letter by **Patrick Murphy** appeared in the *Houma Courier* on October 18, 2009:

A brief response to Rev. Monette’s recent question, is evolution true? The answer to the minister’s query is a resounding yes. When it comes to preaching on evolution, the reverend is no scientist. What is freely

asserted by him is freely denied by me. And calling me a fool because I adhere to the fact of evolution does not help his cause. I’ve attended numerous seminars on the theory of intelligent design and remain unconvinced.

Let me introduce the brilliant evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. With him, I adhere to an established fact that all life on this planet is shaped by Darwinian selection, which also endows it with an overwhelming illusion of design. All intelligence, all creativity and all design is the direct or indirect product of a cumulative process. Design comes late in the universe, after a period of evolution. Design cannot precede evolution and therefore cannot underlie the universe.

Finally, many religious people, especially those who are not beholden to organized religion, see no inherent contradiction between evolution and an informed conscience.

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### WHY NOT DEATH PANELS?

There has been much in the news of late about health care reform, both pro and con. One of the more serious aspects of that so-called reform has included a hyped-up right-wing scare tactic about “death panels” and “pulling the plug on Grandma.” However, end-of-life choices is a topic which NOSHA has hosted before, and it is a topic very dear to our president **Harry Greenberger** (see his letter to the editor in “Published Letters”). He wanted to share the following with all our readers. The following is excerpted from an article entitled “What’s So Bad About Death Panels?” by **Tom Flynn**, which appeared in *The Secular Humanist Bulletin*:

... If out-of-control healthcare costs truly constitute the crisis everyone says they do, why aren’t we hearing more about euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, or decisions patients and their families can make to scale back bloated end-of-life care? Why aren’t we hearing that dreaded R-word – you know, *rationing*? Let me ask the unthinkable: Why *aren’t* we talking about death panels?

And why isn’t the secular humanist community front-and-center in launching this debate?

Let’s begin by admitting that we face a true crisis. Thirty percent of all Medicare dollars go to patients in their last year of life. Half of *that* is expended in the final sixty days. According to physician Jeff Gordon, author of a forthcoming book, *A Death Prolonged*, that’s something on the order of \$70 billion a year squandered on care most of which neither cures nor palliates but simply prolongs suffering. . . . Where resources are limited, health-care dollars are far better spent curing a child of a treatable disease or preventing diabetes in a young adult than in keeping the heart of a terminal

patient beating for another day. And remember, resources *are* limited . . .

Which is where I'd suggest the secular humanist community comes in. Think back to the 1960s when organ transplantation and new technologies to extend basal metabolism forced society to modify traditional definitions of life and death. Secular humanist thinkers like Joseph Fletcher and Marvin Kohl were at the forefront of sweeping reforms. Death was redefined as the cessation of brain function, making possible the harvesting of viable organs. The idea that patients or their families *could* opt for less than "everything that can be done" in the face of terminal illness was established. These ideas were hugely controversial at the time.

Today, reform is urgently needed once again. In part because of our aging population, in part because there is so much more that medicine can do to prolong basal metabolism in patients who are never, ever going to recover quality of life, health care is becoming unsustainable. Public debate about the crisis consumes vast energies, yet doesn't reach meaningful conclusions – not surprisingly, because so many solutions that cry out for exploration remain unthinkable.

. . . Thinking the unthinkable is one of the things secular humanists do best. It's time for our community to come forward and, if need be, force a discussion of the hard questions that fester beneath the shallow analysis exchanged between television heads. Studies show that patients and family members significant – and voluntarily – reduce their consumption of costly end-of-life care if physicians simply have frank conversations with them about terminal-care options. More directive measures, including rationing and yes, even "death panels," may be needed when patients or family members insist – all too often, out of religious commitment – that doctors "do all they can." If nothing else, American society needs to engage with the unthinkable, as it did in the 1960s, if we hope to find a responsible solution to today's health-care funding crisis.

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**REVIEW: *THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH***

**Jared Cormier**

In case you haven't read Richard Dawkins' latest book, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, I highly recommend it for those of you with only a cursory knowledge of evolution or biology in general.

While it is by no means a comprehensive documentation of all the evidence for evolution, it does touch on many fallacies and arguments often put forth against evolution. However, it does much more than this. It describes, in classic Dawkins style, a rather

broad sample of the fossil, molecular, biogeographical, embryological, and experimental evidence for evolution ranging from the Lenski experiments (<http://myxo.css.msu.edu/index.html>) to Endler's guppy experiments

(<http://www.d.umn.edu/~jetterso/documents/Endler1980.pdf>) and many others. Even those who have taken college courses in evolutionary biology, but have not kept up with the literature of the past decade or so, would greatly benefit from this book.

While I disagree with many of Dawkins' metaphors, such as DNA "code" and other falsehoods, I nevertheless think these falsehoods are useful in the introductory style of writing in which they are used. In fact, I may even go so far as to say these are necessary for this particular target audience.

