

Newsletter of the
New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

NOSHA NEWS

Spring 2011

New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.

(a 501c3 corporation)

4314 Bancroft Drive
New Orleans, LA 70122

www.nosha.info

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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

GENERAL MEETING

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

NOSHA TV

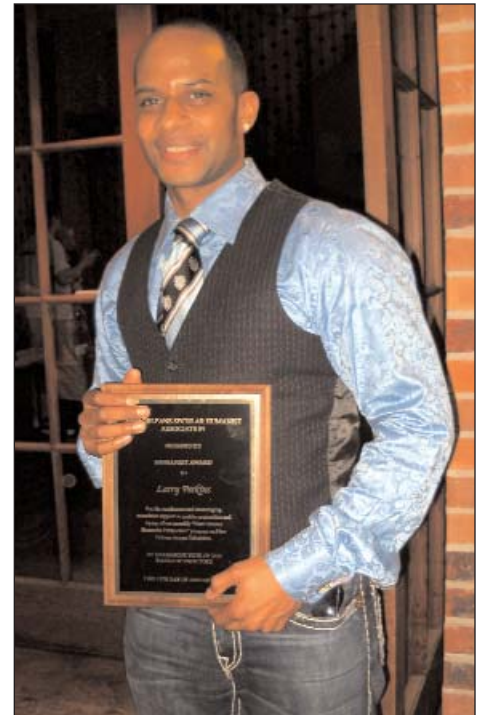
New Orleans Cox Cable
CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"
Saturdays, Midnight & Sundays, Noon
CH 99 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Tues. 10:30am; 10:30 pm

**New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Presents Humanist Award to Larry Perkins**

For his monthly continuous
and encouraging unassisted
support in quality
preparation and taping
of our
*New Orleans
Humanist Perspective*
program on New Orleans
Access Television.

BY UNANIMOUS
VOTE OF THE BOARD
OF DIRECTORS

*This 19th day of
February 2011*



Perkins is a production technician with
New Orleans Access Television.

Photo by Douglas Parfait

"Many of you here have appeared on our New Orleans Humanist Perspective television show and have seen the NOA-TV one-man production assistant, Larry Perkins, at work. He does it all and has worked with us for many years."

~Harry Greenberger

COMING IN APRIL!

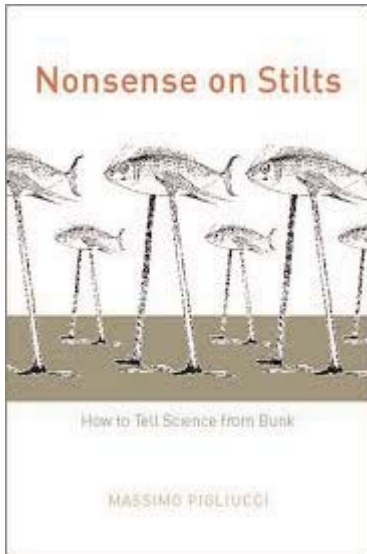


Tom Flynn, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism will present "**The Trouble with Easter**" at our monthly meeting on Saturday, April 16 at 4pm in the Dominion Learning Center at the Audubon Zoo.

Flynn is the editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, director of Inquiry Media Productions, and director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum.

Spring Book Review *Nonsense on Stilts*

Nonsense on Stilts: How to Tell Science from Bunk (University of Chicago Press, May 2010) is the title of a recent book by philosopher and scientist Massimo Pigliucci, chair of the Department of Philosophy at CUNY-Lehman College.



The book helps the reader understand the nature of science by identifying examples of pseudoscience like astrology, intelligent design, paranormal forces, and other "bunk" that is used to try to get people to believe claims that have no valid scientific evidence supporting them. On the other hand, when the scientific community makes valid claims like "the global climate is

warming and the burning of greenhouse gasses is a major contributing factor" there are politicians and other deniers who make counter claims saying the whole issue is bogus. How is the average citizen supposed to know who to believe?

