

November/December 2014

Volume 24

Number 10

# The Minnesota Atheist



## November Public Meeting – November 16, 2014 “Animal Liberation and Atheism” with Kim Socha

Join us on Sunday November 16 as local author and Minnesota Atheists member Kim Socha discusses how her atheism and animal activism connect.

Religious arguments for animal rights and liberation are fairly common in the literature on the animal question and the animal condition. Meanwhile, arguments considering animal liberation from a deliberately secular perspective are virtually nonexistent.

In her new book, *Animal Liberation and Atheism* (Freethought House: 2014), Kim Socha initiates the secular conversation by exploring how the concept of religion is inherently antithetical to animal liberation. She also challenges secularists to view the world differently, free from religion's cultural baggage.

Finally, *Animal Liberation and Atheism* is a call for everyone to consider developing a system of ethics disengaged from anthropocentric and speciesist mythologies so that needless violence against all beings and the environment may diminish.

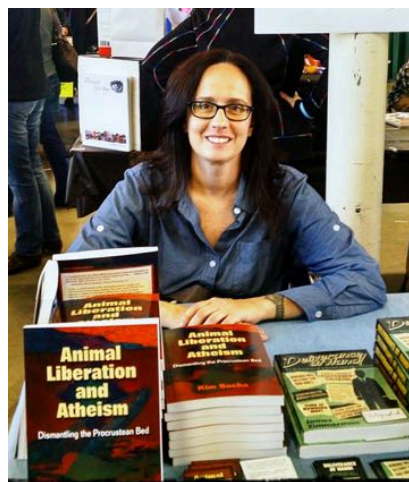
Kim Socha, Ph.D., is a college English professor and activist for animal liberation, drug policy reform, and transformative justice. She is the author of

*Women, Destruction, and the Avant-Garde: A Paradigm for Animal Liberation*, and is a contributing editor to *Confronting Animal Exploitation: Grassroots Essays on Liberation and Veganism* and *Defining Critical Animal Studies: A Social Justice Approach for Liberation*.

Kim has been active with Minnesota Atheists for several years and was one of the 36 contributors to *Atheist Voices of Minnesota* (Freethought House: 2012). She has also published on topics such as Latino/a literature, surrealism, and composition pedagogy. Kim invites feedback on any of her work and can be reached at [kimberlyannsocha@gmail.com](mailto:kimberlyannsocha@gmail.com).

Brookdale Library,  
6125 Shingle Creek Parkway  
Brooklyn Center, MN

1:00-1:15. – Social time  
1:15-1:45pm. – Business Meeting  
1:45-2:00pm. – Break  
2:00-3:30pm – Kim Socha  
4:00-whenever – Dinner at  
Seward Café  
2129 East Franklin Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN



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## President's Column – War on Christmas

By Eric Jayne

The passing of Halloween brings another cause for celebration: The annual War on Christmas. In our own unique way, the Minnesota Atheists has participated in the War on Christmas for several years and I think we'll have plenty to keep us busy for the 2014 war.

Our objective in the War on Christmas is not to destroy the holiday but to challenge the idea that Christmas should be wedged in public schools, department stores, and courthouses across the nation. A secondary objective is to dismantle the preconceived notion that religious belief is a fundamental component to charitable giving.

A recent letter to the editor in the Star Tribune suggested that the "secularization of our culture is removing a religious motivation for giving." The letter writer cited a John Stossel report from a 2006 ABC News - 20/20 episode that concluded "religious people are more likely to give to charity" including "explicitly nonreligious" charities. As a side note, I'm struggling to understand exactly what an *explicitly* nonreligious charity looks like other than one that's committed to the cause of secularization—such as Minnesota Atheists. I've worked in the social service industry for several years and I've yet to come across an agency that would go out of its way to be seen as nonreligious.

To demonstrate his point, Stossel tracked the donations made to two different Salvation Army Red Kettle buckets: one near a Macy's in San Francisco, CA and one near a Wal-Mart in Sioux Falls, SD. The red kettle bucket in the more secularist and liberal San Francisco rendered only half of what was collected in the less affluent (but more religious) Sioux Falls.

I don't think Stossel's test demonstrated what he intended it to demonstrate. Instead, I think it indicates that secularists, who are more abundant in San Francisco, are selective about their charitable giving. As I'm sure is true with any categorical social group, secularists don't want to donate to organizations whose values contradict their own. With bible-based proselyting and opposing views on LGBT equality, the Salvation Army contradicts liberal secularist values in significant ways.

For this reason I feel no guilt when passing by Salvation Army bell ringers without tossing my pocket change in their bucket. That doesn't mean I'm not nice though. I try to keep in mind that the bell ringers have good intentions so I pull my stocking cap over my ears (those bells are irritating!) and quietly smile as I walk by.

