

# The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action <sup>SM</sup>

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## Minnesota Atheists at Twin Cities' GLBT Pride Festival



*Left, above, photo credit: August Berkshire.  
Below, photo credit: Tom Riddering.*

On Sunday, June 28th, Minnesota Atheists marched in the parade during the Twin Cities' GLBT Pride Festival. We also hosted a booth during the festival, where we passed out flyers, buttons, and showed freethinkers of all sexual orientations that they are not alone.

See the President's Column (page 3) for an answer to why we feel it's important to participate in this event.

See page 12 for more photos of the event.



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**Life memberships: 31**

### 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.

## The Minnesota Atheist

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Submit material for the newsletter to 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.



## President's Column by Bjorn Watland

# Why Pride?

The end of June marks the start of our attendance at GLBT Pride Festivals around the state. First, we attend the Twin Cities Pride Festival and Parade, then Rochester, LaCrosse, Duluth, and Mankato. Some atheists are puzzled. Of all the summer festivals, why do we go to so many GLBT Pride Festivals? Our attendance at GLBT Festivals has become a

tradition, largely due to the efforts of founding member August Berkshire. We continue this tradition for several reasons.

First, GLBT Pride events have been very welcoming. If people, no matter their sexual orientation, are gathered together to support an oppressed minority, I think that people are more aware of how to treat everyone fairly. There are also plenty of GLBT atheists out there who are so excited to see our organization supporting their rights, both as an atheist and as a GLBT person.

Second, I think that the GLBT community and the atheist community have similarities. We are both hated by different religious groups. We both seek respect and understanding. We both can have difficulty with family who don't

agree with our identities. We seek social justice and advocate for the rights of a minority. Members of the GLBT community are also strong supporters of the separation of church and state and we can use all of the allies we can in that fight.

Lastly, GLBT Festivals are inexpensive to attend and a great way to put our money where our mouth is with regard to supporting equality for all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation.

I thank you for supporting Minnesota Atheists and our effort to educate the public about atheism.



## American Humanist Association Conference

by Nick Wallin

During the first weekend in June, the new directors of the University of Minnesota student group CASH (Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists) attended the annual conference of the American Humanist Association in Tempe, Arizona.

The weekend was divided into multiple breakout sessions during which participants could choose one of three presentations to watch. Sessions included: a talk by William Lobdell, author of *Losing My Religion*, describing his de-conversion from Born-Again Christian to atheist; a preview of Humanist chaplain Greg Epstein's

upcoming new book *Good Without God*, set to release in October; and lectures ranging from "Atheist Ethics" to "Hope in Humanism". There was also a very interesting presentation on Freethinkers in the Civil Rights Movement by Michael Estes.

There were also a few great speeches by famous freethinkers. Neil deGrasse Tyson, the famous astrophysicist and TV personality, gave an excellent speech on science education and raising inquisitive children. Donald Johanson, the paleo-anthropologist who discovered "Lucy" (*Australopithecus afarensis*) enlightened the audience with a talk about Darwin and human origins. Biologist, prolific blogger, and

Minnesota native PZ Myers gave a speech of his acceptance of the Humanist of the Year award. (Unfortunately, CASH was not able to afford the cost of the banquet to see Myers, our group's faculty advisor, accept this prestigious award.)

The conference was an overwhelmingly positive experience. The board learned a great deal about what Humanists stand for, and how we freethinkers can and must stand up to change this country and this planet for the better. One message that stuck with me was from Greg Epstein: When we talk about being "good without God", our focus shouldn't be on the "without God"; it should be on the "good".

*Film Review*

Jack Caravela

## ***Drag Me to Hell:* A Minnesota Atheist Reel and Meal Experience**

You may be wondering why a group of atheists would choose to see a film titled *Drag Me to Hell*. The short answer is that the movie's co-writer and director, Sam Raimi, treats the concept of eternal damnation about as seriously as we do. Mr. Raimi, recently at the helm of the three blockbuster *Spider-Man* films, decided to return to his roots with his latest offering. Fans of the *Evil Dead* series which launched the filmmaker's career will welcome this throwback horror flick, whose first wink to the genre comes before the movie even begins, with the retro Universal Pictures tag (Raimi opted for the rotating Earth logo last seen in the early sixties rather than the modern version).