One of the goals of this bi-weekly column on freethinking is to help readers answer the previous question. When you have a question or problem about plumbing, you should check with plumbers. When you have a question or problem about electrical wiring, you should check with electricians. So, when you have a question or problem related to science, you should check with scientists and many of the best scientists in the U.S. are in the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The NAS provides advice on scientific matters to the U.S. government and others, including individual citizens who can go to the NAS website and find a wide array of documents, like "Understanding and Responding to Climate Change", written in non-technical language explaining the science behind the issues. Of course scientists at local universities like FSU and FAMU also can offer good advice on science topics and they are usually quite willing to do so. The important thing is to know where to go for good advice and on science-related issues it is not politicians or talk radio and television or similar internet sites.

Just a few years ago FSU scientists and other faculty rejected attempts by politicians, chiropractors,

and others to establish a school of chiropractic at FSU. Subluxation chiropractic is recognized as pseudoscience by the scientific community and others who have studied the history and claims made by the chiropractic industry. When claims made in the name of science turn out to be false, scientists must speak up and inform citizens of the truth value of such claims. Fortunately, for the integrity of science and FSU, there is no school of chiropractic there or at any other major college or university in the U.S.

Identifying pseudoscience and superstition among the many claims and counter-claims in modern society are two important goals of freethinkers. Another example of a modern pseudoscience is known as "intelligent design" (ID), formerly called "creation science". The ID movement has been debunked repeatedly by science and by our courts but it persists because its basis is religious belief and in the U.S. religious belief, of one kind or another, is widespread.

Science requires solid evidence but religious belief is based on faith, not evidence, so when ID supporters make claims about how all the various forms of life appeared, the claims are based on faith in stories found in holy books and interpreted by religious leaders. The science of evolution is often rejected by religious believers because they cannot get past literal interpretations of old creation stories that predate modern science. Freethinkers are able to question all issues without feeling it is wrong to do so and they understand that supernatural explanations of natural phenomena have no place in science. History is filled with examples of resistance to scientific ideas by religious leaders and others in powerful positions, sometimes resulting in death and imprisonment of persons like Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei. However, ideas based on solid evidence are not extinguished by silencing the messengers and science has made incredible progress during the last four centuries.

Critical thinking, open inquiry and reliable evidence are essential to science and to democracies, and governments that fail to encourage its citizens to develop scientific habits of mind risk falling into autocratic dictatorships. The problems of pseudoscience and superstition (*Nonsense on Stilts*) continue to be widespread in spite of the many advances of modern science and resulting technologies. It is critical that our educational systems include instructional strategies that help citizens learn how to recognize claims made without credible scientific evidence.

Reviewed by Ron Good, Professor Emeritus at Louisiana State University. For more reviews, go to www.nosha.info

New Friends in Far Off Places

An email Greenberger received in October 2010 inquiring about meeting our group:

We found your contact information in the magazine *Secular Nation*.

Please allow us to introduce ourselves; Frank is 50 years old, a trained engineer working as a freelance translator and copywriter; Morten is 37 years old and a civil servant (management level). We both have a background in the Danish Army.

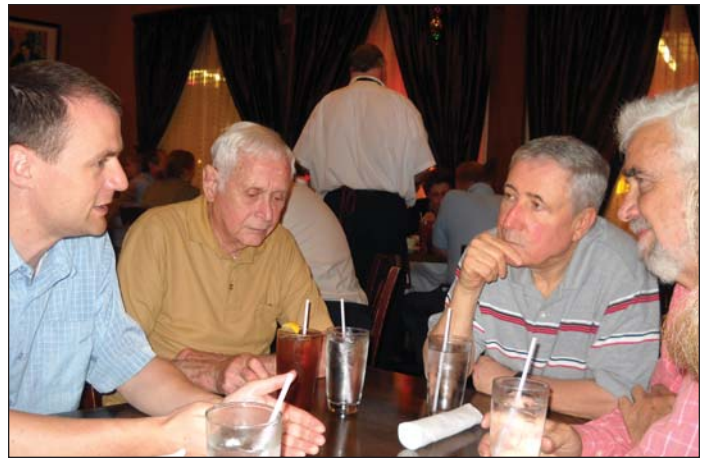
We are taking a vacation in the United States in the shape of a road trip from Los Angeles passing through the southern states including Louisiana.