Most freethinkers accept the Darwinian explanation that we are social primates who developed altruistic tendencies through eons of natural selection. Genetic traits for cooperation were passed on by the most talented at surviving so we humans generally feel compelled to be nice and helpful. Minnesota Atheists recognizes the importance of social outlets and community philanthropy so we are planning our War on Christmas accordingly.

First, we are joining the annual *Walk to End Hunger* on Thanksgiving morning at the Mall of America. The event is a fund raiser (and awareness builder) for hunger relief programs in the Twin Cities area. Our team name is *Minnesota Atheists – Volunteers Beyond Belief* and the money we raise goes to the Keystone food shelves which serves half of St. Paul and all of Roseville. There is a \$25 *Hunger Fighter* entrance fee which goes toward the team's fund raising goal. If you'd like to walk with us for free that is fine too. Just simply sign up as a *Junior Hunger Fighter*. We'll be walking with thousands of other local *Hunger Fighters* with some media presence so it's a great opportunity to help fight hunger and raise awareness not only for hunger relief but for godless charitable giving. The event ends at 10am so there will be plenty of time left for family, feasting, football, and shopping. Visit [WalkToEndHunger.org](http://WalkToEndHunger.org) and find our team under the Keystone Community Services logo on the homepage.

Secondly, although the details are in the *To Be Determined* status, we will continue our tradition of collecting toys, clothes, and games for holiday gift programs in December. We've collected for Children's Hospital, Keystone, and The Bridge for Youth in the past. Look for details on this event on our Meetup page: [Meetup.com/Minnesota-atheists](http://Meetup.com/Minnesota-atheists)

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## News and Notes

By George Kane

Writing the decision in the 1968 *Epperson v. Arkansas* case, Justice Abe Fortas noted that "(t)he First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." Justice David Sutter referred to this principle of neutrality as the bedrock concept of the Establishment Clause, and it has been cited repeatedly in Supreme Court decisions for over four decades. Justice Antonin Scalia, however, in a speech at Colorado Christian University, said that he considers the interpretation that the Establishment Clause forbids the government to favor religion over non-religion to be "a lie."

Scalia, a conservative Catholic Reagan appointee, faults liberal justices for the view of an evolving Constitution that changes in its application as society changes. Scalia averred that only an "idiot" could believe in a "living Constitution." He claims to be an "originalist," who looks for the meaning of provisions of the Constitution in the intent of its authors which he finds in the practices of government at the time. Scalia notes with disdain that justices of the "evolving Constitution" school spend sleepless nights worrying about finding the right interpretation of Constitutional clauses, while he sleeps soundly every night because, when he looks back in history, he finds the questions already decided. He called the interpretation that the Establishment Clause protects secular government "utterly absurd," arguing that the Constitution only obligates government to protect freedom of religion – not freedom from it.

*Because religious belief, or non-belief, is such an important part of every person's life, freedom of religion affects every individual. Religious institutions that use government power in support of themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths, or of no faith, undermine all our civil rights. Moreover, state support of an established religion tends to make the clergy unresponsive to their own people, and leads to corruption within religion itself. Erecting the "wall of separation between church and state," therefore, is absolutely essential in a free society.*

-- Thomas Jefferson, to the Virginia Baptists (1808)

In another public appearance on the same day at the University of Colorado Boulder Law School, Scalia compared his efforts to restore constitutional originalism to the epic quest of "Lord of the Rings" hero Frodo Baggins.

"It's a long, uphill fight to get back to original orthodoxy. We have two originalists on the Supreme Court," Scalia said, referring to Justice Clarence Thomas and himself. "But I feel like Frodo ... We'll get clobbered in the end, but it's worth it."

Scalia sees the Supreme Court as a Fellowship that can destroy the Ring of church/state separation in the forge of Mt. Doom. There is as much fantasy in his self-image as in his Establishment Clause theory.

### George Kane **Cryptogram**

Sxe hdvvyvuxyv, bpqq vrvyg nzqv znxsi hdv qphhqv xsvt, zsj bpqq vrvyg exnzs edx dzt bsxes nzs pshpnzhvqg. Och zqq hdv ipyqt edx dzrv sxh bsxes nzs pshpnzhvqg, tfzyv uxy gxcytvqrvt.

Scnovyt 31:17-18

## We Depend on You

By Heather Hegi



I think we can all agree that Minnesota Atheists (MNA) is a great organization to support! Atheists need a voice in a day that the separation of state and church continues to be under threat and there is still a stigma against atheism. As atheists, we need to make sure our voice is heard, and no one does that better in the state of Minnesota than MNA. But MNA can only fulfill its goals with your help. We are an all unpaid volunteer organization that relies on you. We need you to continue being or to become a dues paying member, we need you as a volunteer on a committee or another aspect of our organization, and we need you to consider joining the Board of Minnesota Atheists.

