

The Minnesota Atheist

Fool Me Twice: Fighting the Assault on Science in America

“Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” Thomas Jefferson wrote this with great hope as he and the founders crafted the new Republic. But we have a huge problem in modern America because the value placed in science is losing its cachet. Politicians are ignoring or disputing the policy impacts that science is suggesting.

The challenges to our society are growing more dire as climate change and evolution denialism are badges of honor worn by many current potential presidential candidates, and in the meantime growing numbers of people are refusing to vaccinate themselves and their children against diseases for fear of a non-existent tie between vaccines and autism.

The United States has given up its leadership role in science and technology, and Shawn Lawrence Otto has been working to restore science to its rightful role of informing public policy. As one of the founders of the Science Debate 2008 program to urge the candidates in that presidential race, he has been analyzing the situation and proposing solutions that may save us all yet.



Mr. Otto will be our guest speaker on Sunday, 15 January, to discuss his new book *Fool Me Twice* and the efforts that all of us can make to rebuild respect for science in a country that is in danger of receding into the Dark Ages. He will have copies for you to purchase and will happily sign them for you.

As a reminder, the business meeting will include nominations to the Board of Directors (see page 6). Please join us!

If You Go...

When:
Sunday, January 15, 2012

Where:
Southdale Library
7001 York Avenue South
Edina, 55435

Schedule:
1:00-1:15 p.m. – Social time
1:15-1:45 p.m. – Business Meeting
1:45-2:00 p.m. – Break
2:00-3:30 p.m. – Presentation
4:00-whenever – Dinner

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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.

MNA Meetup members: **1,000!**
Life memberships: 30

Honorary Members

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

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

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.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Our Year in Review



by August
Berkshire

Many, many people volunteered their time and talents to produce the great success Minnesota Atheists had this past year.

Nine people served on our **board of directors** (see list on page two), but this represents only a fraction of the leaders in Minnesota Atheists.

We produced ten **newsletters** with great articles and photos. For those receiving the paper copy, we have started mailing them in envelopes, which speeds up production (and thus delivery). Thanks to editor James Zimmerman, photographer Richard Trombley, Cedar Printing, mailers Steve Petersen and Shirley Moll (and others), and our many contributors.

Our **website** was redesigned by Clint Buhs and has received good feedback from people who visit. Thanks to Steve Petersen, Eric Jayne, and Grant Hermanson for acting as webmasters.

On **Facebook** we have both an active Group (with 610 members) and a Page (with 208 "Likes").

We produced a dozen **Atheists Talk TV shows**, which were also uploaded as podcasts. Thanks to Steve Petersen for chairing this project and crew volunteers George Kane, Shirley Moll, Wendy Steinberg, Art Anderson, Brett Stembridge, and Grant Hermanson. Also thanks to program distributors Kevin Hardisty, David and Joanne Beardsley, Steve Petersen, Shirley Moll, Jack Richter, Jim Salutz, Lee Salisbury, Jim Bodsberg, and Michael Seliga. And thanks to our numerous hosts and guests.

We produced 52 weekly **Atheists Talk radio programs**, which were also uploaded as podcasts. We continue to have problems with our iTunes feed but we hope that will be resolved. Tremendous thanks to Mike Haubrich, who scheduled, hosted, posted show notes, and uploaded programs for most of the year. Thanks to Carl Hancock, Stephanie Zvan, Brianne Bilyeu, Scott Lohman, Greg Laden and others who have helped. Thanks our sponsors, Q.Cumbers restaurant in Edina and the Humanists of Minnesota, and everyone who contributed to our Radio Fund.

Our **Meetup** group has grown to **1,000** members and continues to be very popular, with events such as book clubs, Freethinking Females lunches, debaptism ceremonies, and Godless Gamers gatherings. Thanks to Jack Caravela, Rhonda LeSage, Eric Jayne, Jeff Mondloch, Patricia M., Sam, and Jacqueline.

We had seven **monthly public educational meetings**, featuring speakers Monica Meyer, PZ Myers, Teresa Nelson, John Loftus, Greta Christina, Hector Avalos, and Grant Steves. All of these presentations were recorded and will appear as podcasts.

We had not one but **two Rapture Parties**, as the world twice failed to end as predicted. Thanks to Keith Lodermeier for organizing the events and to the talented bands that played and helped us raise money.