We are both active in the Danish Atheist Assoc.; Frank as a board member, Morten as former board member and treasurer.

To strengthen our international network, we thought it would be a great idea to visit atheist/freethinker associations while driving through the U.S., and meet some of their members over a cup of coffee.

The Danish Atheist Association (also a member of A.A.I. with currently one seat on the board) was founded in 2001, has over 1,000 members and works primarily to secularize the Danish society which still suffers from a strange involvement from a relatively moderate state church in what we consider purely secular matters such as civil registration, public education and cemeteries.

Best regards
Frank Grevil and Morten Avsum



Morten Avsum, *left*, converses with Harry Greenberger and Patrick Lestrade (*far right*) at Mandina's in Mid City.



Douglas Parfait, a NOSHA member from Slidell with Frank Grevil, *right*.



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BACKGAMMON ANYONE?



The New Orleans Backgammon Club meets ever Wednesday at 6:30pm.

Friendly games and a weekly "Winner Take All Tournament" (\$5.00 entry fee)

FLORA'S CAFE • In the Marigny
at the corner of Royal St. and Franklin Ave.
Lots of on-street parking

Questions? Call Will Hunn at 504.366.7498

IN MEMORIAM

We lost two members of the secular community in January and February: **Scott Major**, age 43, and **Tina Lovine Missildine**, age 48. We extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Scott and Tina.



Scott Major



Tina Missildine

In The News: NOSHA Member Darlene Reaves speaks at Darwin Day activities in Baton Rouge. From *The Advocate*, February 14

Darwin's birthday celebrated

BY EMILY HART HOLDEN
Special to The Advocate

Flags reading "tolerance," "freedom" and "reason" greeted visitors to the Unitarian Church on Sunday afternoon who were celebrating Charles Darwin's birthday.

Darlene Reaves, a retired longtime high school science teacher, outlined Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" for a crowd of about three dozen people, most of them members of a group that organized the event, the Louisiana chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The group's celebration happened to coincide with a local high school student's initiative to repeal the 2008 Louisiana Science Education Act that allows teachers to use supplemental texts to help students critique and review scientific theories, including evolution.

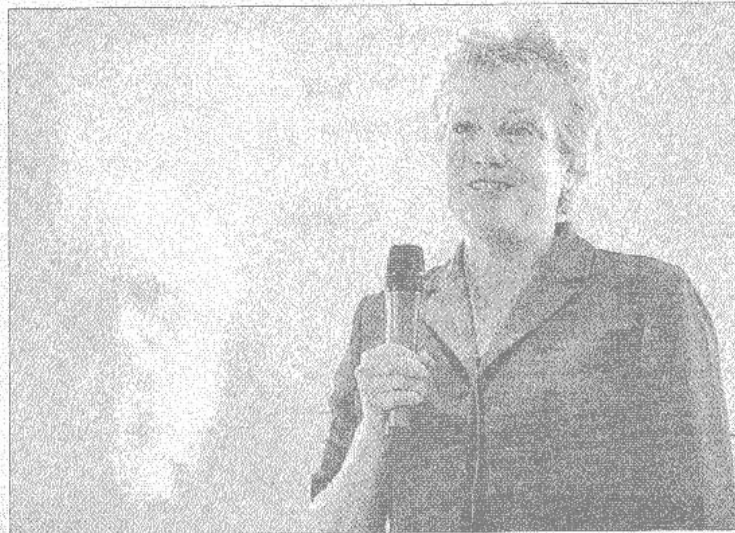
Zack Kopplin, a senior at Baton Rouge Magnet High School, said the supplemental materials must be approved by school boards, but in some areas those boards consist mainly of concerned parents.