### *Become a Member*

Becoming a dues paying member of MNA is important because it demonstrates vested investment in the organization, financially and philosophically. It legitimizes our existence. Without a dues paying membership, we would not be able to produce this newsletter, pay for our Meetup account, or produce our radio program Atheists Talk. We would not have the ability to participate in activities that have a financial cost such as the Day of Reason at the Capital, the Pride Parade, or a baseball game! See the article by our treasurer, Chris Matthews, in this month's issue to read more about the events and activities your membership and donation dollars helped support throughout this year. Also, having a dues paying membership is important because it gives us legitimacy when when we speak in public as an organization representing atheists. It makes our case that we accurately represent atheists when we can support that claim with membership numbers. To check your membership status, you may email your inquiry to: [address@mnatheists.org](mailto:address@mnatheists.org)

### *Volunteer on a Committee*

We rely on volunteers on committees to carry out important work such as run the radio program, keep track of membership information, etc. Luckily, we have had and continue to have many dedicated individuals who have done a lot for this organization, and I mean a lot. But we also have a whole large membership out there, dues paying members and followers on Meetup

or Facebook, who have plenty of talent which they would devote if we just asked. We are not always good at seeking out this talent, so if you think you have the skill and dedication to help with a specific aspect of MNA or help out in general, please let us know. We have many committees that can be found at: <http://mnatheists.org/information/committees>. I am scheduling an 'All Committee Meeting' for us to touch base with our current committee members, see that needs are being met, make sure we are all on the same page, etc. The meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 10th, 6:30-9:00 p.m. at the Larpenteur Estates Party Room (1276 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul, MN). If you are interested in learning more about our committees, this would be an excellent event to attend to get a sense of things. Likewise, if you have an idea you would like to see implemented, this would be a good place to propose it and build the committee to make it happen.

### *Join the Board*

Lastly, I think it is important to join the Board of MNA to help the organization make decisions and take on initiatives. It is a great way to see how MNA functions as a whole and a way to understand the role the board plays in the organization. This would even be a good precursor to joining a committee if you are interested, but of course, not required. We have a board of nine and since I have been involved, there has been turnover each year, and this upcoming year will be the same. We often have to ask around to see who would be interested in filling the vacant position because we seldom get nominations for board positions that we did not solicit. So please, we welcome you to be the one to contact us and let us know that you're interested! Any of the current board members can answer questions and let the rest of the board know you're interested. As long as a dues paying member is willing to nominate you and you're willing to accept the nomination, you're on the ballot for the election! You do need to be a dues paying member to qualify for a board position (6 months for at large positions, 1 year for the rest). Nominations are entered at the January Public Meeting and elections are held

## **We Depend on You (continued from page 4)**

**By Heather Hegi**

at the February Public Meeting, but it is not necessary to be present for either. The responsibilities of being on the board vary depending on the position, but the main responsibility is to participate in the monthly board meeting which is held on the third Wednesday of every month.

We need you to continue being or to become a dues paying member, we need you to volunteer on a committee or another aspect

of our organization, and we need you to consider joining the Board of Minnesota Atheists. Any individual member can make a difference. If you have the interest and find Minnesota Atheists is important to you, it makes you well qualified to join a committee or the board. I hope you will consider supporting Minnesota Atheists in any of these ways.

## **President's Column – War on Christmas (continued from page 2)**

**By Eric Jayne**

Thirdly, our monthly meal preparations at the Family Place shelter will land on November 15 and December 20. Caroline Brunner, Bernadette Chlebeck, Phil Cunliffe, Alyssa Ehni, and Mahad Muhammad have done a tremendous and commendable job in maintaining this important and rewarding Minnesota Atheists event. Visit the Minnesota Atheists Meetup page to RSVP for this popular event. Spots are limited to 12.

I hope you'll sign up for the War on Christmas and consider joining one of these fun, familial, and rewarding events. I can't think of many things more genuinely jolly than celebrating the holidays freethinking friends while supporting secular charities that help individuals and families meet their basic needs.

## **Highway Cleanup**

On Sunday, September 28, we completed the fall cleanup of the Minnesota Atheists' section of Highway 10 in Rice, Minnesota. Minnesota Atheists has been doing this since 2001, thanks to Deb Doucette and Rob Taylor who are the contacts with the state and also organize the cleanup event. It also has been a cooperative effort between Minnesota Atheists and Central Minnesota Freethinkers. By next spring's cleanup, the road sign and responsibility for volunteers may be handed over to Central Minnesota Freethinkers as it better fits with their location and they provide the majority of volunteers.



## October Meeting Review: Ben Blanchard's "I Got Malaria and So Can You: Your Primer on Humanist Service"

By Jack Caravela

During the course of a year, Ben Blanchard traveled to Cambodia, Uganda, Ghana, Haiti, Equador and Guatemala. He taught students, worked on water filtration systems, built latrines, and contributed just about any kind of manual labor needed. Ben also experienced dysentery, was hit by a car, and caught a near-fatal case of malaria. Through it all he managed to do more than persevere—he emerged from his travels with his enthusiasm refreshed and an even greater determination to help people in difficult and often desperate situations.