We worked with the Humanists of Minnesota and Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH) to sponsor three **summer picnics** and participated with the Humanists in the **Winter Solstice Freethought Follies**. Tremendous thanks to Jerry Rauser for organizing the latter event, and to all who participated. Once again we collected gifts for the teenagers at The Bridge for Youth organization.

In May we had another successful **Day of Reason** at the State Capitol, organized by Steve Petersen and featuring guest speaker Sandhya Bathija from Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Also at the Capitol, we **testified** in favor of a bill that would have ended the religious blue law mandating the closing of liquor stores on Sundays. (The bill passed the committee but remains stalled in the legislature.)

We filed our first-ever **friend of the court brief**, on behalf of the group Marry Me Minnesota, which is suing Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota trying to legalize same-sex marriages in our state. We were the *only* group to file such a brief on behalf of the appellants.

We participated in numerous **festivals**: May Day, Juneteenth, Anarchists Book Fair, Twin Cities Book Festival, and six Gay Prides (Minneapolis, Rochester, Mankato, La Crosse, Duluth, and St. Cloud). Thanks to the dozens of people who marched in parades and staffed booths for us. A new handout we had this year was our "**Saved by an Atheist**" business cards.

Deb Doucette organized two **Adopt-A-Highway cleanups** in Rice. We became a partner in the national **Foundation Beyond Belief** organization and applied to get into their **Volunteers Beyond Belief** program.

We had **letters and opinions** published in the *Star Tribune* and the *St. Cloud Times* and were featured in two articles in *Lavender* magazine. Our **press release** for our first Rapture Party was picked up by a number of media outlets. Thanks to Emily Matejcek for being our public relations officer.

Our **public speakers** on the topic of atheism appeared at the Coon Rapids Evangelical Free Church, Southwest Christian High School, South Dakota State University (Brookings), St. Cloud Public Library, Northwestern College, and the Project 42 Conference in Fargo. We were also interviewed on the Center for Inquiry's "Point of Inquiry" podcast and sent a speaker to a regional humanist conference in San Diego.

We also had speakers appear on the following Christian radio programs: The Doug Pagitt Show, KKMS radio, and a New York City internet radio show.

President's Column continued on back page.

Twin Cities Billboard Project Under Way

American Atheists is helping Minnesota Atheists finance a billboard by covering forty percent of the costs if we can have it up by no later than mid-February. Your donations will help us take advantage of this fantastic opportunity. The purpose of the billboard is to advertise our organization, encourage local atheists to join, and offer a pithy, cogent argument that most atheists can support.

Please consider donating to the billboard fund. We need a minimum of \$1000 for a 12x25 foot billboard on a city street in the Twin Cities area. However, we will need \$1500 to have the billboard placed in a prime spot with the heaviest traffic (such as downtown, Snelling Avenue, Hennepin Avenue, or Lake Street).

If there is any money left in the Billboard Fund after we have collected enough money it will either be invested in future billboards or be moved to our General Fund.



Above: Proposed design; may be modified.

Photos from Last Month's Winter Solstice Celebration



2011's Freethought Winter Solstice Celebration was held December 18th at the Doubletree Hotel in St. Louis Park. The Humanists of Minnesota hosted the event.



Photos courtesy of Richard Trombley.

News and Notes



George Kane

We get far too little good news from the conservative Roberts Supreme Court. It was therefore a rare pleasure in December when it refused to consider a case that could have forced school boards to permit church groups to hold worship service in public school buildings outside of normal school hours.

The case was brought by the Bronx Household of Faith, an evangelical Christian church which wanted to use a local school for Sunday religious services. In 1994 they applied to use a New York City middle school for its Sunday morning church services, and were refused because the Board of Education had a policy prohibiting religious worship at its schools. The appeals court ruled that allowing the church services in schools would violate the constitutional requirement on the separation of church and state, and would send the message that government endorsed religion. However, a federal judge granted an injunction allowing the services, pending a ruling by the Supreme Court. SCOTUS rescinded the injunction and reinstated the appeals court ruling, which it declined to review.

The Florida legislature is trying to foist on its voters an expensive amendment to the state constitution that would blast a huge breach in the wall of separation between church and state. Amendment 7 would repeal a provision that has been in the state's constitution for 125 years that forbids the state to directly or indirectly provide state funding to religious institutions. The amendment would even require the state to fund a wide array of religious programs and institutions. The legislature put it on the November 2012 ballot with the deceptive title "Religious Freedom."

