

# The Minnesota Atheist

## Secular Coalition for America Leader to Speak in Minnesota



Sean Faircloth, executive director of the Secular Coalition for America, will speak on “Our Secular Decade: One Nation Under the Constitution.” Free and open to the public. After the talk, there will be an informal gathering at a nearby restaurant. This event is sponsored by Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists

freedom of conscience must extend to people of all faiths and of none. Accordingly, their staff work in cooperation with a variety of other organizations and coalitions where common ground exists on specific issues, and their e-mail Action Alert system is open to all who visit their site.

of Minnesota.

Founded in 2002, the Secular Coalition for America ([secular.org](http://secular.org)) is a coalition of ten national, nontheistic organizations. Its purpose is to amplify the diverse and growing voice of the nontheistic community in the United States. They are located in Washington, D.C. for ready access to government, activist partners and the media. Their staff lobbies Congress on issues of special concern to their constituency.

While the Coalition was created expressly by and for nontheistic Americans, they also enthusiastically welcome the participation of religious individuals who share their view that

### If You Go...

**When:**

Monday, June 28, 2010  
7:00 p.m.

**Where:**

Southdale Public Library  
7001 York Ave South  
Edina, 55435



INSIDE:

- Find out about the MNA center...see page 3
- Your summer reading list.....see page 8
- Getting debaptized.....see page 14
- Jack Caravela stops traffic.....see page 16



IN THIS ISSUE...

President's Column 3  
 May Meeting Review 4  
 No God Required 5  
 News and Notes 6  
 Volunteers Needed 7  
 Cryptogram 7  
 Summer Reading List 8  
 Communicating Atheism 9  
 The Day of Reason 10  
 MNA at Target Field 11  
 Book Review 12  
 Summer Picnics! insert  
 Highway Clean-up 13  
 May Treasurer's Report 13  
 Debaptism Event 14  
 May Day 2010 16  
 May Cable Report 18  
 Things To Do.... 19

**MINNESOTA ATHEISTS BOARD  
 OF DIRECTORS**

board@mnaatheists.org  
 President: August Berkshire  
 pres@mnaatheists.org  
 612-338-4548  
 Associate President: Laura Hutt  
 apres@mnaatheists.org  
 Chair: George Kane  
 chair@mnaatheists.org  
 651-488-8225  
 Associate Chair: Steve Petersen  
 achair@mnaatheists.org  
 651-484-9277  
 Treasurer: Brian Knoblock  
 treas@mnaatheists.org  
 Secretary: Rick Rohrer  
 sec@mnaatheists.org  
 Director-at-Large: Karen Burke  
 dir1@mnaatheists.org  
 Director-at-Large: Mike Haubrich,  
 dir2@mnaatheists.org  
 Director-at-Large: Cody Peterson  
 dir3@mnaatheists.org

MNA Meetup members: 673  
 Life memberships: 31

**Honorary Members**

Dan Barker  
 Gerald Erickson, PhD  
 Annie Laurie Gaylor  
 Dick Hewetson  
 Robert M. Price, PhD

*The Minnesota Atheist*

Published by Minnesota Atheists, P.O.  
 Box 120304  
 New Brighton, MN 55112  
 612-284-4495, [info@mnaatheists.org](mailto:info@mnaatheists.org)  
[www.MinnesotaAtheists.org](http://www.MinnesotaAtheists.org)

Editorial Board, [editor@mnaatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnaatheists.org)

James Zimmerman, editor  
[zgoatee@gmail.com](mailto:zgoatee@gmail.com)

Chief Photographer: Richard Trombley

Membership/change of address: Steve Petersen,  
[address@mnaatheists.org](mailto:address@mnaatheists.org),  
 651-484-9277

Public Relations: George Kane,  
[pr@mnaatheists.org](mailto:pr@mnaatheists.org), 651-488-8225

Atheists Weekly Email (AWE): George Kane,  
[awe@mnaatheists.com](mailto:awe@mnaatheists.com)

Cable: Steve Petersen,  
[cable@mnaatheists.org](mailto:cable@mnaatheists.org), 651-484-9277

Webmaster: Cody Peterson,  
[web@mnaatheists.org](mailto:web@mnaatheists.org)

Podcasts: Grant Hermanson,  
[podcast@mnaatheists.org](mailto:podcast@mnaatheists.org)

Copyright 2010 Minnesota Atheists.

Minnesota Atheists is an affiliate of Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Council for Secular Humanism, and International Humanist and Ethical Union.

Submit material for the newsletter to [editor@mnaatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnaatheists.org). Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

**Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

**Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement**

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheists community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

## The Minnesota Atheists Center

Minnesota Atheists is the state's oldest, largest, and most active freethought organization. We promote not only our own activities but, through our Atheist Weekly E-mail (AWE), those of many other groups. We supply atheist speakers to other freethought groups, especially at colleges. At our recent Day of Reason celebration at the Minnesota State Capitol, we invited representatives from most of the other freethought groups in Minnesota to share the stage with us – and many of them did.

Thus Minnesota Atheists is turning into an umbrella organization with resources that can be shared by other groups for the common good of our movement. Another resource we would like to add is a public building situated in a highly visible location. It could be used for meetings and socializing and would house our research and lending libraries. We might even be able to offer office space to other freethought groups.