On Sunday, October 19th, Ben shared his story at the Minnesota Atheists monthly meeting at the North Regional Library in Minneapolis. Titled "I Got Malaria and So Can You: Your Primer on Humanist Service," it began with his involvement with the Foundation Beyond Belief and its Pathfinder's Project, an international service opportunity of the Humanist Service Corps. With many photos and witty insights, we learned how Ben and his fellow Pathfinders worked to help disadvantaged people around the world while learning valuable lessons about how their efforts could be applied for the greatest effect.

At the Bridge of Life school in Cambodia, the Pathfinders found a country whose poverty and government corruption have not discouraged its people from striving for a better standard of living, many of them eager to learn English in order to earn a sustaining wage in the tourism industry. Ben and his companions met male monks who obeyed a strict doctrine of separation between themselves and women, surprising these men when a female Pathfinder participated in their customary social drinking. It was the first time the monks had ever seen a woman drink alcohol.

In Uganda, Ben and his fellow Pathfinders taught in Kaesese Primary School, the only secular school in a country known for its religion-based intolerance towards gays and lesbians. A government directive called for the sex education curriculum to classify homosexuality and masturbation as sexual deviances (the Pathfinders, of course, did not follow the directive). While the students and the school's founder were ardent atheists, the teachers

were not, often trying to inject their religious beliefs into debates, and town leaders flatly refused to believe that Ben was an atheist. As in all of the areas Ben visited, the lack of clean drinking water was a widespread problem.

Ghana, Ben told us, is home to both a relatively progressive government which brought national health care to its people and, paradoxically, the worst example of human rights violations he witnessed. On the positive side, the Pathfinders worked with The Alliance for African Women's Initiative, an organization that empowers girls with educational opportunities and supplies to support their learning. The Pathfinders' optimism would be challenged, however, by their work at a "witch camp," an open-air prison where roughly three thousand women accused of witchcraft live in squalid conditions without potable water, a sufficient diet, or adequate shelter (according to local superstition, men cannot be witches). These camps exist as the only alternative to immediate execution, although witch killings are still common. The plight of these women has moved the Pathfinder Project to prioritize their future efforts on helping improve conditions in these witch camps.

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## October Meeting Review (continued from page 6)

By Jack Caravela

Malaria caught up with Ben in Ghana. He had contracted it earlier and attributed his early symptoms to a general illness, but when he finally collapsed and was taken to a hospital he was diagnosed with the disease. In spite of suffering from a nearly fatally low blood count and severe liver damage, Ben turned his bout with Malaria into a fundraising effort, posting the following on the Pathfinder's website: "The major symptom of malaria is fever; the major symptom of generosity is happiness." Within ten days of being treated he was back with his fellow Pathfinders, one hundred pounds lighter than when his travels began.

Next on Ben's itinerary was Haiti. Other than the capital city of Port-au-Prince, Ben found, the country is in a state of governmental neglect. A four-hour ride on narrow mountain roads while perched on building materials stacked on the back of a flatbed truck brought the Pathfinders to a village desperately in need of improved sanitation. The mission was to build twenty-five latrines, and Ben was impressed when neighbors, most of whom would not benefit from the construction, volunteered to help. In this village of grinding poverty Ben found a deep sense of community and trust.

In Ecuador Ben was able to use his expertise to help construct a water purification system. During his stay in Columbia he helped build a large composter. In these places, as he found in every country he visited, it was important to work with local organizations and listen to those he was trying to help. He noted that too often Americans assume they know what's best and underestimate their ignorance of the problems local inhabitants are facing. Tasks that the people he met did every day, such as drawing water from a deep well with a bucket tied to a rope, were extremely difficult for outsiders to master.

Despite the adversity he had to overcome, Ben told us it was all worth it for the many friends he made and the wealth of enriching and rewarding experiences he had. To learn more and to see photos of Ben and his fellow Pathfinders on their journey, visit [pathfindersproject.com](http://pathfindersproject.com).



## Cable Report

By Steve Petersen

For the October cable taping, Steve Petersen interviewed Jim Barri, Minnesota Atheists member, about Robert G. Ingersoll and American freethinking icon of the late nineteenth century. Jim is well educated regarding Ingersoll and we discussed the relevance of Ingersoll today and his impact on American and freethought history.

If you would like to see if a program could be shown in your area, or if you have a program idea, please contact Steve Petersen at [address@mnaatheists.org](mailto:address@mnaatheists.org)

**Cable Crew:** George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Les Stordalen, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson .

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org. Available via iTunes and YouTube which are made possible by Grant Hermanson. To date, our channel has had over 134,000 downloads.



## Cryptogram Answer

Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves.