The leading group in opposition to this amendment is the teacher's union, since the amendment would transfer funds for public education to religious schools. Joined by several religious ministers, they sued to have Amendment 7 removed from the ballot. They argued that the amendment's title and ballot summary were misleading. Leon County Circuit Judge Terry Lewis agreed, particularly that the assertion that the amendment would bring the state constitution into conformance with the U.S. constitution is false.

Judge Lewis therefore ordered the amendment to be deleted, but a provision in state law will probably result in it being restored to the ballot. This provision permits the state attorney general to alter the title or summary of challenged amendments without requiring legislative approval. Judge Lewis' ruling provides Attorney General Pam Bondi instructions on the changes needed to pass judicial review.

Religious conservatives will criticize President Obama, no matter what he does. There remain those who refuse to accept that he is a Christian, and are sure that he is a closet Muslim. Now he is accused of flaunting Christmas by putting up too many decorations at the White House. Sean Hannity was especially critical that the decorations, bought with tax funding, provide enjoyment for the president and his family. I wonder if he will also criticize the Christmas decorations put up by prior administrations.

I confess that I have never had any interest in any of the spate of "reality shows" that have been so ballyhooed over the last few years. I find them both voyeuristic and mundane, and have not heard of any that focus on people with whom I would identify or find interesting. This is particularly true of *American Muslim*, an offering on TLC, The Learning Channel. The show focuses on the daily lives and commonplace travails of Americans of the Muslim faith.

That is not a premise that would ever motivate me to flip the channel to catch a program. It provoked the wrath of the conservative Christian media watchdog Florida Family Association, however. They threatened the program's sponsors with a boycott, provoking

News and Notes continued on page 6.

MINNESOTA ATHEISTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

Nominations for the Minnesota Atheists board of directors will occur during the business portion of our **January 15th, 2012** meeting. **Elections** will be held during the business portion of our **February 19th, 2012** meeting.

Nominations will open and close at the January 15th meeting. We will publish candidates' statements in our February 2012 newsletter.

There are nine positions to fill, elected in the following order: President, Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-at-Large. Our bylaws provide that anyone who runs for one position and loses may run again for any other position that has not yet been elected.

Some incumbents will be running for reelection but it is important to remember that *all seats* are technically open. All terms are for one year. Now is your chance to step forward and help guide Minnesota Atheists!

Candidates for all but the three director-at-large positions must have been dues-paying members of Minnesota Atheists for at least one year as of the time they assume office on March 1st, 2012. Candidates for the three director-at-large positions must have been dues-paying members for at least six months.

To run for office, you must be nominated by another Minnesota Atheists member. You cannot nominate yourself. (It's usually not too hard to find someone else at the January meeting to nominate you.)

You need not be present to be nominated (or elected). If you wish to nominate someone who will not be at the January 15th meeting, please check beforehand to make sure that person is willing to serve if elected.

Nominees should send a candidate's statements of up to 150 words to the newsletter editor, James Zimmerman (editor@mnatheists.org), by January 20th, 2012. We would also like to have a jpeg headshot of each candidate.

For more information about nominations, elections, or holding office, contact any board member. (See page 2 for board members' contact information.) For information about publishing your candidate's statement or photo, contact the editor, James Zimmerman, at editor@mnatheists.org.

It is only with your support that we can have a successful organization!

News and Notes (continued)

Lowe's, Home Depot, and Sweet 'n' Low to pull their ads.

This shows considerable clout, but what is the organizational strength of the Florida Family Association? It turns out that it has only one paid employee, David Caton. The threats of boycott that so terrified the program's sponsors was really a one-man crusade of anti-Muslim bigotry.

Jon Stewart provided a wry assessment of the complaints against *American Muslim*. Surely, Stewart

mused, the problem with the program must be that it provides a platform for the anti-American rants of jihadis. Then he played a film clip of Caton, complaining that the program portrayed Muslims as having the typical ambitions, anxieties and concerns of other middle-income Americans. "Oh!" exclaimed Stewart in feigned shock. "The problem with the program is that there are *not enough* terrorists!" The sponsors who pulled their ads are now facing a backlash for religious bigotry.