A building with our name on it would give us "pride of place" and increase our stature and visibility in the larger community. A building would also give us a base from which we could reach out and contribute back to the community. We could offer homework help to students, fundraisers for charities, collect and distribute food for the hungry, and perhaps even provide a soup kitchen from time to time.

Our **Minnesota Atheists Building Fund** was begun in 1996 with about \$3,000 in profits that we had realized from hosting an Atheist Alliance International convention that spring. Over the years the fund grew slowly until, in February 2004, a newsletter cover article by MNA member **Matthew Richardson** generated new enthusiasm for the idea of our own building. This led to the formation, in 2006, of "**The 300 Club**," which was a play on the religious "700 Club" and which began at the time the movie *300* was in theaters.

The goal of "**The 300 Club**" was to find 300 members to each pledge to give us \$1,000 over four years – an average of about \$5.00 a week per person. While the club is short of the 300 members we had hoped for, we have still raised a significant amount of money and our Building Fund now stands at about \$125,000. It is with deepest appreciation and gratitude that we thank everyone who has contributed to this fund over the years, and who continue to do so.

We have also discussed the possibility of raising funds by borrowing from members interest-free for a period of five to ten years. These loans would be

secured by the building and the interest that members would have normally earned on such loans would be tax-deductible as a donation.

We had originally hoped to find a building that would be centrally located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, would have an auditorium to seat 100-150 people, would have room for offices and libraries, and would have plenty of off-street parking. This is still our ultimate goal. Such a building would probably cost \$300,000-\$500,000.



August Berkshire

However, last year's board of director's made a keen observation and decision. With the Building Fund generating only 1% in bank interest, and with the real estate market being in a slump, our board realized that investing our money in a decent building of any size would probably give us just as good a return on our money as leaving it in the bank.

Consequently, it was decided to seek a smaller, more affordable building for now: one that could accommodate up to 25 people, plus a lending library, plus a reception desk. We would be able to use this for many meetings (board meetings, book clubs, movie nights, etc.), but not our main monthly meeting.

For a number of years, our Building Committee has been diligently searching for an appropriate building. Ideally, the building would be centrally located, near public transportation, and would already be commercially zoned for assembly. Ironically, a church that is going out of business would suit us just fine!

Minnesota Atheists Building Committee members who have been working on this project for several years include **Ron Julien** (current chair), **Bob Schmitz**, **Tom Riddering**, **Matthew Richardson**, **Steve Petersen**, **Shirley Moll**, **George Kane**, **Jack Caravela**, and **August Berkshire**. They are joined by new committee members **Brian Knoblock** and **Rick Calissi**.

If you would like to help in any way, please contact Ron at (612) 789-4071 or julien\_ron@yahoo.com; or contact any other MNA building committee or board member. You can still sign up for the 300 Club or donate whatever you can. Every little bit helps. Together, we can build a great future for Minnesota Atheists and the freethought community!

## APRIL MEETING REVIEW

by George Kane

## May Membership Meeting: Myers Draws a Full House

Our public meeting in May was our largest of the year, with over 100 people turning out to hear the American Humanist Association's Humanist of the Year and celebrated science blogger P. Z. Myers tackle the question of whether science and religion can coexist. Myers answered that question at the very outset of his presentation, declaring that religion and science can coexist "in the same way as humans and tapeworms." That is, religion is only a drain to science, and never has anything of value to contribute to it.

Myers provided historical examples as illustrations. The science of astronomy took a major leap forward with the development of giant telescopes by men such as William Herschel, who found stars and galaxies where the sky was thought to be empty, showing that the universe is boundless. Theists and philosophers had thought that the stars were fixed on heavenly spheres not too far from Earth, since they did not have tools for empirical analysis like the large optical telescopes that Herschel introduced.

Similarly, the empirical processes of science resolved the argument between preformation and epigenesis. Preformationism, which originated with ancient Greek philosophers, held that a plant or animal can develop from an egg or spore because a model of the adult form exists in it. That is, the fact that a chicken can come from an egg proves that the egg must have in it somewhere a tiny model of chickens. That satisfied the abstract ruminations of philosophers, but did not stand up to actual observations of plant and animal development. Epigenesis, a theory developed by biologists that replaced preformationism, explains the development of a plant or animal from an egg or spore, as a sequence of steps in which cells differentiate and organs form, without a preexisting model.

Contemporary biology is dominated by the ideas of common descent and natural selection, which Darwin



introduced after years of detailed observation. They of course conflict with the religious notion of divine creation, which is supported only by myth. Nevertheless, in America today, the religious viewpoint still has abundant popular support in opposition to science. But despite the widespread support for religion, despite the heated arguments brought against so many branches of science, only one side in the argument employs methods that have proved to be productive in determining the facts of material reality. To those who wage a war against science, Myers issued a challenge: Name a single example of religion providing an insight into the natural world that cannot be proved by science? If there are none, then religion has no value in providing knowledge of the world.

After the presentation, there was a lively question-and-answer session. At 4:00, a large contingent drove to Q.Cumbers for dinner. The monthly public meetings are on vacation for the summer months, replaced by the picnics in Columbia Park. The next public meeting in the series will be held in September.

FROM THE MAY 23, 2010 ISSUE OF *THE LACROSSE TRIBUNE*:

## No God Required to Feel Awe in the Universe

Anyone who has seen the pictures sent back by the Hubble space telescope knows that a belief in a god or the supernatural isn't necessary to inspire awe.