Our group of about fifteen Minnesota Atheists knew what to expect: lots of hidden perils jumping onto the screen, quite a few disgusting scenes of projectile vomiting of everything from worms to embalming fluid, and plenty of tongue-in-cheek humor. I'm sure I wouldn't have enjoyed the film nearly as much if I had seen it alone. While we were all too polite to talk during the film, my neighbors' nervous starts, averted eyes, and belly laughs made watching *Drag Me to Hell* into a fun shared experience.

The plot is simple: a young loan officer named Christine Brown, played by a sympathetic and plucky Allison Lohman, declines to extend a foreclosure notice on an elderly woman, who then casts a curse that

will send a demon to drag our protagonist down to the depths of hell in three days' time. To make the moral and ethical issues more interesting, Christine is being considered for a promotion at work, and her male boss has told her that he needs to see evidence that she can make "the tough decisions" in order to consider her. Meanwhile, her competition for the Assistant Manager job is whee-

### ***Drag Me to Hell*, 99 minutes, released May 29, 2009 Directed by Sam Raimi**

dling his way past the more experienced Brown with underhanded tactics. On top of that, the elderly woman Christine turns down is anything but endearing, as we learn she has had two extensions already, has no concept of personal hygiene, and is prone to violent outbursts against anyone who crosses her.

The story proceeds in neat chronological order, as the demonic attacks become progressively worse and Christine enlists the aid of a fortune teller to find a way to lift the curse. During her ordeal, Christine tries to maintain her relationship with her boyfriend Clay, a young psychology professor who is much more likely to accept that Christine is having a mental breakdown than is a victim of a supernatural curse. Throw in a long-planned dinner party with Clay's ultra-snobby mother while Christine is fighting off invisible monsters, and you have

some idea of what our poor heroine faces during the course of the story.

In true old-fashioned horror style, there are multiple false endings (I won't say how many), and a final twist that caught most of us at least partly by surprise. At no point does *Drag Me to Hell* turn into a slasher film (it's rated PG-13); Raimi invests his characters with enough humanity to make us care about them, and he doesn't dispose of them lightly.

For a movie that those with more refined tastes might dismiss out of hand (although such diverse reviewers as *the Onion* and *the Wall Street Journal* were extremely complimentary), *Drag Me to Hell* provided some interesting conversation topics afterwards. My favorite discussion was about the relative merits of the characters, and whether they deserved their fates. This just goes to show that when a bunch of atheists gather for pizza after a movie, stimulating conversation is bound to happen.

It would be a mistake to claim intellectual aspirations for a movie titled *Drag Me to Hell*, and I'm sure its director would agree. There are some wildly unlikely scenarios and gratuitous attempts to up the disgust-o-meter readings. Still, I left with the feeling that Raimi did just what he set out to do: make a horror movie to satisfy fans of his early work.



# Highway Clean-up

On Sunday, May 30th, Minnesota Atheists took to the streets, literally, as they participated in a highway clean-up in Rice, Minnesota. This was the largest turn-out for a highway clean-up in over five years. Members of Central Minnesota Friends Free of Theism came to help us out, too. If you'd like to participate in a future highway clean-up, mark your calendar for Sunday, September 27th. Contact Steve Peterson for more information.



*Standing (left to right): Steve Petersen, Tom Stavros, Steve Rehn, Nia [last name unknown], Deb Doucette, Art Anderson, Jack Caravela, Shirley Moll, Brian Knoblock, Rachel Wilson, Cathy Prody, August Berkshire, Stephanie Lommel, DJ Lommel.  
Kneeling (left to right): Rob Taylor, Richard Trombley, Clint Buhs.  
Photo credit: Steve Petersen.*

## Freethought Cryptogram

Sgb mtfa fg bopfc oxoznfcjes fcpf afpeba tm

fg cjr, qosjeejes ijfc zopage, jefoddjsoewo

peb fco wzjfwpd rjeb.

-Rjwcod Geuzpn

## Russell's Celestial Iced Teapot Picnic

Saturday, July 25th, 11:00 a.m.  
Como Park Midway  
\$7/person

Here is your chance to hang out with your favorite freethinkers! MN Atheists will be hosting a picnic, with grilled food (hot dogs and hamburgers, veggie equivalents). We'll also have varieties of iced tea. Food will be served from 11 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. We will then have groups who will go for nature walks, geocaching, mini golf, and a visit to the zoo.