"While it's good that they're concerned, they're not scientists and that means they're not the ones that should be making decisions about what goes on in science class," Kopplin said.

Kopplin, who calls the law "embarrassing" to the reputa-



Kopplin



Advocate staff photo by ADAM LAU

Retired high school science teacher Darlene Reaves speaks to a gathering for Darwin Day at Unitarian Church in Baton Rouge on Sunday.

tion of Louisiana's education system, said he is working with state Sen. Karen Carter Peterson, D-New Orleans, to garner support for a bill she plans to introduce in April to repeal the law. Several audience members offered him support.

Reaves taught at the New Orleans Center for Science and Math and at West Feliciana High School in St. Francisville. She also wrote a wildlife biology course for the state and an Osher Lifelong Learning course

for LSU.

Reaves said some students said they didn't believe her when she taught evolution. "I just told them, this is the prevailing scientific view, and this is based on evidence," she said.

"On the Origin of Species," published in 1859, is widely considered by the scientific community to be the foundation of evolutionary biology.

Darwin reportedly spent more than 20 years carefully

collecting evidence from around the world for the book, Reaves said.

She explained Darwin's ideas about natural selection and what he called "descent with modification," or evolution, in the animated style of a high school educator.

Reaves answered questions from the audience about some of the arguments creationists use against evolution. She said many of the weaknesses of Darwin's argument that he couldn't

explain while he was writing the book have since been resolved.

For example, the study of genetics has explained how traits are passed through generations and scientists have discovered the approximate age of Earth, Reaves said. The problem is that creationists still refer to those problems, she said.

The Louisiana chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State is three years old and has 50 active members, chapter president Patti Garner said.

The group works to educate the public about misconceptions about the separation of church and state and acts as a watchdog group for potential violations of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Members of Capital Area Atheists and Agnostics also attended the event. The group is nine months old and has 47 members, said founder and chairman Melissa Streeter. She said her group wants to change the community's untrue view that atheists and agnostics are immoral or untrustworthy.

Steve Crump, senior minister of the Unitarian Church, said the church on Goodwood Boulevard often holds events that bring together such diverse groups.

Crump said it is little-known that Darwin's family was Unitarian. "Religion and science, from our perspective, for centuries have been compatible," he said.

NOSHA Represents During Parades

Once again, NOSHA challenged Mardi Gras paraders by running a new streetcar ad on the Canal Street Line during February so that it could be seen during much of carnival season this year.

And we were fortunate to receive design input from a NOSHA member who works in the local sign industry, so we're very appreciative for his help! **Douglas Parfait**, who works in sales at **Pro Signs & Graphics**, volunteered to do the design for us which was a huge help (see below.)



Prestenbach Does His Part

Longtime NOSHA member from Marrero, Percy Prestenbach, keeps us informed of the letters he sends to the *Times-Picayune*. Even if they don't always get printed, the former recipient of NOSHA's Humanist Award likes to make sure that the local media knows that non-believers are part of their audience and they shouldn't forget it.

Here is a sampling of letters that Prestenbach has written in 2010. Perhaps this will serve to motivate some of us to do something similar:

This letter is in reference to "Senate calls for prayer to end crisis," (June 2010).

The Senate of Louisiana has approved a resolution encouraging people to pray for an end to the BP oil leak. It amazes me how people with knowledge can still think that prayers can be answered. It will come as a surprise to many atheists if the oil leak is stopped due to prayer.

(December 2010) When I was young, I was a God fearing person, and I was told that God created me in his own image and likeness, naked, normal and natural. If the story is true, then God must be a nudest.