Through science, reality's wonder is revealed to us. Despite not being able to discern our movement directly, reasoning and careful observation lead us to the fact that the earth is whipping around our Sun at an astonishing 67,000 miles per hour.

It is hard to comprehend scale in this magnificent universe we find ourselves in. One million Earths would fit inside our sun. And our sun is certainly not one of the bigger stars out there. For example, we could fit 7 billion suns inside VY Canis Majoris. To put that in perspective, if the Earth were shrunk down until its diameter was equal to that of a penny, the relative diameter of our sun would be seven feet, and VY Canis Majoris be almost three miles across.

All of these stars appear as mere points of light in the night sky, which is our galaxy, the Milky Way. There are upwards of 400 billion stars in our galaxy. The human mind is simply not able to comprehend numbers at this scale. To try to conceptualize a number like 400 billion, imagine a second. Four hundred billion seconds would be more than 12,600 years. And that's just stars in our galaxy; there are hundreds of billions of other galaxies comprising our universe. I recommend [newgrounds.com/portal/view/525347](http://newgrounds.com/portal/view/525347) for a great tool showing size comparisons of the very big and very small.

But as unfathomably large as these stars are, they are but specks of dust when compared to the utter emptiness of the universe. Besides the sun, the closest star to us is 4.2 light years away. This means that it takes a beam of light (traveling 186,000 miles per second) more than four years to get there. This trip would take 4.7 million years in a commercial airliner. And that's just the nearest star.

In the realm of the atomic, reality is no less awe-inspiring. Like the cosmos, emptiness is the rule in the realm of the atom. An atom is comprised of a nucleus in the center, with electrons orbiting it. The rest of the atom is empty space. If one were to increase the size of the nucleus of a hydrogen atom to the size of a marble, the electron would be smaller than a grain of sand - and it would be one and a half miles away. Everything, including ourselves, is almost entirely empty space. Quantum mechanics,

which describes how physics works on an atomic scale, is almost impossible for a person to grasp intuitively. This is a strange realm where particles can be in two places at the same time, tunnel through barriers and pop into and out of existence. Yet our understanding of quantum theory underlies laser printers, iPods and electric "eyes" that automatically open doors at stores.

And this is where the true beauty of the natural universe comes full circle. We know that all atoms, including those that make up our bodies, were originally forged in the giant fusion reactors we call stars. When stars reach the end of their lives, they often explode (currently at the rate of 1 every second), scattering their atoms across the universe. Some 4.5 billion years ago, these atoms came together to form the Earth, and billions of years later, humans evolved from these same atoms. We are fundamentally and intricately related, not just to all living things, but to the very universe itself. As a noted science popularizer, Carl Sagan, once said, "The cosmos is also within us. We're made of star stuff. We are a way for the cosmos to know itself."

These are just a handful of examples demonstrating the wonder of the natural universe. I find our current understanding of the universe more magnificent than the sum of all the assertions and pronouncements made by all the priests, rabbis, and imams. I find it impossible to look at the scope of the universe and conclude that the earth is the crown jewel of creation. And here we are on a speck of dust orbiting an insignificant star, perhaps the only beings in the universe technologically advanced enough to understand the cosmos, to understand ourselves, and to understand our ancestors - the stars.

For some truly inspirational music and videos based in science, check out [symphonyofscience.com](http://symphonyofscience.com).

*Reprinted with permission. Jeremy Fejfar is a member of the La Crosse Area Freethought Society (LCAFS.org). -ed.*



by **Jeremy Fejfar**

## News and Notes

At the end of April, a 5-4 majority on the Supreme Court once again found that a monument on government land that features a Christian symbol does not constitute endorsement of religion. In the case *Salazar v. Buono* the Supremes reversed a lower court ruling that the transfer of the land under a metal cross in the Mojave Desert National Preserve to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, specifically to ensure that the cross would not be taken down, was an impermissible government preference for religion. The ruling sent the case back to the Appeals Court with a clear message: Keep the cross standing.

That was expected to be the end of the case, but on May 9 there was a plot twist worthy of a network sitcom. Someone went out into the desert with bolt cutters in the middle of the night and stole the five-foot cross! The Park Service offered a \$125,000 reward for the capture of the thief, but announced they would not replace the cross. Then, in yet another comic twist, on May 19, the cross reappeared! But the Park Service decided that it was not properly resurrected, but was only a copy, and not covered by the injunction prohibiting the removal of the original cross. The Park Service promptly removed the replacement cross.

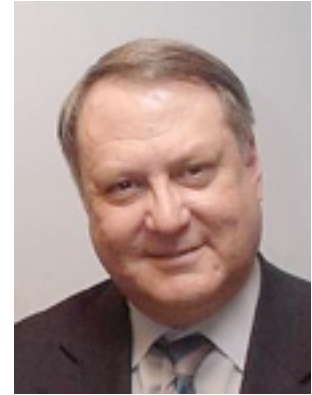
Now we will see if the entire case will have to be relitigated. The issue is no longer a cross erected in 1934 by World War I veterans, but whether the government can decide to put up a new cross. One encouraging outcome of the case was that the newest Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, voted against the cross. Prior to her appointment, she had such a short record of Establishment Clause cases that it is not known if she will be a dependable supporter of the separation of Church and State. Unfortunately, the current nominee, Elena Kagan, arguing the government's case as the Solicitor General, stated a very weak view of separation when she argued that the transfer to the VFW of a few feet of land under the cross resolved any appearance of government endorsement of religion. The wall of separation

may never recover from replacing Justice Stevens with someone who considers it to be of indifferent value.