Numbers 31:17-18



Jim Barri and Steve Petersen

## Cable Schedule

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

**Bloomington:** Ch. 16. Sunday 11:00 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardesley.

**Minneapolis:** Ch. 75. Monday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen

**Northwest Community Television (NWCT) Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, Maple Grove, New Hope, Osseo, Plymouth and Robbinsdale,** Ch. 20 check web page for date and times:

<http://nwct.org/programming.aspx> Sponsor: Grant Hermanson

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

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale,**

**Moundsview/New Brighton:** Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll

**St. Cloud:** Ch. 12 Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor: Tom Stavros

**St. Paul:** Ch. 15 Wednesdays 5:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Wright

**Stillwater:** Ch., 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Ch. 15. Saturday 8:00 p.m. Sponsor:

Michael Seliga



## Atheists Talk Radio Report

By Mike Haubrich

### "The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars",

Michael Mann on Atheists Talk #284, October 5, 2014

Greg Laden and I had the honor and privilege of talking to Michael Mann regarding the politicization of the issue of climate change. Dr. Mann recently published a book relating how difficult it is for scientists to get their message to the public that climate change is real, and that it is caused by our activity.

### "From Iraq to America," Faisad Saeed Al-

Mutar on Atheists Talk #285, October 12, 2014

Last year Faisal Saeed Al-Mutar was granted asylum following the death of relatives in sectarian violence. Secular humanists in the United States have been quick to welcome his presence in our community. He is a frequent guest speaker and is also a writer and an editor. Carl Hancock interviewed him on this show.

### "Fighting the Pledge in Schools", David

Niose on Atheists Talk #286, October 19, 2014

David Niose is the past president of the American Humanist Association and legal director for the Appignani Humanist Legal Center. In 2012 and 2013 he argued that a Massachusetts law requiring teachers to lead the Pledge of Allegiance was unconstitutional under the Massachusetts constitution. In May 2014, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court finally ruled against the interests of atheist students in the matter, but Niose remains interested in the topic. He joined Scott Lohman to talk about the case; his upcoming book, *"Fighting Back the Right: Reclaiming America from the Attack on Reason,"* and the AHA 2015 National Conference.



Minnesota Atheists produces the radio program, and the director is Carl Hancock with hosts Carl Hancock, Brianne Bilyeu, Scott Lohman, David Pacheco and Stephanie Zvan. Both Stephanie and Brianne upload podcasts to our web site. The radio program is broadcast live every Sunday from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. from AM950 KTNF studios in Eden Prairie, MN. Live streaming is available on our web page. [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org). Original music was composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. The cost to us is \$5,320.00 every six months. Your donations will be appreciated. They can be sent to our post office box or posted online at [minnesotatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund](http://minnesotatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund). Thanks to Brianne Bilyeu the program has a presence on social media: an Atheists Talk Facebook page and an account at [Twitter.com/atheists\\_talk](https://twitter.com/atheists_talk).

All past programs can be accessed via the MNA web page: [minnesotatheists.org/news-and-media/podcast](http://minnesotatheists.org/news-and-media/podcast) or on iTunes. If you are interested in helping on the radio program, please send a message to [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org).

## Secretary's Report – October

By Jill Carlson

- The Board continued discussion and brainstorming for the Winter Solstice event occurring in December, 2014. The Solstice venue, "The Republic" was reserved and entertainment, Ed Brayton, will be contacted. The board approved expenses to fund this project.
- The final financials were disclosed for the summer MNA conference that occurred in July, 2014. The event operated at a deficit of more than \$3,000. This obligation will be split evenly with the Humanists of MN, the conference's co-sponsor.
- An updated venue for the summer picnics was reserved and the board approved \$125 to reimburse the Humanists of MN for the reservation. The new park is located in Minneapolis and it was selected for the better children's play area and the improved facilities. The park is called Wabun Picnic Area at Minnehaha Park.
- It was agreed that the Board Treasurer will draft a brief letter for the newsletter regarding the annual budget and how the funds received are allocated.
- A brainstorm took place regarding a 2015 conference for MNA. Opinions were mixed if the project can continue due to financial losses; a woman themed conference or national "woman in secularism" focus was discussed as a possibility.

## Call for January Articles

We welcome contributions from all readers of The Minnesota Atheist. While we cannot guarantee that your submission will be accepted for publication, we will carefully consider anything that is related to atheism. We would especially like to receive contributions which provide profiles of individual atheists and which report atheist-related events in the wider community.

Because we are a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, we cannot print articles that support or oppose a specific candidate, but we can print articles that support or oppose specific causes. Article length should ideally be 500-1000 words and no more than 2000 words.

Please send submissions to the editor, Jenny Nolan at [editor@mnaatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnaatheists.org) by 11:59pm on December 22. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. Without contributions for readers like you, The Minnesota Atheist would be needlessly constrained in its breadth and depth.



I've been a humanist all my life.  
I just never had a word for it.

Joseph Fieber  
Out of the Closet Humanist

Contact us at [board@mnaatheists.org](mailto:board@mnaatheists.org) if you are interested in participating in the Out of the Closet campaign. We look forward to hearing from you!