Like it or not, Christian music is undoubtedly popular. Among my daughter's peer group "Jesus Take the Wheel," by Carrie Underwood, is a very popular song that her friends sing when they get together. During my own adolescence I was an unwilling participant in an evangelical youth group where many discussions

took place regarding Christian artists like Amy Grant, Petra, and DC Talk. Given the seemingly timeless popularity and ubiquity of pious music I felt the need to come up with a list of my favorite pro-atheist songs, many of which are delightfully sacrilegious. Some of these songs promote rational freethought, some satirize

religious beliefs, and others celebrate science. In creating this list I factored musical composition and anti-ecclesiastical lyrics. Although this list consists of only 30 songs I will pretend to be Casey Kasem and introduce them in the *American Top 40* show fashion starting with number 30.

## Atheist Top 30

by Eric Jayne

- ◆30. "Heaven and Hell" The Who  
*This lyrically simple song will have you wondering if Keith Moon isn't a god*
- ◆29. "The Element Song" Tom Leher  
*Not exactly anti-ecclesiastical but a brilliant song about the Periodic Table*
- ◆28. "Do You Realize??" Flaming Lips  
*Humanistic lyrics that give awe to the cosmos*
- ◆27. "Atheist Peace" Bad Religion  
*Sometimes loud punk/metal is good for the soul*
- ◆26. "The Galaxy Song" Monty Python  
*Have a problem? Listening to this will make it (and you) seem insignificant*
- ◆25. "God's Song" Randy Newman  
*Newman unabashedly tells it how it is*
- ◆24. "The Origin of Species" MC Frontalot  
*Funny rap song satirizing creationist arguments*
- ◆23. "What if No One's Watching" Ani DiFranco  
*Ani encourages us to not be afraid to ask questions and be skeptical*
- ◆22. "Religion and Politics" Scott Beach  
*Hilarious spoken-word piece that is timeless*
- ◆21. "Hellalujah" Insane Clown Posse  
*Don't listen to this hip-hop song around young children*
- ◆20. "East Jesus Nowhere" Green Day  
*Anti-church song from Green Day's latest album*
- ◆19. "Every Sperm in Sacred" Monty Python  
*Everyone should be familiar with this anti-Catholic comic gem!*
- ◆18. "God" John Lennon  
*John encourages us to believe in ourselves in lieu of deities and political idols*
- ◆17. "Jesus Loves Me (But He Can't Stand You)" Austin Lounge Lizards  
*Tongue-in-cheek country song depicting "red state" philosophy*
- ◆16. "Superstar" Carl Anderson  
*Somewhat satirical, "Jesus Christ Superstar" rocks and celebrates skepticism*
- ◆15. "Fuck the Creationists" MC Hawking  
*Self explanatory song title performed by a Stephen Hawking impersonator*
- ◆14. "Shallow Be Thy Name" Red Hot Chili Peppers  
*Alternative rock anti-God song from the band's classic*
- ◆13. "God Shuffled His Feet" Crash Test Dummies  
*You'll feel like Larry Craig when you're toe-tapping to this clever melody*
- ◆12. "It Ain't Necessarily So" Cher  
*Song about biblical baloney from George Gershwin opera, "Porgy & Bess"*
- ◆11. "The Only Way (Hymn)" Emerson Lake & Palmer  
*A Hymn for humanists written by one of the best progressive rock bands*
- ◆10. "Shuffling & Shmiling" Dead Prez  
*African hip-hop dance song critical of Christian/western colonization*
- ◆09. "Four Winds" Bright Eyes  
*Modern folk-rock song lambasting the Torah, Koran and Bible*
- ◆08. "The Idiots are Taking Over" NOFX  
*Punk rock song echoing the angst we freethinking atheists feel*
- ◆07. "Only the Good Die Young" Billy Joel  
*Because atheists would "rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints"*
- ◆06. "Jesus Doesn't Want Me for a Sunbeam" The Vaselines  
*An old children's Christian song with an impious spin (later covered by Nirvana)*
- ◆05. "A Rational Response" Greydon Square  
*YO! Square's dropping fresh beats & cogent lyrics for straight up freethought rap*
- ◆04. "Arc of Time (Time Code)" Bright Eyes  
*Techno dance song with great sarcastic lines about Jesus, heaven and angels*
- ◆03. "The Meek Shall Inherit Nothing"/ "Dumb All Over"/ "Heavenly Bank Account" Frank Zappa  
*Three fantastic anti-religious songs that MUST be listened to in succession*
- ◆02. "Imagine" John Lennon  
*Just about everyone knows this beautiful humanistic anthem*
- ◆01. "Dear God" XTC  
*This has it all: catchy melody, powerful singing and unapologetic lyrics*



