

Newsletter of the
New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

NOSHA NEWS

Fall 2011

New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.

(a 501c3 corporation)

4314 Bancroft Drive
New Orleans, LA 70122
www.nosha.info

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Council for Secular Humanism
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Atheist Alliance of America
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GENERAL MEETING

3rd Saturday of the month, 4pm
Dominion Learning Center
Audubon Park Zoo

NOSHA TV

New Orleans Cox Cable
CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"
Fridays, 8:30am & 8:30pm
Saturdays, Midnight & Sundays, Noon
CH 99 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Sunday, 3:30pm; Monday, 8:30am;
Tuesdays, 10:30am & 10:30 pm

**New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Celebrates Twelve Years of Reason and Humanity**

Annie Laurie Gaylor Headlined Our Largest Banquet Yet!

This year's theme was "**One Nation, Indivisible**" which was a very patriotic and appropriate message given that our guest speaker was **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, the current co-president of **Freedom From Religion Foundation**. The Foundation "works as an umbrella



NOSHA President **Harry Greenberger** with **Marshall Harris** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**

for those who are free from religion and are committed to the cherished principle of separation of state and church." In fact, FFRF has been involved in at least one local situation in the past year.

The board would like to thank the committee members who made all of this possible: **Ricky Adams, Beth Deitch, Chad Matisse, Rose Mort, and Charlotte**

Klasson. We'd also like to acknowledge and thank **Chris Baudot** for being our banquet photographer for the evening.

The banquet was held at Smilie's in Harahan and we had 62 in attendance.

More details about banquet on page 3

Paul Kurtz to be November guest speaker



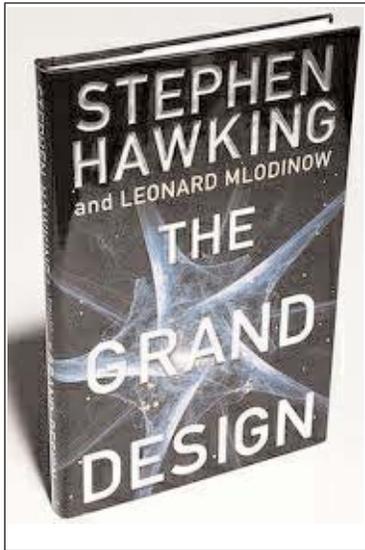
Paul Kurtz, considered the "father of secular humanism," is the current chairman of the **Institute for Science and Human Values** and founder of the **Center for Inquiry** and will be our monthly speaker on Saturday, November 19.

He will be interviewed by Norm Allen about his forthcoming book, *The Turbulent Universe*.

Fall Book Review:

***The Grand Design* New York: Bantam Books (2010)**

Perhaps you are one of the lucky few who is naturally gifted with mathematical genius or at least has advanced training in the field. No? Me either. I think I understand that our reliance on energies such as light to observe the universe around us places limits on what we can know about the sub-atomic realm, yet it often



seems to me that physicists take a little too much pleasure in emphasizing the mysteriousness of the quantum.

Nevertheless, I cannot help but be curious. After all, physicists seem to be investigating the very nature of reality and knowledge, pressing the boundaries between philosophy and observational knowledge.

So I'm always looking for experts who are willing at least to try to explain their insights to those of us who don't "just get differential calculus." To that end, I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed *The Grand Design*, a 2010 publication by Cosmologist-Mathematician-Physicists **Stephen Hawking** and **Leonard Mlodinow**.

In a scant 200 pages, Hawking and Mlodinow attempt to give us non-specialists some grasp of the latest synthesis of theoretical physics, the somewhat poorly bounded M-theory. This is an entry into the counter-intuitive realm of sub-atomic particles whose paths through space seem to take on specifics only upon being observed, of quarks and multiverses and forces operating in eleven dimensions, and the on-going quest for a unified way to understand gravity, electro-magnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces.