## Winter Solstice Celebration

By Stephanie Zvan

The winter solstice is fast approaching. Come join your fellow non-believers on the longest night of the year to eat, drink, and laugh the darkness away!

This year, the Minnesota Atheists are hosting their solstice banquet and celebration December 21 at Republic in Seven Corners on the West Bank of Minneapolis. Just off the new light rail Green Line, Republic specializes in local food prepared for a discerning palate. The Star Tribune called their menu, "Pub food done better."

In addition to a selection of three-course meals for our solstice dinner, Republic can accommodate requests for vegan or gluten-free meals. Just let us know what you need when you register at <http://mnatheists.org/solstice>.

Want just the right drink to go with your dinner? You're in luck. The cash bar at Republic offers a good selection of wine and cocktails, but their specialty is craft beer. Republic was named one of Draft Magazine's Top 100 Beer Bars in America both of the last two years. You'll have no problem finding the perfect beer to go with your food.

If dinner's not in the plans for you, you'll still want to join us later in the evening for stand-up comedy from Ed Brayton. Brayton is best known these days for his blog, Dispatches from the Culture Wars, and as the owner of

Freethought Blogs, but he used to tour the country with his stand-up act before he got tired of having to explain his jokes to undereducated audiences. These days, he performs almost exclusively for atheists, and we're happy to bring him in to provide our entertainment for the evening.

Tickets for both dinner-plus-entertainment and entertainment-only are limited. To ensure your place, go to [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org) or return the order form included with this newsletter. Tickets for both the dinner and the entertainment are discounted for members of Minnesota Atheists and Humanists of Minnesota.

Watch for more news from Minnesota Atheists on additional local guest entertainment. If you have any questions about this year's celebration, send them to [apres@mnatheists.org](mailto:apres@mnatheists.org).



Once you realize the wonder and majesty found in embracing the natural view of the universe, anything else is a cheap counterfeit.

Patrick Currier  
Out of the Closet Atheist

## September Treasury Report

By Chris Matthews

### Radio Fund

Erik Englebretson	\$50
Nancy Ruhland	\$50
Cynthia Flaig	\$25
James Wright	\$25
Steve Petersen	\$15
Cash donations	\$65
<b>Total Radio Fund</b>	<b>\$230</b>

### Building Fund

Erik Englebretson	\$50
Ann Zaiser	\$40
<b>Total Building Fund</b>	<b>\$90</b>

### General/Visibility Fund

Leland Salisbury	\$500
Thomas Dooley	\$100
Georgia Tsoi	\$25
<b>Total General/Visibility Fund</b>	<b>\$625</b>

**Total Income:** **\$945**

**Current Building Fund Total** **\$133,464**

### Top Expenses

Conference	\$3,940
Baseball Game	\$2,329
Radio Show	\$820
Newsletter Printing	\$474



## Donate to Minnesota Atheists...With Good Reason

By Chris Matthews

The end of 2014 is right around the corner. For some, the end of the year is a time to reflect, and for some it is a time to plan. For some, it is both. The following information might help you judge the value of donating to Minnesota Atheists as the year comes to an end.

- Tax Benefits. Minnesota Atheists is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization. If you are so inclined and otherwise qualify, your donations may be tax deductible.
- All-volunteer. Minnesota Atheists has no paid staff. Everyone -- from the radio program staff to the cable TV show staff to board members to members who organize and host events -- is volunteering their time and skills. All monetary donations benefit the activities and goals of the organization directly. Some of these are highlighted below.
- Conference. In July, Minnesota Atheists co-hosted a summer regional conference, which was our third co-hosted conference in three summers. Our conferences have included

## Donate to Minnesota Atheists...With Good Reason

By Chris Matthews

nationally-known speakers, as well as local talent, and include workshops to attract attendees. Much effort goes into organizing a conference, and our volunteers have stepped up to the challenge repeatedly. This year's conference expenses were over \$13,000.