**The Texas State Board of Education** meets every ten years to define curriculum standards which determine how textbooks are written. The Board completed this work on May 21, setting standards

with which textbook companies must comply to have a crack at the 4.8 million student Texas market for the next decade. Republicans have the majority on the Board, so of course they are writing the standards to extol their dogmas and to downplay the dogmas of the Democratic Party. This is politically significant because smaller states, which have little influence on textbook writing, often buy the books that were written to Texas' standards, as the books with the largest printing run are often lower priced.

Among the Republican majority's objectives is to ensure that school children are taught that America was founded as a Christian nation, and that the founders never intended that there should be a separation between church and state. They rewrote the relevant curriculum standard, so that it now reads: *Examine the reasons the Founding Fathers protected religious freedom in America and guaranteed its free exercise by saying that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and compare and contrast this to the phrase 'separation of church and state'*. At least in the end they added 'compare' to the original proposal, although the standard still implies that the drafters of the first amendment did not want church and state to be separate.



by George Kane

# June Festivals: Volunteers Needed

**Juneteenth – Saturday, June 19, 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.**

Minnesota Atheists will have a booth at the Juneteenth Festival again this year. It is one of the ways in which we reach out to communities that are underrepresented in the organized atheist movement. Juneteenth commemorates the day, in 1865, when news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached Texas.

The festival takes place at **North Mississippi Regional Park** in **Minneapolis** (east side of Hwy. 94 North and 49<sup>th</sup> Ave. North). (Note: The Camden Bridge crossing the Mississippi River on 42<sup>nd</sup> Ave. N. is closed for repairs.) If you would be willing to help staff our booth, please contact August Berkshire at (612) 284-4495.

**Twin Cities Gay Pride Festival & Parade – Saturday and Sunday, June 26 and 27**

This is the first of five Gay Pride festivals that Minnesota Atheists participates in every year. Equal treatment under the law for all citizens (guaranteed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment) has become one of the most

visible state/church issues of our day. A victory by any group is a victory for all of us.

We'll be staffing a booth in **Loring Park** in **Minneapolis** on **Saturday 10:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. and Sunday 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.** We're looking for 18 volunteers to help staff the booth in two-person, two-hour shifts. Please contact Matthew Richardson at (612) 522-5078 if you can help.

On **Sunday at 11:00 a.m.** we'll participate in the **Pride March** in downtown **Minneapolis**. The parade lines up along 3<sup>rd</sup> St. S. and proceeds down Hennepin Ave. to Loring Park.

Everyone who staffs our booth or marches with us gets a free Minnesota Atheists t-shirt! We welcome members of all freethought groups to march with us (though parade rules will only allow our Minnesota Atheists sign).

**We hope to see you at one or more of these events. Let's get this summer off to a great start!**



FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Pqa hgyacblabp lvwp dvcwva s egvcwa gn

egldxapa bavpcsfpu pgjsck caxfhfgb.

-Zgqb Dsvx Wpayabw, lszgcfpu gdfbfgb, Jsxxsea y.

Zsnncaa.

Answer on page 18

# Your Summer Reading List



by Grant Steves

Reading allows us to escape into sand castles, solve the great murder mystery, connect with the population of the planet Msiehta, or live vicariously through a romantic love story. Summer seems to seduce us into such easy reading.

The following reading list does not meet the escapist standard. It is a list to expand your knowledge, deepen your understanding, and keep your grey matter alive.

**1. Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem*, 2007, 288 pages, The MIT Press.**

How we create meaning in the material world. Flanagan expands our understanding of consciousness as it is understood pursuant to neurological research.

**2. Bruce M. Hood, *Supersense*, 2009, 302 pages, Harper One.**

A cognitive scientist explores why we believe in the unbelievable. He strips away the magic of mind reading and gives us the biology of belief.

**3. Lee Tiffin, *Creationism's Upside-Down Pyramid*, 1994, 230 pages, Prometheus Books.**

A man of science explores why we need to refute Fundamentalism's creation myth, and its intrusion into public education and life.

**4. Thomas W. Clark, *Encountering Naturalism*, 2007, 103 pages, Center for Naturalism.**

A short, pithy introduction to the worldview of naturalism. Atheism presents a position, and naturalism provides the worldview for atheism.

**5. Richard Carrier, *Sense and Goodness Without God*, 2005, 424 pages, Author House.**

Carrier gives depth to the philosophical position of naturalism that Clark's book only outlines. Carrier's book is for the philosophically adventurous.

**6. Rodrigue Trembaly, *The Code For Global Ethics*, 2010, 300 pages, Prometheus Books.**

This book is reviewed on page 12. An easy, readable book on ethics for humanists.

**7. Greg M. Epstein. *Good Without God*, 2009, 250 pages, William Morrow.**

The Humanist chaplain at Harvard University explains what nonreligious people know and believe. Epstein explores the practical side of living as a humanist.

**8. John W. Loftus, *The Christian Delusion*, 2010, 422 pages, Prometheus Books.**

Loftus participated in an interview on MNA's radio program a year ago when he discussed his book *Why I Became an Atheist*. His latest book is a collection of essays by various atheist authors. David Eller discusses the culture of Christianities; Hector Avalos explores Yahweh as a moral monster; Robert Price states why Jesus is a myth; and Loftus contributes several essays on the failure of Christianity. The adventure in this book lies in browsing through to the essays you enjoy.