Published by Bantam Press/Simon & Shuster, \$30.00.

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**REMEMBERING A SPECIAL LADY**



On Thursday, October 15, NOSHA and the freethinking community lost a very special friend. Maria **Serena Bodellini** was born in Foggia, Italy where she was raised during the hardship years of World War II. She received a degree in Modern Languages from the

University of Bologna, and eventually came to the U.S. where she became a citizen and raised her only son Marco.

Always a feminist and freethinker, she worked as an interpreter, translator and commodities futures broker. She was an officer with the Greater New Orleans Chapter of NOW and a board member of NOSHA since December 2008. For several years she has been one of our most ardent and progressive supporters, and we will remember her lovely personality and feisty attitude with much fondness for a long time to come. It has been an honor to have known her and we will miss her. Our condolences to her son Marco Bodellini and her family in Italy.

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**GRANT WRITER NEEDED**

A person with some grant application experience can be very helpful to NOSHA regarding a small current need and possible future grant requests. Contact Harry at (504) 282-5459 or [hpgreenx@yahoo.com](mailto:hpgreenx@yahoo.com).

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**Religion**, n. A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable.

-- Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

**THE NUMBERS OF “NONES” ARE GROWING**

(The following article by Cathy Lynn Grossman was excerpted from the September 22 edition of *USA Today* where it appeared under the title “People with ‘no religion’ gaining on major denominations.”)

Americans who don’t identify with any religion are now 15% of the USA, but trends in a new study shows they could one day surpass the nation’s largest denominations – including Catholics, now 24% of the nation.

American Nones: Profile of the No Religion Population . . . finds this faith-free group already includes nearly 19% of U.S. men and 12% of women. Of these, 35% say they were Catholic at age 12.

. . . Nones, now 22% of all adults ages 18 to 29, continue to gain . . . researchers forecast one in five Americans will ve Nones in 20 years.

. . . Nones also are the only major U.S. faith group that’s majority male. Even when girls grow up with unbelieving parents, they’re more likely to find a faith as adults than their brothers.

. . . There are so many misconceptions about who the Nones are. They’re not New Age searchers or spiritual or even hardened atheists. . . They’re a stew of agnostics, deists and rationalists. They sound more like Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine. . .

In some way, researchers found Nones are very much like the overall, largely religious, U.S. population. There’s no statistical difference on education, or income or marital status. They are just as likely to be divorced as anybody else.

Nones are not a fringe group anymore and are now part of Middle America. They’re present in every socio-demographic group.

\* \* \* \* \*

One day Preacher Bob was walking down the street and he sees Billy, the neighbor’s boy, out in the yard peering into a cardboard box.

“Whatcha got there, Billy?”

“Puppies!”

“Puppies? What kind of puppies?”

Billy answers proudly, “They’re Christian puppies!”

Preacher Bob beams and continues on his walk.

A couple of weeks go by and Minister Frank is visiting Preacher Bob. Preacher Bob tells Minister Frank he has to come see this kid down the street and how cute he is. So they walk down there and Preacher Bob says, “Hey there Billy, how are those puppies doing?”

“Oh, they’re great, Preacher Bob, just great!”

“Say, Billy, tell the Minister here what kind of puppies you have there!”

“They’re atheist puppies!”

Preacher Bob is shocked and sputters, “Atheist puppies?! But, Billy, a couple of weeks ago you said they were Christian puppies!”

“Yeah, I know, but now their eyes are open.”

*(Thanks to John Williams for sharing this bit of humor with the NOSHA on-line discussion group.)*

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**PROPOSAL FOR NOSHA GROUP FOR MEMBERS WITH PERSONAL PROBLEMS**

Taking the idea from New York City Atheists, addressing the question as to counseling help for nonbelievers, NOSHA is proposing the formation of a therapy group for its members with psychological, emotional or other personal problems. New York calls its group “Living without religion,” led by a psychotherapist. Their group “will meet once a month, with the goal of helping each other resolve our personal problems through reason, scientific knowledge, empathy, logic and understanding. There will be no charge for this cutting-edge support group, but you must be a member to participate.”

NOSHA member Lisa Suarez, a Humanist and a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, has agreed to help to put together a group of our members “who would like to grow their values and strengthen personal positions in life.” Like the NYC group, there will be no charge for participation.

Anyone interested in becoming a part of this program should contact Harry Greenberger at (504) 282-5459 or [hpgreenx@yahoo.com](mailto:hpgreenx@yahoo.com).

Personal problems? Philosophical issues?  
Stress?  
Unexplained fatigue? Depressed?  
Let’s talk about it.  
**LISA SUAREZ, M.Ed., LMFT**  
Email: [LisaS@carenola.com](mailto:LisaS@carenola.com)  
Phone: (504)896- 1000,  
VoiceMail x82

**ADVERTISING IN NOSHA NEWS**

If you or someone you know would like to purchase advertising in this newsletter, it is now available. The ad immediately above is paid advertising. Two sizes are available – 1/4 page (3.5” w x 4.25” h) @ \$40 or 4 issues @ \$136 and Business Card (3.5” w x 2” h) @ \$25 or 4 issues @ \$85.