## Updated Ten Commandments



Member Matthew Richardson spotted this slightly altered version of the legendary ‘Law of Moses’ on a vehicle in the Twin Cities. In violation of Revelation 22:18 and 19, the owner of this vehicle took it upon himself to modify and display his version of the commandments.

A few of the more notable points on this tweaking of an old favorite:

-Though the list is titled “Jesus’s 10 Commands,” the reference for this list is given as Exodus 21—a chapter from the Old Testament.

-The hood blocks a full view of the numeration, but there appears to be 11, not 10 commandments here.

-Jesus must have invented the dollar sign.

-Apparently, honoring your parents will *approximately equal plus live minus longer*.



*George Kane*

## The Tiller Murder

On a Sunday morning at the end of May, Dr. George Tiller, who was well known as one of the few doctors in the country who performed late-term abortions, walked into Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita Kansas, which he had attended regularly for years. Inside the church, long-time anti-abortion activist Scott Roeder shot and killed him.

Many online abortion opponents could not conceal their delight with Roeder's "street justice." Dr. Tiller had also for years been the object of incendiary attacks from Bill O'Reilly of *Fox News*, which many blame for inciting Roeder to the murder. Abortion opponents rankle, of course, at the notion that they bear any responsibility for the criminal violence of extremists like Roeder. They point out that the mainline anti-abortion organizations denounced Dr. Tiller's murder, and that few of them would ever engage in violence. Nevertheless, the argument on which religious opposition to abortion is always based, that abortion is murder, is inherently inflammatory. If they insist that Dr. Tiller committed hundreds of murders, they can hardly denounce his own murder as inappropriate or disproportionate punishment. Their arguments justify violating the law by appealing to a higher law.

An atheist's position on abortion does not follow necessarily from disbelief in supernatural gods. Nevertheless, when a committee of the Board drafted our public policy posi-

tions last year, we decided that we had to include protection of reproductive choice among them. Although it might be possible to come up with purely secular arguments for opposing the legal right to abort one's pregnancy, in fact the political movement to outlaw abortion consists of religious groups making religious arguments. In order to fight for the strict separation of church and state, we are forced to refute these arguments.

To assert that abortion is murder, abortion opponents have to identify the conceptus as a person. In the magical mind-set of religion, this is justified by asserting that God breathes a soul into a person at the moment of conception. To a nonreligious person it is counterintuitive, even comical, to call a fertilized egg a 'person,' like calling an acorn a tree. They will usually suggest some other medical event as the magic moment when 'personhood' arises. Court cases like *Roe v. Wade* and legislation usually point to calendar dates, while the more medically-minded will identify personhood with responsiveness to pain, brain-wave activity, or viability. Once it is admitted that abortion after a certain point is murder, the rhetorical task becomes much easier for the abortion opponent: he just needs to keep moving that date earlier. If abortion is murder after 24 weeks, why not 23? Why not 20? Why not one? If independent viability is the issue, advances in medical care are continuously bringing that date in. If *in vitro* gestation should ever become possible, would we have to move 'personhood' back to conception?

But this entire 'magic moment' form of argument is wrong because it mistakes 'personhood' for a medi-

cal state. Rather, it is actually a *valuation* – it is when we say to the offspring "we recognize you as one of us, and confer to you the same rights we recognize for each other." So the real question is not "how do we identify when this medical moment of personhood appears," but instead "how do we justify assigning personhood to this point in development rather than any other?"

The answer that you reach will depend on what you consider the source of moral value. As an atheist, of course I reject "divine declaration," but I also reject as the basis for law moral judgments that are subjective or arbitrary. I reject as invalid, therefore, the argument made by showing supposed pictures of fetuses early in development and saying "Look, you can't murder this! It's too cute!"