Find us! We are on the web at **mnatheists.org** and on Meetup and Facebook:



www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists



www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists

Wandering in a vast forest at night,
I have only a faint light to guide me.
A stranger appears and says to me:
'My friend, you should blow out
your candle in order to find your
way more clearly.' The stranger is a
theologian. -Denis Diderot,
philosopher

Atheists Talk: October-December Radio Report

A*theists Talk* Radio is produced by Minnesota Atheists. Carl Hancock directs. Producers and hosts include Mike Haubrich, Greg Laden, August Berkshire, Scott Lohman, Stephanie Zvan, and Steve Petersen. Shirley Moll helps with radio ads. The radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at AM 950. It is broadcast from KTNF studios in Eden Prairie. Live streaming can be accessed through our web page, www.mnatheists.org. Original music is composed, played, and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. The six month cost is \$5,320. Each donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. To donate, send in a donation to our PO box or online at http://mnatheists.org/component/option.com_civicrm/Itemid,55. All past programs can be accessed via our web page.

If you are interested in helping on the radio program please send a note to radio@mnatheists.org. Recent shows included:

"Religion, Patriarchy, and Sexual Repression" with Sunsara Taylor. #138, October 23rd.

Sunsara Taylor writes for Revolution Newspaper, sits on the Advisory Board of The world Can't Wait, and is a co-host on *Equal Time for Freethought*. During our show, she explored the question: Why do all the world's major religions have patriarchy and the enslavement of women at their core? Interview by George Kane and hosted by Stephanie Zvan.

"The Atheist's Guide to Reality" with Alex Rosenberg. #139, October 30th.

Many religions claim to hold the answers to life's big questions: What is the meaning of life? Why are we here? From where do we get our

by Steve Petersen

morals? Some say it's all because of God, and that leaves us atheists throwing our hands in the air.

Dr. Alex Rosenberg discussed his book *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions*. During the show, he walked us through the science that succeeds in providing answers without having to fall back on supernatural explanations. He celebrated the universal applicability of the methods of science, embraced 'nice nihilism,' and took us on a fast-paced, wild journey through the physics, chemistry and biology that explain our past, present, and future.

Interview by Carl Hancock and Scott Lohman, and hosted by Brianne Bilyeu.

"50 Voices of Disbelief" with Russell Blackford. #140, November 6th.

For this show, we interviewed Russell Blackford, author of *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists*, which presents a unique and thought-provoking collection of original essays that address personal disbelief in a higher power. Drawn from an international cast of professionals in the fields of academia, science, literature, media and politics, contributors offer carefully considered statements of why they reject the idea of a deity governing the universe and human affairs.

Interview by Rachel Reiva, hosted by Stephanie Zvan.

"Reason Rally 2012 and American Atheists National Convention with David Silverman." #141, November 13th.

Steve Petersen and August Berkshire interviewed David Silverman, President of American Atheists, about the Reason Rally 2012, to be held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., Saturday, March 24 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Brianne Bilyeu hosted.

"Shawn Lawrence Otto." #142, November 20th.

Shawn Lawrence Otto just launched his book, *Fool Me Twice: Fighting the Assault on Science in America*, a richly documented and well-reasoned analysis of modern science denialism, especially addressing climate change. He joined us to



August Berkshire, left, and Brianne Bilyeu during an airing of Atheists Talk.

Radio Report continued on page 8.

Radio Report (continued)

talk about his book in greater detail.

"Believing Bullshit" with Stephen Law. #143, November 27th.

Stephen Law is a provost for the Centre for Inquiry UK and the editor of *Think: Philosophy for Everyone*. We interviewed him to discuss his latest book *Believing Bullshit: How Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole*.

Interviewers: Carl Hancock and Scott Lohman, hosted by Rachel Reiva.

"The Rap Guild to Evolution" with Baba Brinkman. #144, December 4th.

Baba Brinkman is a Canadian rap artist, writer, actor, and tree planter. He is well known for blending rap music and literature and science. He coined the term "lit hop" to describe his literature-based rap music. His thesis compared modern Hip hop freestyle battling with *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. He joined us for today's show to discuss his unique form of art.

Interviewers: Carl Hancock and Scott Lohman, hosted by Rachel Reiva.