There are a lot of monkeys and apes who have a similar image and likeness to man and God. There are people who will say anything to protect the God idea. They will say evolution is a theory and there is a missing link between apes and man.

The missing link between man and God is a missing God.

Do you write letters to the editor about the separation of church and state and other similar issues? If so, be sure to send copies to us especially if they are printed.

Please send it to charlotte@nosha.info

NOSHA CALENDAR

In case some of you aren't aware of ways to keep up with NOSHA news and other social activities, here's info and some links you can use:

NOSHA Monthly Meeting

3rd Saturday of the month

Audubon Zoo, Dominion Learning Center

Upcoming Dates:

April 16, May 21

NOSHA Happy Hours

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

(Locations vary, so check the

NOSHA calendar page for up-to-date info)

The Heretics' Brunch

This is a new feature and will usually be the **last Sunday** of the month.

Upcoming Dates:

April 24

You can watch the latest NOSHA television programs, link up to our Google Group discussion, read past newsletters and read up on all of the atheist and secular humanist articles and shows available and we are even on Facebook and Meetup

NOSHA Google Group:

<http://groups.google.com/group/nosha>

NOSHA on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=45510814299>



NOSHA on Meetup:

<http://www.meetup.com/new-orleans-atheists/>



ARE YOU IN THIS NUMBER?

NOSHA would like to acknowledge our dues paying members for 2011 and those who've donated a little more.

Ricky Adams	Dale Alsandor
Cheri Babich	Betsy Bainbridge
John S Batson	Marcy & Kevin Bladsacker
Walter E. Block	Robert Bober
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Helen Bostock	Joe Boudreaux
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Terry Christensen	Cathy Cohen
Chris Cook	Joe Cook
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Keith Welsh	Corky Willhite
John Williams	Barbara Workman
Bob Zauner	David Zuber

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

Martyrs (\$100-249)

Sheila Curry
Beth Dietch
Randall Hayes
Justin Hinckley
Paulette Hurdlik
Charlotte & Thomas Klasson
Mark Meunier
Raoult Ratard
Grant Smith
Marie Taylor
Frank Tournier
Charlotte Upadhyay

Patron Saints (\$250-499)

Betty & Manny Alessandra
Michael Malec

Archangel (\$500 +)

Georges Maillot

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

Tell Us About It

Patrick and Patricia Lestrade are proud to announce the presence of a new atheist in the world. **Ronan Patrick Weaver** was born at 3:18am on February 15 to their daughter **Erin** and her husband, **Johnny**. Congratulations!

Josh Meyer and **Jennifer Hathorn** were married on March 5 at the 5 Rivers Alabama Delta Resource Center. Josh has been active on the NOSHA Google Group and just recently earned his doctorate in biology from LSU. Likely he and his wife will be leaving the Baton Rouge area for work in the next few months.

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

If the Ocean was Whiskey and God was a Duck!

Having begun keeping a record of all his communications with God, nine-year-old child-evangelist **Brother Sam Singleton** suspects he's been duped.

When he's conned into preaching at the family's brush arbor revival, on whiskey-cooking Birch Blake's land, young Brother Sam uses the opportunity to clear up some questions about right and wrong.

Hilarious and provocative, "If the Ocean was Whiskey and God was a Duck" brought vividly to life the time, the place, and the people who produced, so far as anybody can say, the world's first and still only atheist evangelist. The show was held at Winston's Pub in Old Metairie in January.



Brother Sam is flanked by **Ricky Adams, (left)** and **Chad Matisse (right)** Photo by Rose Mort

Celebrating the Winter Solstice with a cookout on the Bayou hosted by President Harry



Rita Premo, Marcy and Kevin Bladsacker, Joyce Kisner



Lucy Wells Tierney



Michael Crosby, left and Dave Schultz, right



Beth Deitch, William Gautreaux



Lisa Suarez



Rose Mort, Robert Carver



Galen Hall, Betty Alessandra

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

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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look for us online: www.nosha.info