**9. Lee A Kirkpatrick, *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion*, 2005, 400 pages, The Guilford Press.**

Kirkpatrick explores the psychology behind human attachment to religion as revealed in the evolution of humanity. We may have left religion behind and wonder why more do not. Kirkpatrick helps us understand why so many stay within religion.

**10. David Lewis-Williams, *Conceiving God*, 2010, 314 pages, Thames & Hudson.**

Lewis-Williams presents the cognitive origin and evolution of religion. This book mixes the history, anthropology, and psychology of humanity as religion evolved in the human community.

Take the challenge and enjoy one of the ten recommended boos for summer reading.

Looking for even more reading...?

For sale: About 30 years' worth of back issues of Free Inquiry and Skeptical Inquiry. Series not complete but unlikely to contain duplicates. For sale in bulk at \$2 each. Contact Gordon Thompson at 952-881-2801.





# Communicating Atheism

by Grant Steves

Atheists may have an intelligence that is above average. We may have more education than most groups, and we might conclude, we are better at communicating ideas. Not true! Education and intelligence do not equal successful communication.

Successful communication is not a natural ability. It is not a gift, but it is a complex process that involves skills, knowledge, and empathy.

High school students are in many respects a good reflection of the audiences we must address. The best lesson plan, under the best conditions can still fail. Why? You may have been rational, but your audience was not. You thought your presentation had humor, visual aids, and appeal, but your audience rejected your humor, found your visuals boring, and did not understand your appeal. As the speaker, your message failed because you did not listen to or identify with your audience. If your message reflected your academic credentials and level of intelligence, you failed to consider that your audience has not attended college and are of average intelligence.

Your process of preparation failed because you did not reflect on who the audience was. In interpersonal communication, it is relatively easy to adjust quickly to the other person. However, a public speaking situations quick adjustment to the audience is more difficult.

Many new high school teachers start their career with great enthusiasm – only to become greatly discouraged because the students do not share their enthusiasm for mathematics or English literature. What this teacher must learn is that teaching is not about their enthusiasm for literature. It is about their enthusiasm for communicating to their audience. It was the Greeks who realized that it was a matter of ethos (character credibility) and not logos (logic of ideas presented). It is more a matter of pathos (emotional appeal) than logos.

The credibility of the person is more important to the audience than the apparent brilliance of their presentation. Students see through the arrogance of the presenter, and they want an authentic person who cares about them more than the message or self.

How does the speaker know if they communicate successfully? You distribute a simple survey that requests information about your presentation. If you hand this survey out before you start speaking, you have informed your audience that you care about

them as people and not just your message.

The credibility of the speaker is crucial to the acceptance of and understanding of your message.

An audience may hear a thirty-minute presentation, but they listen to only ten minutes. As communicators we must realize that to keep the attention of the audience, we must refer to them. We must engage them. We must respond to their needs and agenda. It is better to speak for five minutes and answer thirty questions than to speak for thirty minutes and answer only one question.

As a communication teacher at the university and high school level for forty years, I quickly assess the problems of speakers and can analyze the speech difficulties. However, learning to speak well is not just giving many speeches, but it is knowing your audience.

Howard Gardener, in his book *Frames of Mind*, identified seven different types of intelligence. You may have experienced the mathematical intelligence at work. Solving complex math problems with ease but unable to communicate that process. A spatially intelligent person who can create or solve the question dealing with the use of space but cannot communicate it,

A linguistically intelligent person will understand the nature of language, and they may be fluent in several languages, but they may not succeed at communicating this to an audience.

Interpersonal communication is the ability to relate to other people, and it is also a form of intelligence.

Gardener's point is that we have different areas of intelligence. We may have several, or we may have one. Successful communicators must recognize their strengths and weaknesses. We must learn to compensate for the areas of weakness. We must not assume that, because of our intellect, we will be successful at communicating complex ideas to high school students.

Being intelligent and well educated requires us to be humble enough to recognize that communication takes more than brilliance.



## May 4th: The Day of Reason

This year's Day of Reason event was well attended by over 50 of our supporters and many others, including legislators who stopped by for a brief time to listen to our speakers. The theme this year was "Keeping Government Secular Helps Everyone." Each speaker in their own words elaborated on the theme. The podcast will take some time to edit and post on the web site, but when finished it will be well worth your time to view.

### Speakers included:

Emcee: Steve Petersen (*pictured*)

- 1) August Berkshire, President of Minnesota Atheists
- 2) George Kane, Chair of Minnesota Atheists and Founder of Freethought Toastmasters
- 3) Scott Lohman, President of the Humanists of Minnesota (*pictured*)
- 4) Nick Wallin Activities Director of Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH)
- 5-6) Brigit Trehus President of St. Olaf College Society of Atheism, Non-Religion, and Agnosticism (SANRA) & Catey Jordon Incoming President of SANRA (*pictured*)
- 7) Marie Castle, Communications Director of Atheists for Human Rights
- 8) Nancy Ruhland, Board member of Atheists for Human Rights (*pictured*)
- 9) Grant Steves, Host of *Atheists Talk* television program
- 10) Jack Caravela, Minnesota Atheists Meetup host
- 11) Eric Winter, Rochester Area Freethinkers (*pictured*)
- 12) Randall Tigue, State Director for American Atheists
- 13) Bob Schmitz, Minnesota for Secular Government Board Member
- 14) Mike Haubrich, Minnesota Atheists Board Member
- 15) Cynthia Egli, Past President of Minnesota Atheists
- 16) Jim Barri, leading the original Pledge of Allegiance