Of special interest to the secularist is the author's confidence in the comprehensible and law-driven nature of the universe. They explain that idea that there are multiple universes is not just a fudge factor made up by non-believers to explain away the need for a creator. Rather, the likelihood of multiple universes is directly implied by the nature of physics as it is now understood. And the possibility or even probability of multiple universes takes physics into discussions once

reserved for philosophers. Hawking and Mlodinow break with Stephen Jay Gould's optimistic view of science and religion as "non-overlapping magisteria," and dare to ask why there is something rather than nothing, why our universe has the particular physical laws it has, and why we humans exist.

The answer explained in *The Grand Design* is that the an entire universe, including the one we live in, can consist of positive and negative energies that net to zero. This being the case, multiple universes are as likely to pop into existence as none. The possibility of multiple universes pulls the rug out from under "fine tuning" arguments in favor of an intelligent designer, because various universes could each have different sets of physical laws. We just happen to inhabit this particular one of many, since humans, or beings like us, exist only in those universes with physical laws biased in favor of producing such life forms.

M-Theory is not in the same class as gravity, evolution, or the heliocentric model of the solar system. M-theory is still a hypothesis, a theory with a lower-case "t". In spite of this, it is fascinating to see how physicists grapple with some of the same epistemological problems faced by philosophers. The position of at least these cosmologists closely parallels that of some philosophers, who say that human existence and the array of physical laws that characterize our universe are "brute facts" that simply have to be accepted.

For 500 years science has been steadily reducing the arenas within which a deity might operate. In *The Grand Design*, Hawking and Mlodinow make it clear that there simply is no such arena. On page 165 they write:

"Many people through the ages have attributed to God the beauty and complexity of nature that in their time seemed to have no scientific explanation.

But just as Darwin and Wallace explained how the apparently miraculous design of living forms could appear without intervention by a supreme being, the multiverse concept can explain the fine-tuning of physical law without the need for a benevolent creator who made the universe for our benefit."

Reviewed by Jim Dugan, NOSHA Board Member and Ph.d. candidate in anthropology at Tulane University.

NOSHA Banquet Revisted

We are happy to report we had people from all around the region including as far away as **Gulfport** and **Hattiesburg, Mississippi**, and also **Thibodaux, Slidell, Baton Rouge** and **Deridder** here in Louisiana, which wasn't expected, but very appreciated.

“Harry, you have assembled a lovely group of humanists and freethinkers. The affection everyone had for you and each other was very apparent and lovely!”

~Annie Laurie Gaylor

We also had a very special guest, **Jerry DeWitt**, who was a former evangelical pastor for over 25 years who briefly addressed the audience about his



experiences in dealing with his loss of faith. He has since been a guest speaker for a monthly meeting in September and has been named as the new Executive Director for **Recovering from Religion**, created by Darrell Ray, author of *The God Virus*.

RR is a “support group to help people deal with the aftermath of leaving their religion.”

Other highlights of the evening included a video montage created by **Chad Matise** set to the John Lennon song “Imagine” featuring the faces and quotes of many prominent and celebrated atheists.

Annie Laurie Gaylor was an enjoyable speaker and a gracious guest. As this was her first visit to New Orleans, we made sure she had a chance to tour the Garden District and the French Quarter with **Marshall Harris** as her knowledgeable and enthusiastic guide.