"The Believing Brian" with Michael Shermer. #145, December 11th.

Michael Shermer is the founder of the Skeptics Society and editor-in-chief of *Skeptic* magazine. He is the author of several books on the topics of belief and the history of science. For this show, he discussed his latest book, *The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies—How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths*.

Interview by Carl Hancock and August Berkshire. Hosted by Stephanie Zvan.

"The Knowledge of Good and Evil" with Glenn Kleier. #146, December 18th.

Glenn Kleier joined *Atheists Talk* today to discuss his rousing new suspense thriller, *The Knowledge of Good and Evil*. Kleier uses the novel's plot as a springboard to examine religious scepticism, belief, and faith. The book's main character, Ian, is a paranormal investigator and television report who was deeply damaged by the death of his parents when he was a child. He struggles with religion and his anger at God. When he learns of a journey that may prove the existence of God and Heaven, he becomes determined to undertake it. But while he seeks this knowledge, he is blocked by a secret society that will do everything in its power to keep him out.

James Zimmerman interviewed Kleier. Brianne Bilyeu hosted.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

N kwgnwzw aqwfw ni sj Cjp. N qhzw gjzw, kgvw ilnwi, fhnskjdi
 hsp Qhggxhfl Rhfpi, hsp aqha qhi aj kw wsjvcq. Na qhi aj kw
 wsjvcq, kva na'i wzwfeaqnsc ns aqw djfgp, hsp wzwfeaqnsc ns aqw
 djfgp ni ygwsae mjf xw.

-Ywss Bnggwaaw

(Answer on page 13.)

November and December Treasurer's Report

Building Fund

Ioannis Roussos	\$50
Arthur Scearcy	\$25
Jeffrey Sella	\$25
Christopher Matthews	\$11
Total Building Fund	\$111

Legal Fund

Gary Bolt	\$55
Calla Simms	\$50
Steve Petersen	\$10
Total Legal Fund	\$115

Radio Fund

Theodore Nagel	\$250
Erik Englebretson	\$200
Alice Lesney	\$200
Steve Petersen	\$130
David Thomas	\$100
Vernon Young	\$100
Rapture II donations	\$84
Paul Gramstad	\$50
Ioannis Roussos	\$50
Vicky Hagens	\$25
Nancy Ruhland	\$25
Jeffrey Sella	\$25
Lynn Fellman	\$15
Total Radio Fund	\$1,254

General/Visibility Fund

anonymous	\$100
Richard Dean	\$465
Vanita Mishra	\$250
Michael Jacobson 2003 Trust	\$100
Kent Kokko	\$50
Joseph Smith	\$50
Keith Thorkelson	\$50
Tim Traynor	\$50
Michelle Tjernagel	\$42
Vicky Hagens	\$40
Jeffrey Sella	\$25
Michael Stiegler	\$25
Adam Zielie	\$25
Dale Howey	\$20
Meghan Kosowski	\$20
Justine Hartz	\$13
Dean Spencer	\$10
Joe Crump	\$7
Total Gen./Visibility Fund	\$1,342

Total Income: \$2,822

*Compiled by
Chris Matthews*

Current Building Fund Total \$130,137

Radio Show Fundraising Goal \$3,255
 (for 5 months ending
 December 31, 2011)
 Amount Raised (thru
 December 25, 2011) \$1,972
 Amount Remaining to
 Reach Goal: \$1,283

Top Expenses for November/December

Radio Show	\$1,640
Newsletter Printing	\$1,537
Storage	\$284
Logo Merchandise	\$245



Planning your estate?
 Don't forget to include
 Minnesota Atheists.

Pseudo-Science, Equivocation, and DVDs: How Scientologists Extinguished an Atheist Invasion



Eric Jayne

In October, the Church of Scientology opened their new 82,000 square-foot building to the public. The building, formerly home to the Science Museum, sits kitty-corner to the Fitzgerald Theater and is currently the largest Church of Scientology in the Midwest. One month after its ribbon cutting ceremony about 35 atheists invaded the new building in spite of poor road conditions from the metro area's first significant snowfall of the season.

It wasn't truly an "invasion" since the local Scientology church agreed to host a Minnesota Atheists group tour, but only after some persuasion and a vetting process by a church leader named Karen. After I answered all of Karen's questions she said that she will need some time to decide whether or not to allow our group in. Two days after our conversation Karen confirmed our group tour for Saturday, 19 November.