For more information, check the NOSHA website at [www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info).

**CITY COUNCIL INVOCATION  
SEPTEMBER 3, 2009**

On September 3, NOSHA president **Harry Greenberger** once again gave the invocation at the opening of the New Orleans City Council meeting, this time by invitation. Following is the content of his invocation:



“First, I want to thank you for the kid reception you gave to my prior invocation and for this opportunity to return.

Since an invocation is generally understood to be an appeal to a “higher power,” my appeal today

is to the high power of “natural morality” – morality without religion.

Humanists often hear that without belief in God there is no basis for morality and thus “anything goes.” In truth, most non-believers have strong foundations for living ethically. It has been documented that atheists and agnostics do not behave less morally than religious persons, even if our virtuous acts arise from different sources.

A study of history will show that rules of moral behavior had been accepted by many early societies prior to biblical “commandments,” not the least of which is the ethical wisdom of the golden rule – doing to others as we would have them do to us. Because early and present day nontheists do not want to be murdered, robbed, or otherwise injured, we follow moral laws prohibiting those types of acts. And, our desire to be treated fairly, honestly and respectfully leads us to advocate rules of conduct, which promote fair, honest, and respectful treatment of all people. Our judgments of right and wrong reflect the out-come of thousands of years of social interaction, and are now a part of our common inheritance.

As Albert Einstein, a recognized nontheist, said: “From the standpoint of daily life...there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men – above all for those upon whose smiles and wellbeing our own happiness depends.” That is “morality without religion” which I invoke to operate in the deliberations of this Council and to prevail in our city which you represent.”

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“It is only by dispelling the clouds and phantoms of Religion, that we shall discover Truth, Reason, and Morality.”

--Baron D’Holbach

**WHAT ELSE HAS NOSHA BEEN DOING?**

The turnout for our October meeting was one of the largest to date. The drawing card was our speaker,



**Victor J. Stenger**, an emeritus professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Hawaii and author of ten books. Not only did Vic address our group on “the new atheism” but he autographed and discussed his latest book, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason*, as well as several of his older publications.

If you haven’t done so, lately, you should take a look at the new and improved NOSHA website. NOSHA secretary **Charlotte Klasson** and member **Ricky Adams**, himself a website designer have thoroughly re-worked it and it’s quite impressive. Great thanks to Charlotte and Ricky for all their work. Just go to [www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info) and check it out.

One of the links on the NOSHA website will get you to [www.cafepress.com/noshastore](http://www.cafepress.com/noshastore) where you can purchase NOSHA paraphernalia including t-shirts, mugs, etc. all bearing the NOSHA logo. NOSHA gets 25% of the sales.

NOSHA member **Randall Hayes** was inspired by Doug Stewart’s article and challenge in the Summer 2008 newsletter to get his own personalized plate for his car. Here’s Randall’s plate. He joins Doug’s “Godless”, Dave Schultz’s “Humnist”, and Percy Prestenbach’s “Atheist” plates. Note the “flying spaghetti monster” on the rear of Randall’s car, too.



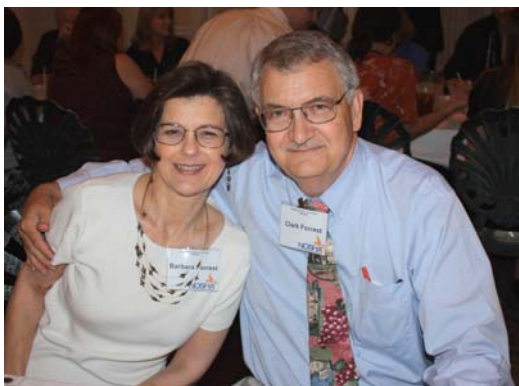
Our regular November meeting, on the 21<sup>st</sup> will be a commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin’s of *The Origin Species*. We will view two parts of a British television documentary entitled “The Genius of Charles Darwin” which was written and is presented by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

The speaker for our December 12 meeting will be **Dr. Darrel Ray**, author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*.

Also at our December meeting, we will be electing **new board members**. With the death of Serena Bodellini and several term expirations, we are soliciting nominations now. If you would like to serve or would like to nominate someone, it’s not too early. Please contact Harry Greenberger or Charlotte Klasson with your nominations.

### MORE PICTURES FROM NOSHA'S TENTH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET

A special thank you goes to **Harry Greenberger** and **Charlotte Klasson** for banquet arrangements and to Smiley's Restaurant for great food and a terrific wait staff. And thanks to **Dave Schultz** and **Robert Carver** for all the banquet photographs.



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:**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**2010 Annual dues are \$20.00.** 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  
520 St. Louis St., Apt. 3  
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