- Radio Show. Our weekly one-hour radio show, Atheists Talk, is live every Sunday morning at 9:00 on AM 950 KTNF out of Eden Prairie. The show is hosted and organized by a group of dedicated volunteers. The show features interviews with well-known authors and other intellectually interesting folks and covers topics of interest to the atheist community. Guests in 2014 included Greta Christina, David Silverman, Dale McGowan, and Robert Price. The show costs \$205 each week, which amounts to over \$10,500 for 2014.
- Newsletters. Our newsletter, The Minnesota Atheist, is one way that new members of the community learn about Minnesota Atheists, and it keeps all members informed about our organization via regular columns, information about monthly meetings, the cable and radio programs, etc. The newsletter is printed and mailed to dues-paying members who request it. The cost of printing and mailing newsletters in 2014 will be about \$6,600.
- Baseball Game. Minnesota co-hosted a "Mr Paul Aints" minor league baseball game in July. This was our third summer of renaming the Saint Paul Saints for a game and having a night of unbelievable fun in the process. This event continues to receive attention well outside Minnesota, and it shows that atheists sometimes just want to have fun. Our cost for the game sponsorship and related Aints merchandise in 2014 will be over \$2,500.
- Internet. The costs of our electronic presence include our website hosting and the domain name we use, the cost of mailchimp for AWE and other communications, meetup fees, and fees for online purchases and donations. We post podcasts of our radio show online where it reaches a far broader audience than the live broadcast possibly could. For 2014, our internet costs will amount to about \$1,200.
- T-Shirts. Every year we create a new edition of the Minnesota Atheists t-shirt to promote our organization. Usually the design is a change of the colors used, but we have been using themes for the past few years as well. The 2014 t-shirt celebrates 30 years of organized atheism in Minnesota. Our costs for t-shirts in 2014 was over \$800.
- Solstice. Minnesota Atheists alternates hosting the annual winter solstice event with the Humanists of Minnesota. 2014 is our turn. We aren't sure yet what the costs will be, so you'll have to watch for that in the Treasury report in upcoming newsletters.
- And more. There are other expenses that don't quite add up to the ones already mentioned, but are worth noting. We routinely represent Minnesota Atheists at Pride and other events throughout the year, and we participate in freethought community picnics every summer.

All in all, our organization is pretty impressive. The efforts of our volunteers go a very long way, but none of our goals would be possible without generous donations from folks like you. As 2014 winds down, please consider supporting Minnesota Atheists. If you are not a member, become a member. If you are a member, you can renew your membership now to extend it by 1 or 3 years. You can also donate to our radio fund or our general visibility fund. Details on how to donate or pay memberships can be found on the last page of this newsletter and on our website. Plan, reflect, support Minnesota Atheists, and then have a great 2015!

## Book Review – Sam Harris' *Waking Up*

By Grant Steves

Sam Harris appears to be a contradiction. Can you be an atheist and be spiritual? Harris has, through his past books and debates, established himself as an atheist. However, people sometimes stray into eccentric choices. This new book by Harris raises that question. The word 'atheist' has controversy attached to it, so having controversial terms should not deter an atheist. Perhaps you need to let Harris make his point, evaluate his argument with an open mind, and then make your decision.

To succeed he needed to define spirituality. He did this by looking at its origin. The word is directly related to the Latin word, *spiritus*, and that is a translation of the Greek word *pneuma* – which means breath. This historical attempt to rescue the word is about as valid as using the Bible as a deed to the land of Israel. It isn't what it was, but what it is.

You should be looking for a modern use of the term that matches your intent. Present dictionaries are limited in definitions that would be useful for Harris. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged Edition (1967) perhaps helps with the following: "of or relating to the conscious thoughts and emotions." However, in general discourse we often use it to identify that which inspires – music, art, poetry, etc., and phenomena that are not supernatural in its origin. It is not easy to go against calcified popular attitudes about the usage of a word, but it is possible to encourage a word's usage to be broader in its intent. We certainly have done that with words such as love, religion, and humanism.

Harris' first chapter gives a brief history and definition of spirituality in an atheist context. He also introduces a method of meditation, which appears to be the point of his book, i.e., to encourage the use of meditation.

Chapter two of his book is his argument on a definition of consciousness. This is important to understanding the idea of meditation and the benefits that may be derived from meditation. His degree in neuroscience is used to help support his argument.

Chapter three reflects on the riddle of the self. This is an age old issue, and Harris tries to help us understand it, because it directly

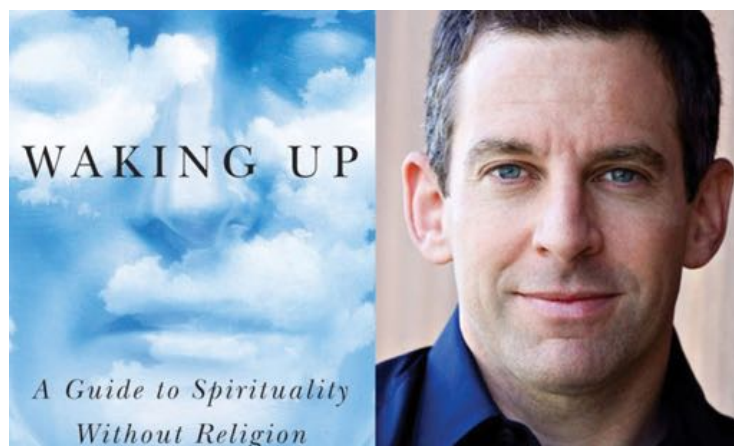
supports his position on meditation benefits that one can obtain from its practice.

Chapter five covers the selection of a teacher of meditation – its importance in finding the right one, and the importance of not being trained by the wrong person. He also comments on use of drugs as a short cut to discovering the self, and he reflects on the curious near death experience.

Harris wants us to understand that a "true spiritual practitioner is someone who has discovered that it is possible to be at ease in the world for no reason, if only for a few moments at a time..." Further on in the book he asserts "that spiritual life consists in overcoming the illusion of the self by paying close attention to our experiences in the present moment." This is accomplished through meditation.