## The Atheist Experience at Target Field

by Eric Jayne

If you were at the Minnesota Twins game this past Mother’s Day you may have noticed a geeky-looking individual wearing a purple Minnesota Atheists t-shirt, standing on the main plaza holding a yellow sign that read “Minnesota Atheists” written in black marker. That was me. The purpose of the sign was to alert Minnesota Atheists members that signed up for the Twins group outing where I was so they could pick up their tickets. The sign also attracted the attention of several

eventually approached me and very nicely said I need to take my sign and stand on First Avenue because this plaza is private property. When I explained that the purpose of the sign is merely to alert my group where I am so they can pick up their tickets and that I am in no way protesting or advertising he silently pondered what I said. A few seconds later he said that he can’t think of any reason why I can’t stay. He shook my hand and wished me a good day. After the two cops left a private security guard approached me to make sure that I had a ticket to the game. He left me alone when I confirmed that I had 25 tickets.

Some passersby made off-handed quips while others offered sarcastic remarks like “God bless you.” One man clapped and said “right on,” but I couldn’t tell whether or not he was being sarcastic. A couple people even took their picture with me and other atheist members from the group as game time neared (although their motives were unclear). My favorite moment was when a gentleman sporting a tank top and stylish sunglasses on top of his clean-shaven head waved his arm (about as thick as my leg) in my face revealing a tattoo of Jesus. He yelled that Jesus is real and God is real before walking on to the ballpark. If I was thinking a little quicker I would have shown him my tattoo-less arm and said something like “My arm says there is no God.” On second thought, it’s probably best I didn’t say anything.

Our group made it into the stadium and took our seats on the first base side, next to the right field foul pole in the upper deck. We had a perfect view of the scoreboard which flashed a number of groups in attendance that day. Among the several groups whose names appeared on the scoreboard in the 4<sup>th</sup> inning was the Minnesota Atheists. Karen, one of the attendees, got a great picture of the moment which can be seen on the Minnesota Atheists Meetup site.

It was a little chilly in the upper deck, but an otherwise beautiful sunny day in which the Twins shutout the Baltimore Orioles in a 6-0 win. As far as I was concerned, Minnesota Atheists came out victorious too by simply making an appearance on the brand new, giant, state of the art scoreboard at Target Field...even if it was for only four seconds.



passersby, Twins security, and even the Minneapolis Police Department. While the extra attention from my sign truly was unintended, it was not unexpected. My plan was to simply ignore snide remarks (which I received) and not draw additional attention by engaging in arguments. My plan worked and it turned out to be a victorious day for the Minnesota Twins and Minnesota Atheists.

When I arrived at Target Field, I picked a comfortable spot on the plaza near a bench, then proceeded to peel the rubber band off my sign and hold it up. About ten minutes after I took my spot two Minneapolis police officers stood some 15 feet away and watched. One



by Grant Steves

## Book Review

“If there is no God, everything is permitted,” Ivan says in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

This quotation slips from the lips of many who fear human existence without the guidance of a god. Indeed, the question of ethics implied in the quotation has been raised for thousands of years. It is, as Socrates said, “no small

matter, but how we ought to live.”

One of the most recent delineations on human ethics is *The Code For Global Ethics*, by Rodrigue Tremblay. He presents ten principles for a global humanism: 1) Dignity; 2) Respect; 3) Tolerance; 4) Sharing; 5) No domination; 6) No superstition; 7) Conservation; 8) No war; 9) Democracy; 10) Education. Each of these is developed in a separate chapter. Professor Tremblay’s principles are a reflection of the Humanist Manifestos developed in the last century such as: Corliss Lamont’s *The Philosophy of Humanism*, Paul Kurtz’s *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*, and Greg M. Epstein’s *Good Without God*.

Tremblay’s introduction compares the religious approach to ethics and morality to the humanist approach. The points emphasized are how religions use: 1) punishment to get obedience and compliance, 2) exclusion to get loyalty, 3) politics to gain power, 4) status to create competition, and 4) a mind-body split to create an after life for reward. Humanism frees us from these shackles and creates an ethical system that is responsible and inclusive.

Professor Tremblay’s first principle addresses dignity and equality. To fail to live up to the standard while claiming to be moral or ethical is hypocritical. Regardless of who you are, this does not give permission to use others ‘as tools, objects, or instruments.’ All people are to be treated equitably whether male or female, gay or straight, young or old. Hypocrisy to principles of humanism can be just as easily exposed as the hypocrisy of the religious.

We derive our dignity and equality from the respect we have for others. That respect is because of our recognition of ‘a natural right to property and ownership of one’s own life.’ ‘This is the foundation of

human liberty.’ You could raise the question that Bentham raised about the non-existence of natural rights. Obviously, Professor Tremblay uses natural rights to construct his ethical code. Someone else might derive the same principle without a return to the natural rights position. As an atheist or humanist you might disagree with his arguments, but you will find it difficult to disagree with his ethical principles.