I am a utilitarian, so I believe that law must be justified by promoting the greatest good for the greatest number. In utilitarian analysis we always have to take into account the effect of an action upon everyone affected by it. The problem becomes, when do we include the welfare of the fetus in this calculation? Once we do, then abortion is murder, and we cannot counterbalance an individual's loss of life with any small benefit no matter how widely distributed. But that would be circular reasoning – assigning 'personhood' in order to determine when we should assign personhood. A consequential analysis is only possible if we decide when an abortion should be permissible by examining the consequences to society as a whole.

I think that the highest quality

(continued on page 9)



## Hostility to Reason

by Eric Jayne

*(editor's note:*

*This article first appeared in the June 17th edition of the Star Tribune. It is a response to Katherine Kersten's article "Hostility to Religion Bodes Ill for Society," which appeared in the June 7th Star Tribune. The premise of Kersten's article was that religion, Christianity in particular, is necessary to keep scientific progress in check. She argued that without Judeo-Christian beliefs, society would be morally corrupt and incapable of compassion. )*

I am convinced that there is absolutely no value to the muddled ramblings of Katherine Kersten. In her recent column, "Hostility to religion bodes ill for society," she shamelessly blames secular freethought and atheism for infanticide, the Holocaust and general draconian attitudes toward social welfare while



crediting Christianity for human compassion. In making her assertion she conveniently ignores the numerous Bible passages where the bloodthirsty Judeo-Christian God condones war and ethnic cleansing. In Numbers 31: 17-18, for example, God actively calls for the killing of male children and the raping of female children. That's one of the many Bible passages Kersten is forced to gloss over when she touts that Judeo-Christianity teaches us "universal standards of right and wrong." Also, since she had brought up Hitler, I would like to point out to

Kersten, and her atheist-bashing ilk, that the SS belt buckles Nazi soldiers wore during the Holocaust bared the motto: "Gott mit uns" (God is with us).

Kersten ends her article by suggesting that Social Darwinism is a legitimate science that promotes the notion of the survival of the fittest. Therefore, Kersten argues, scientific progress needs to be constrained by religion so that the poor and vulnerable citizens of society are protected. Her position might have merit if Social Darwinism were an actual science, but it's nothing more than pseudo-science just like astrology and intelligent design. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is a biological science that was never intended to be co-opted by the social sciences. In fact, Charles Darwin wrote that human beings could not "check our sympathy even at the urging of hard reason without deterioration in the noblest part of our nature." If Kersten simply understood legitimate science she probably wouldn't be so afraid of it, and she might even tone down her spiteful and erroneous anti-secular rhetoric.

### Minnesota Atheists Pub Night at Sweeney's Saloon

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, more than 50 atheists crammed themselves into a private room at Sweeney's Saloon to socialize, have drinks, and eat some delicious food. Now we all know that we don't have to wait until the State Fair to eat some deep-fried dill pickles. The staff at Sweeney's were absolutely wonderful to everyone, and our waitress was really on top of all of those orders. As the evening was wrapping up, one of the bartenders asked for Minnesota Atheists contact information, gave Crystal and Vic a huge hug, and said "Now I know I'm not alone." All in all, a night well spent among friends old and new.



*(George Kane, continued from page 8)*

of life in America will be reached if the abortion decision is left to the woman, in consultation with her mate, her doctor, and her support group. Of course I could be wrong, but until I am shown that I am, I can only conclude that elective abortion should be legal.

To see the Minnesota Atheists' public policy on reproductive rights, go to <http://mnatheists.org/content/view/133/71/>

## Beware the Little People!

by Vic Tanner



Is “Atheist” a strong enough word for skeptical thinkers? It really only denotes a non-belief in gods and, as we all know, there are many more wacky things out there. What's stranger than believing that an invisible friend is watching over your every move? Or than believing that the world is only 6,000 years old despite the evidence to the contrary? How about believing that a race of tiny elves that cannot be seen by human eyes are inhabiting the world all around us?

In Iceland, there is a deeply held belief in the existence of the Huldafólk, or Hidden People. Even though Iceland is a largely secular country with low church attendance, many inhabitants of the frozen country believe that the Huldafólk are real. A 2006 survey concluded that

16.5% of Icelanders think their existence is “likely”.