The formula for meditation that Harris gives in the first chapter cuts away the unessential and clearly states the essential. It is a form of meditation I have been doing for over thirty years. The benefits he identifies I have experienced. It was encouraging to see the research that he uses to support the practice. It is an activity that requires discipline and can be rewarding, but it is not a panacea for the human race.

Once again Harris has written a short thought provoking book on a subject on which people are often confused, puzzled, or negative in their reactions.



## Upcoming Events

**Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous.** Sundays, 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., or Wednesday 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South, Suite 55, Minneapolis. Meets in the basement. Open to all genders.

**Lake Superior Freethinkers Monthly Membership**

**Meeting.** First Sundays, social time 9:00 a.m., breakfast 9:30 a.m. (\$13.00), program 10:00 a.m., Duluth Radisson, 505 West Superior Street, Duluth.

**Freethought Toastmasters.** First and third Mondays, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact George Kane, nup@Minn.net

**Freethought Lunch.** First Tuesday, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Contact Bob or Marilyn Nienkerk, 612-866-6200.

**All Committee Meeting.** Wednesday, December 10, 6:30 p.m. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact Heather, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org).

**Solstice Banquet at Republic, Guest Comedian Ed Brayton.** Sunday, December 21, 2014, 6:30 p.m. Tickets online at <http://mnatheists.org/solstice>

**Crafty Freethinkers North.** Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Brookdale Library, Study Room I, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Brooklyn Center.

**Little Canada Book Club.** Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m., Caribou Coffee, 3354 Rice Street, Little Canada.

**Freethought Dinner Social.** Second and fourth Mondays, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington. Contact Bob or Marilyn Neinker, 612-866-6200.

**Godless Gamers—Board Game Night.** Second and fourth Thursdays, 6:00 p.m., Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Road B2, Roseville.

**Blasphemer's Brunch.** Second Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 West 66th Street, Richfield.

**Lunch at the Dragon House Restaurant.** Third Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Avenue, Columbia Heights. Contact Bill Volna, 612-781-1420.

**Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting.** Third Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Open to all members. Contact Heather Hegi, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org) for location.

**Freethinking Females Evening** at Chatterbox Pub. Fourth Monday, 7:30 p.m., Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Avenue South, Saint Paul.



Check out more events on our Meetup page at: [meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://meetup.com/minnesota-atheists).



**There's always time to make a difference.**

**Join Minnesota Atheists, renew your membership or make a donation today.**

### Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

- One-year student membership \$10
- One-year individual membership \$35
- Three-year individual membership \$90
- One-year household membership \$45
- Three-year household membership \$115
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600
- General Fund \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Building Fund \$\_\_\_\_\_

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

- Please send my subscription by email

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**Minnesota Atheists, PO Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112. Please make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists. Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.**

# Minnesota Atheists

## Positive atheism in action<sup>sm</sup> since 1991

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

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Board@mnatheists.org

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pres@mnatheists.org

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apres@mnatheists.org

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achair@mnatheists.org

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sec@mnatheists.org

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August Berkshire  
dir1@mnatheists.org  
612.868.2267  
Georgia Hancock Tsoi  
dir2@mnatheists.org  
Alyssa Ehni  
dir3@mnatheists.org

### The Minnesota Atheist Newsletter

#### Editorial Board Email

editor@mnatheists.org

#### Editorial Board

George Kane  
nup@minn.net  
651.488.8225  
Heather Hegi  
chair@mnatheists.org  
Christopher Matthews  
c03m13@bluebottle.com  
Shirley Moll  
srmoll@comcast.com  
James Zimmerman  
zgoatee@gmail.com

#### Editor

Jenny Nolan  
editor@mnatheists.org

#### Chief Photographer

Richard Trombley

#### Membership and Change of Address

Steve Petersen  
address@mnatheists.org  
651.484.9277

#### Submissions

Submit material for the newsletter to the editor at editor@mnatheists.org  
Submissions may be edited.

### Minnesota Atheists Media

#### Public Relations Chair

Emily Matejcek  
pr@mnatheists.org

#### Atheists Weekly Email (AWE)

Christopher Matthews  
awe@mnatheists.org

#### Cable TV Chair

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cable@mnatheists.org

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Grant Hermanson  
web@mnatheists.org

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podcasts@mnatheists.org

### Minnesota Atheists Goals

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 Affiliations

Minnesota Atheists is affiliated with the Atheist Alliance of America, Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, The American Humanist Association, the Council for Secular Humanism, The International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the Secular Coalition for America.

### Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 207  
Life members: 37  
Meetup members: 1566

### Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD  
Dan Barker  
Gerald Erickson, PhD  
Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Dick Hewetson  
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PO Box 120304

New Brighton, MN 55112

612-588-7031

[info@mnatheists.org](mailto:info@mnatheists.org)

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