In his chapter on tolerance, Tremblay identifies empathy as key to how we treat others. Incorporating the research by Martin Hoffman and Robert Wright into his discussion on tolerance, Tremblay presents us with the Super Golden Rule:

“Not only do to others as you would have them do to you, but also do to others what you would wish to be done to you, if you were in their place.”

*The Code for Global Ethics:  
Ten Humanist Principles,  
Rodrigue Tremblay. © 2010,  
300 pages.*

There are individuals who might disagree with this Rule. There are those who believe that the outcome or result is the justification for actions. The actions might harm others, but if the results benefit the group, the actions are acceptable. These actions would violate the Super Golden Rule. The question that is raised by this is: Do we endorse humanist principles or do we endorse ethical decisions that violate those principles? If we advocate a violation of humanist principles, in what way are we any different from a religious person who lies to advance the greater good of a god.

Tremblay challenges us to elevate our ethical standards. Ethical standards that permit any behavior to achieve a goal is to endorse what Ivan said.

The other principles build on these first three. Sharing is based on our respect for others; no domination exploitation is derived from the principle of equality; no superstition is derived from a reliance on reason and evidence; conservation is rooted in our need for respect of life and property; violence, war, and peace are related back to tolerance. Democracy is the governmental structure that is best suited to govern and achieve these principles. Education is the key to preserving and assuring that the other principles are understood.

In the end, it is not that these specific points are adopted, but it is important that the behavior decided upon should reflect these principles. The lesson learned from this book is to emphasize the need for ethical behavior by everyone.

# May 23rd Highway Clean-up

We had nine members make it for the highway clean up in Lakeville. Thanks to all. In the photo are from left to right: Art Anderson, Richard Trombley, Shirley Moll, Morgan Christain, Karen Burke, Michelle Losey, Rhonda Arkley, the coordinator for this event. Many thanks to Ken Kressin who did some early cleaning. Photo credit Steve Petersen, who also helped clean.



## May Treasurer's Report

### Visibility Fund

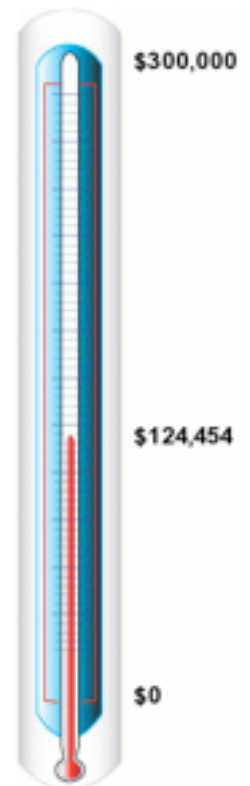
Lee Salisbury	\$65.00
Jerrold Larson	\$25.00
James Kahn	\$10.00
Nick Karlisch	\$12.00
Justine Hartz	\$12.00
Paul Gramstad	\$25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$160.00</b>

### Building Fund

Daniel Norte	\$35.72
Vernon Young	\$100.00
James Whitney	\$25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$160.72</b>

**Total Income: \$320.72**

**Current Building Fund: \$124,453.61**



# The First Minnesota Atheists Debaptism Event



On Sunday, May 23, in the quiet suburban community of Eagan, the very first Minnesota Atheists Debaptism event was performed. We had a pretty good turnout of about 25 ex-Christians—mostly former Catholics and Lutherans, but also two former Jehovah’s Witnesses, one former Southern Baptist, and one former Mormon. The *Hair Dryer of Reason* (which I’ll explain



by Eric Jayne

shortly) was definitely put to the test!

In case you’re wondering what a debaptism is, let me briefly explain. A debaptism is a tongue-in-cheek ceremony where those who had once been baptized, while under the influence of religious indoctrination, symbolically renounce their past baptism and previous beliefs by going under a hair dryer (i.e. *The Hair Dryer of Reason*) as opposed to being dunked in baptismal water. A picture of Richard Dawkins adorned the hair dryer used in our debaptism ceremony to give it a bit more freethinking panache. In addition to the ceremony, each participant received an original *Minnesota Atheists*





Photos courtesy of Ricard Trombley.



*Certificate of Debaptism* signed by me and an additional witness in attendance

to make it extra official. The fact that everyone in attendance showed so much enthusiasm in their participation made the event all the more fun.

Some might ask why atheists would go through the hassle of performing a silly ceremony that is redolent of religious rituals. The very idea of ceremoniously revoking a past baptism lends credibility to the original Christian rite of baptism, doesn't it? My

answer to these questions is quite simple. Participants acknowledge the silliness and celebrate freely because the mock ceremony is a very informal ("pseudo-formal" might be more accurate) event presented as light-hearted entertainment. This is a celebration of our respective transformations from god-fearing obedient

followers to secular freethinking individuals. While it is true that a ceremony to affirm one's atheism is unnecessary, it's also true that human beings are social creatures who simply enjoy being silly from time to time and having fun at celebratory social gatherings—we're not Jehovah's Witnesses after all! With a positive attitude, an enthusiastic crowd, and a working hair dryer, debaptisms can be a fun and cathartic experience. To be sure, freethinkers who did not experience a religious upbringing or baptism are

encouraged to participate in debaptisms as well so they can affirm their devotion to secular freethought and rejection of religious teachings.