Those of us who braved the snowstorm gathered in the atrium where we were divided into two groups, each with its own tour guide (Karen and another church leader named Nancy). The tour began in the main gallery where a dozen video-information stations were scattered. Photography was not allowed, except by me and only after I obtained permission. While one group was instructed to watch a sanitized, church produced Scientology video celebrating the life and accomplishments of L. Ron Hubbard, the other



group was getting a live E-Meter presentation. When we were finished with the first presentation we switched to the other.

The E-Meter presenter explained that the E-Meter reads

and shows human thoughts. To demonstrate how the E-meter works, Karen invited a volunteer to demonstrate the E-meter. The volunteer was told to grab two silver cylinder conductors attached by two wires to a watermelon shaped device with dials and a meter. He was asked to think of something

negative and when he did, the meter needle moved about two-thirds to the right.

Our presenter suggested that is what a negative thought looks like. When asked what a positive thought looks like, she simply said that the meter would be in a different place. As she explained that there are 27 different thoughts that the E-meter can read, I couldn't help but think that the mood ring is a bit more stylish and accessible approach to pseudo-science.

When we asked the presenter to tell the volunteer to think of a negative thought but have him actually think of a *positive* thought so that we could see if he could trick the E-meter, Karen interjected by saying that the E-meter won't give an accurate reading in this public setting. She claimed the device works best in a private, closed door setting in a one-to-one interview. One of the atheists asked if there is ever more than one person administering an E-meter session so that other interpretations of the meter reading can be considered. The answer was a firm, "no" and it was stressed that E-meter sessions are strictly private between the person getting their thoughts read and the person judging what the meter says.

When asked about the power supply and manufacturing of the E-Meter, we were told that it has a rechargeable battery and that they're manufactured in their own privately owned manufacturing plant that also manufactures all of their DVDs. These are the same DVDs featured at their video stations in the church building.

After being told that there was no time for more questions we were hurried out of the E-meter presentation and rushed back into the main gallery where we were instructed to walk around and watch more videos at the self-service propaganda video stations promoting different aspects of Scientology. It's interesting to note here that the other half of our tour was still watching the L. Ron Hubbard biography video so there was plenty time for Karen (our group's tour guide) and the presenter to take more questions if they really wanted to.

We were then herded to the chapel, which is open to the public on Sunday mornings at 11:00, where the original OmniTheater was located. This is where I first noticed that the Scientologists were videotaping us. In the corner of the theater was a Scientologist

(identifiable by their matching white, navy, and yellow garb) behind a video camera pointing right at us! I was then notified by another fellow atheist that they were videotaping us during the DVD and E-meter presentations. After we saw two 3-minute videos celebrating Scientology on their impressive movie screen we were guided through the hall toward their cafeteria.

We were offered a nice assortment of cheese, crackers, cookies, vegetables, and choice of coffee, soda, and juice. This was the time that Karen and Nancy specially designated for questions and answers. The two of them took questions while half a dozen Scientologists stood along the perimeter of the wall (along with a video camera) and silently observed.

One of the first questions from our group was about past lives. Nancy took this one and said, without batting an eye, that she believes she has had past lives. When somebody asked if she thought that everybody had past lives, she responded with, “if it feels right to you then you do” and told our group to watch the video stations in the main gallery for more information.

Another question asked by our group was about the Church of Scientology’s stance on GLBT issues and same-sex marriage. Nancy was unfamiliar with the term “GLBT” and had to have it explained to her by the questioner. After she got clarification she said that the topic is covered under the second point of the eight point Scientology cross. For more information about the eight principles represented by

the eight point cross, we were referred to the aforementioned video stations.

Regarding the existence of God, we were told that, “if God is true for you and you believe in Him, then He exists.” We were then directed to—you



guessed it!—the video stations in the main gallery for more information. When I asked Nancy how far her past lives go back and if her lives go as far back as the time when Xenu brought humans to Earth 60 million years ago she said, “I can’t answer that because I’ve never heard of whatever you’re talking about” and took the last question immediately afterward. In total, the Q & A lasted no more than 15 minutes even though several of our hands were eagerly raised to ask more questions.