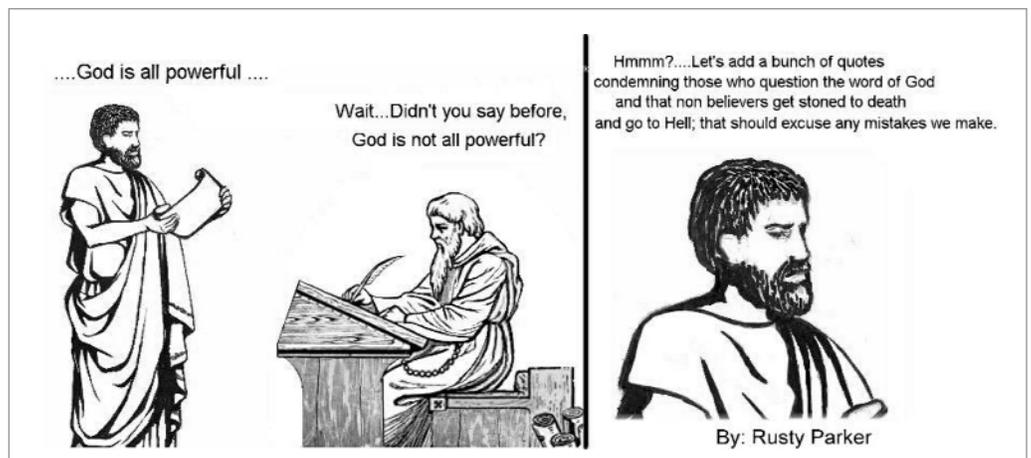


And after the banquet, she was game for a night out on the town and even sampled a famous “Hurricane” at Pat O’Brien’s and strolled Bourbon Street with a few of the NOSHA faithful!

Since November 2004, Gaylor has been serving with her husband, **Dan Barker**, a musician and former fundamentalist minister who is also nationally well-known as a freethought activist. She is the editor of *Freethought Today*, the only freethought newspaper in the United States, which is published ten times a year by FFRF.



Comic strip art and concept by **Rusty Parker**, an active NOSHA member.



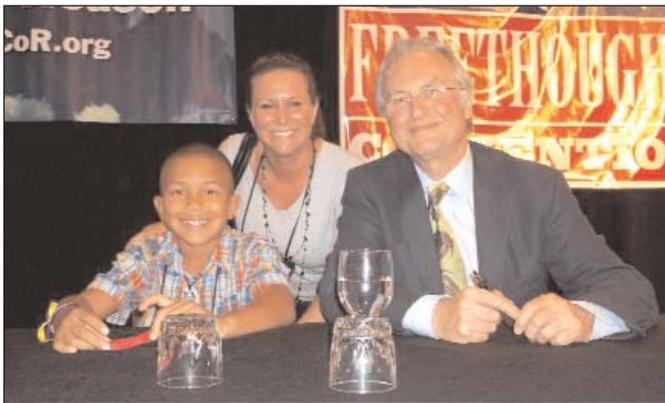
The Texas Freethought Convention 2011 “From Grassroots to Global Impact”

By Bridgette Barber

On October 7-9, I attended The Texas Freethought Convention, which was held in the Downtown Hyatt Regency Hotel in Houston. The theme for this year was “From Grassroots to Global Impact.” This was the first time I have attended a conference of this type, but I was pleasantly surprised by how comfortable and welcomed I felt although I attended virtually alone. I was also surprised at the size of event....over 650 attendees.

The convention featured exhibits from multiple sponsors and friends, including **The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science**, **Secular Student Alliance**, **Camp Quest**, **American Atheists**, and the **Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers**. It also featured a film festival that included such films as “The God Complex,” “Godless” and “The Ledge,” which was written and directed by **Matthew Chapman**, who was also in attendance.

The list of speakers included big names in the field of science such as **Professor Richard Dawkins**, **Dr. P.Z. Meyers**, **Dr. Eugenie Scott**, **Dr. Liz Cornwell**, and **Dr. Barbara Forrest**. Dr. Forrest from Louisiana (*and*



KT Barber and his mom, **Bridgette Barber** meet **Professor Richard Dawkins** in Houston.

a board member of NOSHA) lectured on why “academic freedom” is a fraud and discussed the now infamous Louisiana Science Education Act.

Other speakers included were **Matt Dillahunty** from “The Atheist Experience,” “Brother” **Richard Haynes** from AtheistNexus.org, and **Aron-Ra** of YouTube video acclaim. The convention organized a blood drive with the MD Anderson Cancer Center and had entertainment in the form of a comedy show with **Marion DiGiorgio**, and a rap concert by Greydon Square.

My son, KT, accompanied me and attended Camp Quest, a secular camp for children of freethinkers that promotes critical thinking and use of the scientific method. The children from Camp Quest also participated in a demonstration of the iPad app for Richard Dawkins' new book, *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True*. This was my son's first experience interacting with other children of atheists. He had such a good time that he asked me to attend Camp Quest this summer!