With the first debaptism behind us, and with all the great feedback received from participants, I'm sure there will be more debaptism ceremonies in the near future. Keep checking the Minnesota Atheists Meetup site, and please keep in mind that not only can you get debaptized multiple times, it's highly encouraged.



## May Day 2010

We had an impressive turnout of 25 people for our Minneapolis May Day parade and booth in Powderhorn Park on Saturday, May first.. As usual, we were warmly received by the crowd. This year's "Hug an Atheist" champion was Angie Stehr, who shared atheist hugs with about 200 parade onlookers.

We would like to thank the following people for helping to set up our booth, staffing our booth, and marching with us: August Berkshire, Dave Bradley, Sandra Breuer, Karen Burke, Jack Caravela, Cynthia Egli, Mark Friedl, Mike Haubrich, Joseph Homrich, Laura Hutt, George Kane, Brian Knoblock, Shirley Moll, David Perry, Steve Petersen, Cathy Prody, Fabian Rivera, Neyshaliz Rivera, Bon Schmitz, Jenny Schreiter, Claire Smith, Angie Stehr, Will Tanberg, Mike Toft, and Rachel Wilson.



*Right: MNA member Jack Caravela stops traffic with his legendary hugging skills ...again.*

*Photos courtesy of August Berkshire.*





by August Berkshire



*Minnesota Atheists embraced community members of all sizes...*



*genders...*



*ages...*



*and, um, species.*

# May Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

For our May taping August Berkshire interviewed George Kane on *The Days of Prayer and Reason*. This covered the history of the Day of Prayer and the recent ruling by a Federal judge agreeing with FFRF that the law mandating this is unconstitutional. The program also covered the Day of Reason event we held earlier that day at the state Capitol rotunda and the different speakers we had and what they had to say.

If you are interested in having our program played on your local cable access station please contact Steve Petersen at [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.org) or 561-484-9277.

### Cable Crew:

George Kane, Brett Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, Mike Haubrich, Karen Burke and Brian Knoblock.

### Podcasts:

MinnesotaAtheists.org. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.



### Cable Schedule:

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:** Channel 14. Check their web site [www.bect.tv](http://www.bect.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m., Tuesday 5:30 a.m., and 1:30 p.m.. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

**Minneapolis:** Channel 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Rochester:** Channel 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View New Brighton:** Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**St. Cloud:** Channel 12 Thursday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jack Richter.

**Stillwater:** Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. and Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

**South Washington County:** Channel 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St.**

**Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.



### FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

The government must pursue a course of complete neutrality toward religion.

—John Paul Stevens, majority opinion, *Wallace v. Jaffree*

# Minnesota Atheists

[www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org)

P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112

## Join or Renew Membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 - Individual Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$45 - Household Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$75 - Sustaining Fund Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 - Student (newsletter by email; send copy of fee statement or school ID)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$600 - Lifetime Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 - Newsletter Only

## Donate to Special Funds

- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ General Expense / Outreach Fund
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Building Fund
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Radio Fund
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Donation

All memberships include the newsletter. To pay by credit card or PayPal, please visit our website.

Payment by: Check (enclosed) for \$ \_\_\_\_\_, payable to **Minnesota Atheists**.

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

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

>>Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible. <<

## Things to do, Places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous, 3249 Hennepin Ave. South, #55 (Men's Center, in the basement), Minneapolis. Open to men and women. Contact: tcAgnostic@gmail.com.

Third Sunday, 1:00-3:30, Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting. (No meeting in July or August.) See front cover for details.

Fifth Sunday, Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund. Price: -\$7.00. (August and November 2010.)

1st and 3rd Monday, 6:00p.m. Freethought Toastmasters Club. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. West, St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to party room.) Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, nup@minn.net.

2nd and 4th Monday, 5-7 p.m. Dinner Social. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66th Street, Richfield. Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

1st Tuesday, 11:30 a.m., Lunch Social, Old Country Buffet, Co. Rd. B2, between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., Lunch Social. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420

4th Wednesday, Meal and a Reel. Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin and Lake). 6:00 meal, 7:00 movie. Details in Atheists Weekly Email.

Thursdays, 7:00, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) meeting. See cashumn.org for details.

1st Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Atheists Talk TV Show taping. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2nd Thursday. Rochester Area Freethinkers monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn@hotmail.com, or (507) 259-4237.

3rd Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Minnesota Atheists board meeting. Location varies. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net.

**To sign up for the Atheists Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to [awe@mnatheists.org](mailto:awe@mnatheists.org).**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit [atheists.meetup.com/493](http://atheists.meetup.com/493).**



Minnesota Atheists  
P.O. Box 120304  
New Brighton, Minnesota 55112

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

DATED MATERIAL - DO NOT DELAY

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Minneapolis, MN  
Permit No. 1613

"To have faith in reunions beyond the grave is to continuously deny the evidence of one's own senses, to ignore the ultimately unignorable knowledge that our dead loved ones return to us only in dreams - a natural phenomenon. That is why the atheist, who accepts the knowledge of future extinction, is seen by many fundamentalist believers as a threat rather than an object of bemused tolerance. To all who deal with the knowledge of their own mortality by telling themselves that another, richer life awaits them, the atheist gives voice to their greatest fear by saying, 'This is it, our one time around' "

- Susan Jacoby, "Does Anyone Believe in an Afterlife?" from *the Washington Post*, "On Faith," May 17, 2010.

**Check out our website at  
[mnatheist.org](http://mnatheist.org).**