Of course, there are worse beliefs to have. After all, belief in a race of diminutive trouble-makers usually doesn't fill people with a desire to overthrow the government or deny others their civil rights. It may involve building little houses in your yard, true, but they usually won't ask the government to help fund them. Just the tiny little Home Depot down the street.

The origins of the Huldafólk stories probably stem from a long extinct pre-Christian mythology. However, in practice, belief in Huldafólk and Christianity often mix. One version of the Hidden People story even ties their birth narrative into the Biblical story of Genesis. In it, Eve, in one of her well known acts of disobedience, hides some of her children from God, who (in a reactionary manner typical of his Old Testament behavior) condemns them all to a life of never being seen by the rest of the

world. Of course, the children weren't the ones asking to be hidden, but God never has spent too much time in the “judging” part of his job. In a further step of pagan-Christian syncretism, some Icelanders have been known to build little churches to try to convert the Huldafólk to Christianity, perhaps in an effort to get them to burn down little abortion clinics.

In the last decade, there has been a noticeable decrease in religious belief, but unfortunately there also appears to be a rise in revivals of old religious customs. And, of course, people still love Bigfoot. Do these beliefs tap into some kind of human need for magic and wonder in the world? Are humans programmed to think in some sort of mythological imagery? Perhaps. But, if you are going to believe in some sort of supernatural belief, just make sure it's a harmless one. After all, just because the story exists, doesn't mean we have to believe it.

## Financial Report—June 2009

### Building Fund: \$838.00

Dennis Griebenow	\$25.00
Guy Harper	\$25.00
Brian Knoblock	\$253.00
Christopher Matthews	\$100.00
Vanita Mishra	\$100.00
Daniel Norte	\$36.00
Nancy Ruhland	\$20.00
Richard Trombley	\$35.00
James Whitney	\$25.00
Rachel Wilson	\$100.00
Vern Young	\$100.00
Anonymous	\$20.00

### Radio Fund: \$90.00

Erik Englebretson	\$50.00
Art Scearcy	\$40.00



### Visibility (General) Fund: \$1217.28

Guy Harper	\$25.00
Ken Holmbeck	\$25.00
Owen Konecnik	\$21.00
Paul Larson	\$145.00
Shirley Moll & Steve Petersen	\$20.00
Richard Trombley	\$30.00
Anonymous	\$951.28



by Bjorn Watland

First, a big "Thank You!" to everyone who helped out with the Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner Fundraiser on May 31st. I know I had a great time meeting so many new people.



## The Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner Fundraiser



Second, if you liked hanging out with like minded people, we'll be doing that again at Columbia Park in NE Minneapolis on July 19th at noon for the Freethought Picnic sponsored by Humanists of Minnesota. There will be a third picnic on August 16th, sponsored by us (also at noon at Columbia park). If you had no idea we have such a diverse community of atheists, now is your chance to meet the university students who are doing their part to build a community at the U for atheists.

Finally, with your help, we raised over \$1,100 at the spaghetti dinner fundraiser and had over 130 people drop in. You may think to yourself, what in the world would an atheist group do with that money? Well, we do have a three-part mission... (See page 2 for that.)



Photo credit: Brooks Peterson.