Also in attendance from Louisiana was **Jerry DeWitt**, a former Pentecostal minister. Representatives from The Dawkins

Thunderfoot, left, the brilliant and creative genius behind the “**Why Do People Laugh At Creationists**” video series on YouTube hams it up with his new buddy, KT.

Foundation including **Richard Dawkins** himself expressed excitement to work with Jerry on **The Clergy Project** which was developed to provide confidential networking and support to active and former clergy as they transition from believer to non-believer.

Without a doubt, the highlight of the convention was the banquet, where the 2011 Richard Dawkins award was presented to **Christopher Hitchens** for his outstanding contributions to freethought. Richard Dawkins personally presented the award this year. Hitchens not only graced fans with his presence at the convention. He also signed books, gave a speech and took part in a question and answer session after the banquet. Truly a memorable evening for everyone involved!

Based on what an amazing experience the 2011 Texas Freethought Convention was, I am already planning to attend the 2012 convention, which will be held in September 2012 in Austin.

**To find out more about the
Texas Freethought Convention go to:
www.texasfreethoughtconvention.com**

More Letters To The Editor by NOSHA Members

Don't dumb down classrooms when it comes to evolution: Thursday, August 4

Re: "Students should get all the facts," Your Opinions, July 20.

I certainly agree with the letter writer that Louisiana students should get all the facts about evolution. However, groundless speculation and wishful thinking do not constitute facts.

The writer is correct that some scientists, such as Francis Collins, author of "The Language of God," see evidence of intelligent design in the complexity of the genetic code itself, an idea roundly criticized by other scientists as baseless. The letter writer seems unaware, however, that even Collins solidly accepts evolution as a fact, acknowledging that the earth is billions of years old and that speciation is undeniable.

Inexplicably, the writer claims there are no scientific facts indicating that one species ever evolved into another. This is to deny the entirety of the fossil record, the morphological classification of existing life, the overwhelming evidence of genetics and the chemical analysis of the structure of proteins across species, all of which converge upon the fact of common descent.

I agree with the writer's claim that Louisiana students are unlikely to be denied entry into colleges merely because of their state's wrong-headed educational policies. They will, however, have to compete with every other applicant on the basis of their scores on standardized tests. And that comes down to classroom content.

Please, Louisiana, grow up! Stop dumbing down the classroom and our kids.

Jim Dugan
New Orleans

Mandeville to cut utility freebies for churches: Sunday, August 14

"It's not stealing if we don't know we're stealing" is one way to defend the free utilities provided to a dozen Mandeville churches. But that view doesn't hold water unless we believe that no one involved in the churches' financial affairs over five decades saw anything unusual about the free utilities.

Or one could quote Flip Wilson's Geraldine: "The Devil made me do it." Surely these churches will do the right thing by "rendering unto Caesar" restitution for the substantial largess they received at the expense of ratepayers who do observe the eighth commandment.

And surely the city will issue rebates to the ratepayers.

John S. Batson
Jefferson

NOSHA CALENDAR

NOSHA Monthly Meeting

3rd Saturday of the month
Audubon Zoo, Dominion Learning Center

Upcoming Dates:

November 19
December 17 - *Winter Solstice Party*
January 21

NOSHA Happy Hours

1st Wednesday and **3rd Tuesday** of the month

The Heretics' Brunch

Usually the **last Sunday** of the month.

Upcoming Date:

November 27

(Locations vary and dates or times may change, so check the NOSHA website for current details.)



Americans United

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, December 6 at 7pm
Baton Rouge Main Library
7711 Goodwood Blvd.

Meetings are free and open to the public

Tell Us About It

A Starfleet Wedding! NOSHA members **Douglas and Yvette Parfait** celebrated their 3rd anniversary this past June. Congratulations!