Our guides told us the tour had concluded and then led us back to the main gallery. They

encouraged us to take our time and visit the video stations at our leisure. Most of us had our fill of propagandist videos and evasiveness for one evening and opted to walk three blocks in the freshly fallen snow to Amsterdam, a Dutch tavern. We were able to exchange our shared thoughts and feelings (free from E-meters!).

If you’re interested in seeing the church for yourself, the main gallery is open to the public

during the week and, as previously mentioned, the chapel is open to the public every Sunday at 11:00 for a morning service.



Above: Our group in the main gallery. Note the bottom half of the Scientology 8-point cross in the background. The book on display is Hubbard’s Dianetics.

Minnesota Atheists Gift Donation Event to Children's Hospital of Minnesota

by Eric Jayne

On Saturday, December tenth, several local atheists gathered with their gift donations at the Green Mill restaurant in St. Paul. Their mission: to donate and wrap presents for patients at Children's Hospital of Minnesota. After enjoying a feast, accompanied by nontraditional Christmas music, we wrapped the many donated gifts. They consisted of gift cards, Legos, toys, books, games, puzzles, and clothes. There were so many donations that one of the attendees volunteered to run to Target for more gift bags.

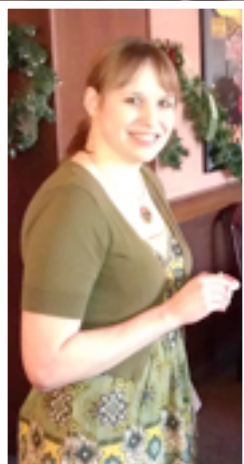
Children's Hospital provided a list, appropriately called *Wish List*, of desired items for patients - infants up to teenagers. The atheist donors referred to this list when purchasing gifts and let others know what they were bringing so they didn't buy too much of one item or over represent a particular age group.

The following week Jack Caravela, Dianne Caravela, Caroline Brunner, and I delivered the gifts to the Children's Hospital in St. Paul. Each gift had a laminated tag attached to it with the Minnesota Atheists logo and the message: "Happy Holidays from your friends at Minnesota Atheists." Andrew Douglass, a representative of the *Child Life* department at Children's Hospital, met the four of us in the main lobby to accept the gifts. He was amazed at the amount of gifts we delivered and offered to take pictures to celebrate the moment.



Combined with our organization's annual donation to The Bridge for Youth program at the Winter Solstice party, the Minnesota Atheists demonstrated that Christmas-time charity isn't attached to believing in a virgin-birthed, half-god zombie. Thank you to everyone who contributed and donated, including those who couldn't make the event but arranged to have me collect their donations. We hope to do this again next year!





FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

I believe there is no God. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark Cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, but it's everything in the world, and everything in the world is plenty for me.

-Penn Jillette

November/December Cable Show Report

In part one of our November show, guest

by Steve Petersen

Ryan Sutter provided an overview of the popular fantasy series *Discworld*, by British author Terry Pratchett. During part two, Ryan offered a continuum of atheist approaches, from the fictional worlds of Pratchett, to the friendly scientist approach of Carl Sagan, to increasingly more polemical angles of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. James Zimmerman hosted.

For our December show, James Zimmerman interviewed Scott Lohman on the secularism of *Star Trek*. Scott provided an historical overview of the erstwhile show, from its origins to its becoming a cultural phenomenon. He then discussed how the series treats the ideas of gods, miracles, and immortality. Scott gave examples of specific episodes that dealt with these themes, including the original series' "Return of the Archons," *The Next Generation's* "Devil's Due," and



"Death Wish," from *Star Trek: Voyager*. Scott also noted the treatment of omnipotence and afterlife as interpreted in the *Star Trek* motion pictures *The Final Frontier* and *Generations*.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program, or if you have a public access television station in your community, please contact Steve Petersen at achair@mnaatheists.org or call 651-484-9277.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, Art Anderson and Esther Sutter (November only).

All episodes can be viewed via iTunes or on the following cable stations, thanks to Grant Hermanson.

Cable Schedule:

Burnsville / Eagan Community Television: Channel 14. Times vary; check their web site, <www.bect.tv>, for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

Bloomington: Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. and 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, Moundsview, New Brighton: Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

St. Cloud: Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor Jack Richter.

Stillwater: Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. 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.