**More Photos from the Twin Cities' GLBT Pride Festival**

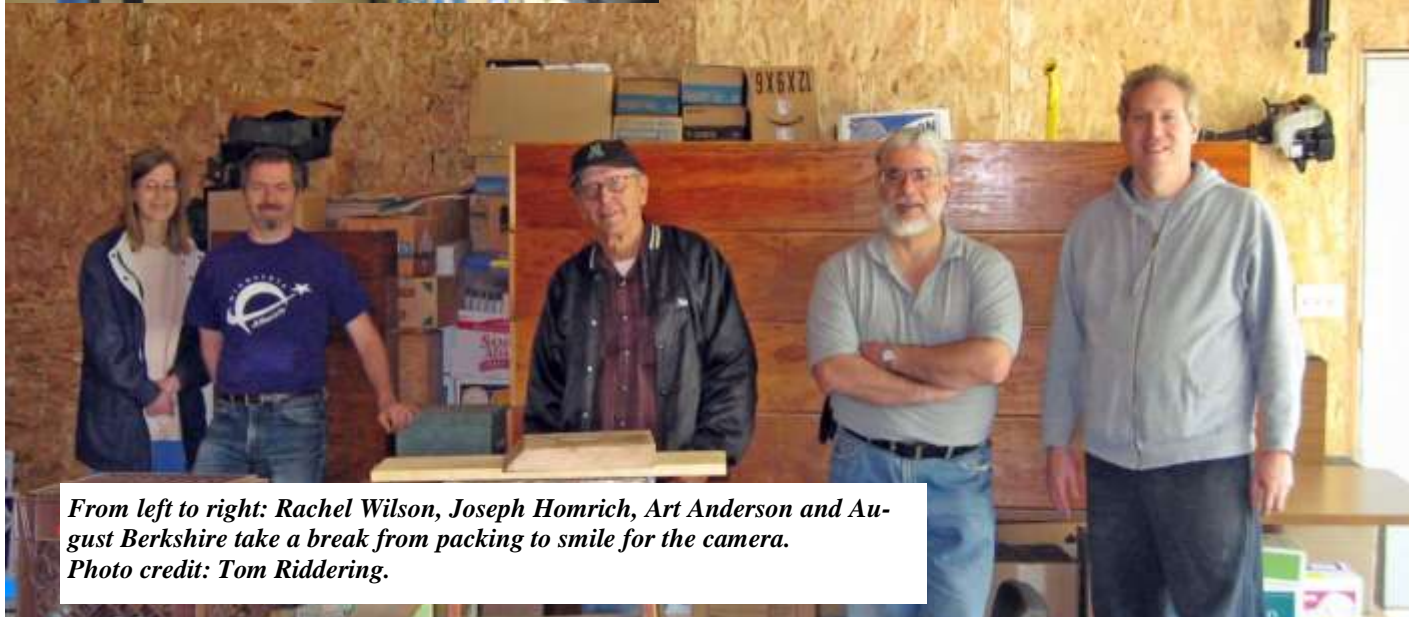


*Photo credit: August Berkshire.*

# Library Relocating



*Left: Packing the library, from left: Art Anderson, Steve Petersen, Jim Barri, Rachel Wilson, Shirely Moll, Tom Riddering. Photo credit: August Berkshire.*



*From left to right: Rachel Wilson, Joseph Homrich, Art Anderson and August Berkshire take a break from packing to smile for the camera. Photo credit: Tom Riddering.*

The Minnesota Atheists' library was evicted last month when Tom and Jean Riddering (who played host to the library at his home) announced they was moving. The 1,300 volume Merrill R. Holste library was packaged and placed into the garage on May sixteenth, then moved into a Minneapolis storage facility on May twenty-second.

The Merrill R. Holste library is one of the largest atheist/humanist/freethought libraries in the Upper Midwest. It was collected by Merrill Holste and donated to Minnesota Atheists by his widow, Esther Holste. His son Peter is a current member of MNA. Read about Merrill's history at. <http://mnatheists.org/page2/files/oct03.pdf>



*Bob Schmitz, Jack Caravela, Jim Barri and August Berkshire try to fit the library into a moving van. Photo credit: Tom Riddering.*



*Photo credit:: Richard Trombley*



# Fossil Hunting at Lilydale Park

by Crystal Dervetski

On June 20<sup>th</sup>, Minnesota Atheists met at Lilydale Park in St. Paul for a fossil hunting adventure. Everyone met outside in the parking lot, grabbed an information packet about the park and the fossils, and then made the hike up to the three fossil beds located in the park. Everyone found something, and had a great time sharing their finds with one another. Families were out in full force, and even some of the really tiny ones made the trek up the hill. After the find, everyone came back down and drank some much needed water and munched on granola bars. The adults were entertained by a miming of a light saber battle and a spot-on impersonation of C-3PO, courtesy of a couple of the youngest fossil adventurers. The weather was