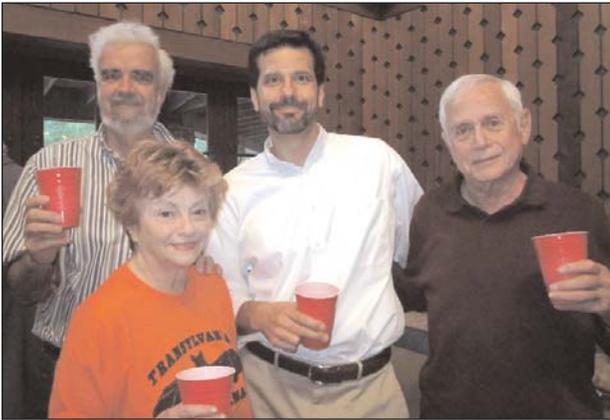


DO YOU HAVE ANY PERSONAL NEWS TO SHARE?

Anniversaries, milestone birthdays, new babies, graduations (any age), interesting accomplishments, "once in a lifetime" trips.

Send them to charlotte@nosha.info

“Much Ado About Nothing: The Maya and 2012”



Patrick Lestrade, Betty Alessandra, Marc Zender
and Harry Greenberger

Marc Zender, a visiting Assistant Professor at Tulane University and former lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University, spoke to NOSHA in October.

A specialist in Mayan languages and hieroglyphic writing, Zender is project epigrapher for the Comalcalco Archaeological Project directed by Ricardo Armijo Torres, and has undertaken archaeological, linguistic and epigraphic fieldwork in much of the Maya area, particularly in Mexico, Belize and Honduras.

2011 BANQUET MEMORIES



Learn more about NOSHA membership:

Annual dues are \$20.00 for a household. NOSHA relies on annual memberships to fund our monthly programs and advertising to promote secular humanism in the Greater New Orleans area.

We'd like to recognize the following members for contributing at higher levels.

Martyrs (\$100-249)

Sheila Curry
Justin Hinckley
Mike Jolley
Raoult Ratard
Marie Taylor

Beth Dietch
Paulette Hurdlik
Mark Meunier
Douglas & Yvette Parfait
Frank Tournier

Randall Hayes
Charlotte & Thomas Klasson
Dilia Montoya-Palgrave
Grant & Suzy Smith
Charlotte Upadhyay

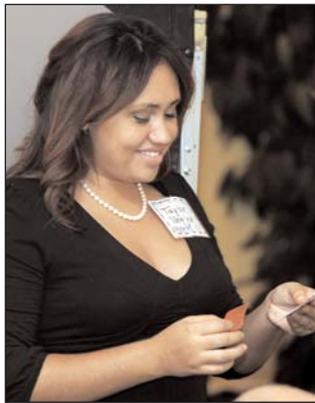
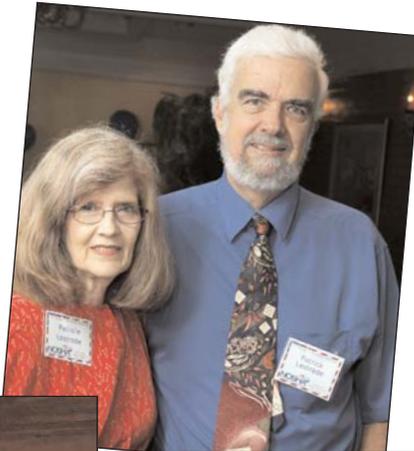
Patron Saints (\$250-499)

Betty & Manny Alessandra
Robert Bober
Steve Darwin
Michael Malec

Archangel (\$500 +)

Georges Maillot
Anonymous

Thank you to all of our donors who make our activities possible!



2011 BANQUET MEMORIES



*Banquet photos by Chris Baudot
Patriotic fleur de lis by Carter Hooper*



Support NOSHA as a member in 2012!

Name(s)

Address

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I request a mailed newsletter

\$20 Annual dues (*Household*)

\$100 Martyr

\$250 Patron Saint

\$500 Archangel

\$_____ Other

Make checks payable to NOSHA and mail to:

Connie R. Gordon, Treasurer
2509 Giuffrias St., Apt. 603
Metairie, LA 70001

*Contributions in excess of
basic dues are tax deductible.*

You can also pay online via

www.nosha.info using PayPal.



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 the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation. We believe in enjoying life here and now and in cultivating moral excellence. 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 the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

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