Above, left: In November, host James Zimmerman interviews Ryan Sutter. Above, right: the December cable crew, along with James and guest Scott Lohman.

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

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

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

Name: _____ Phone: _____

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

Things to Do, Places to Go: A Calendar for Atheists

In addition to these regularly scheduled events, there are many more events every month. Please subscribe to Atheist Weekly e-mail on our web site, mnatheists.org, and join our Meetup group.

Sundays, 9:00am-10:00am *Atheists Talk* Radio. AM 950 KTNF in the Twin Cities or stream live at <http://www.am950ktnf.com>. Contact us during the show with questions or comments at (952) 946-6205 or radio@mnatheists.org.

Sundays, 6:00pm-7:00pm Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous. Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South Suite # 55, Minneapolis Meet in the basement. Open to all genders.

2nd Sundays, 1:00pm Minnesota Atheists Little Canada Book Club, Caribou Coffee 3354 Rice St, Little Canada, MN 55126

3rd Sundays, September through May, 1:00pm-4:00pm. Minnesota Atheists Public Meeting. Various libraries. Business meeting, educational program and dinner afterwards at a nearby restaurant.

5th Sundays, 5:00pm (January, April, July, Sept, Dec). Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner. Old Spaghetti Factory, 233 Park Ave., Minneapolis. Get together for drinks and pasta.

1st & 3rd Mondays 6:00pm Freethought Toastmasters. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W, St. Paul 55113. This group meets the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month. George Kane, chair@mnatheists.org.

2nd and 4th Mondays, 5:00pm-7:00pm Freethought Dinner Social. Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington, MN. For more information call Bob or Marilyn Neinker at 612-866-6200.

1st Tuesdays, 11:30am-1:00pm Freethought Lunch. Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Bob or Marilyn Nienkirk at 612-866-6200.

4th Tuesdays, 7:00pm Maple Grove Book Club. Byerly's Meeting Room - 12880 Elm Creek Blvd N Maple Grove, MN 55369

Every other Tuesday, 7:00pm Secular Bible Study. Various locations. See the Meetup page <http://www.meetup.com/Secular-Bible-Study/>.

1st Wednesdays, 7:00pm Minnesota Atheists Burnsville Book Club. Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville MN 55337. Meet in the Party Room.

3rd Wednesdays, 11:30am-2pm Lunch at Dragon House Restaurant. Dragon House Restaurant 3970 Central Avenue Columbia Heights. Private room reserved. Bill Volna 612-781-1420

3rd Wednesdays, 6:30pm Minnesota Atheists Monthly Board Meeting. Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue, St. Paul, 55113. Open to all members. George Kane, chair@mnatheists.org.

1st Thursdays, 6:00pm-9:00pm *Atheists Talk* television show. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277.

To sign up for the Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit atheists.meetup.com/493.



President's Column (continued)

We **debated** "Which is the More Reasonable Worldview: Christianity or Atheism?" in Fargo and "Did Jesus Need to Die for Our Sins?" at the Maple Grove Theater.

We started a book project called **Atheist Voices of Minnesota** that will feature essays by dozens of atheists who have Minnesota connections. The book is being edited by Bill Lehto and will be published by Freethought House later this year.

We became **Local Partners with American Atheists** and our first project together will be a billboard in downtown Minneapolis in February.

Our **Building Fund**, which had been deemphasized this past year in favor of our Radio Fund and our Legal Fund, finished with a total of about \$130,000. In 2012, we expect to step up our efforts to find a building.

Thanks to Chris Matthews, Steve Petersen, and Shirley Moll for tracking **memberships and donations** and sending out renewal reminders. And thanks to all of you who have kept them busy – we greatly need and appreciate your financial support.

George Kane continued to produce our **Atheists Weekly E-mail (A.W.E.)**, listing all the freethought events in Minnesota that we are aware of. Also, a special thanks to George for hosting all our board meetings. He cooks us wonderful food, which alone is enticement enough to run for our board. Nominations are this month!

(If I have overlooked someone or something in this list, please let me know and I'll make a correction next month. -AB)

“[W]hat can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence.”

- Christopher Hitchens, from "Mommie Dearest: The pope beatifies Mother Teresa, a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud." *Slate*, Oct. 20, 2003. slate.com/id/2090083

**Check us out on the radio!
AM950 on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.**