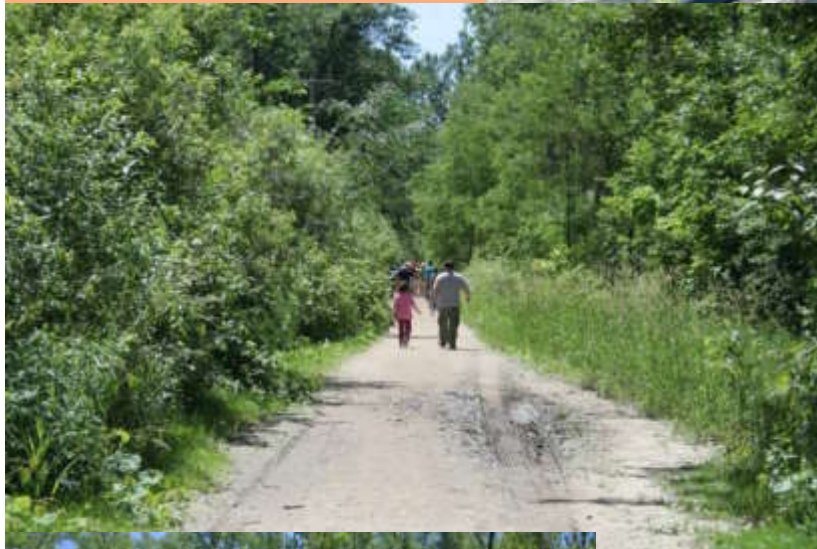
beautiful, the fossils were abundant, and the socialization couldn't be beat!

Mark your calendars for an easy fossil hunt at the Intergroup Secular Labor Day Picnic on Saturday, Sep-

tember 6<sup>th</sup> in Northfield, MN. Crystal and Vic will take everyone out to a very easy site after the picnic that is right next to a road; no hiking involved!



*Photo credit: Richard Trombley*



*Left, above, and right, photo credit: Jennifer Zimmerman*

## Cable Report



*Grant Steves, left, and Chester O'Gorman attempt to comprehend James Zimmerman's fascination with finger wagging.*

*Photo credit: Steve Petersen.*

### by Steve Petersen

For our June taping James Zimmerman interviewed Grant Steves and Chester O'Gorman who jointly preside over the Secular Bible Study. The first program, titled "The Secular Bible Study" was a discussion of two people who clearly enjoy each other's intellectual capacity to have a civil discourse of their different religious views. This was a friendly, freewheeling in depth-discussion. The second program was "The Anthropology of Religion." This was a serious discussion about religion. The two books referenced were: *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* by Jack David Eller and *Religion Explained* by Pascal Boyer.

**Cable Crew:** Art Anderson, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg and Grant Hermanson.

**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.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.





*Film Review*

James Zimmerman

**Film Review: *Up***

If we take the word Cinema at its root (from the Greek *kinesis*, meaning “movement”), then pure cinema has been dying since the advent of synchronized sound. Too many movies are simply footage of people talking, or of a camera sitting idly by recording whatever happens to be going on in front of it. In its purest form, perhaps film continued to exist only in the creations of those (such as Chaplin and Hitchcock) who first mastered their trade and came to prominence during film’s silent era.

But Pixar does an admirable job of bringing audiences a delicacy for the eyes. In a style first explored in *Toy Story*, expanded upon in *Monsters, Inc.*, and brought to perfection in *WALL-E*, the animation studio succeeds in telling a tale via visuals with its latest offering: *Up*.

In the first fifteen minutes of *Up*, we are treated to a narrative – told almost entirely without words – of love found, promises made, and decades lived in the lives of Carl and Ellie. It’s a poignant story, and the promises made and dreams lost in the picture-perfect montage bring equal parts laughter and tears.

Even once the film catches up to the present-day, and the actual dialogue begins, we are still offered visuals in favor of explanatory discourses. I found myself sitting in the theater thinking, “Ah yes, he’s remembering the promise to his wife,” and “Oh, he’s trying to decide between carrying out his original plan

and the possibility of a new adventure” – and such viewer-dependent interpretations are far richer than being verbally told what is happening (or what is about to happen).

It probably goes without saying that a film titled *Up* is bound to cast its cameras heavenward from time to time. The hero and his wife marry in a religious ceremony (Catholic, by the looks of it), but this brief scene tells us more about the humorous mismatch of the newly-related families than it does about their theist leanings. Later, Carl is shown

***Up*, 96 minutes,  
released May 29, 2009  
Directed by Peter Docter**

wistfully speaking to a deceased relative, but it’s unclear if he really believes he is addressing an angel, or if this is just a coping mechanism; a means for Carl to sort out his problems when he no longer has a live companion by his side. Russell, a juvenile character with membership in the Wilderness Explorers’ Club, is confused by Carl’s one-sided conversations. His club must not be sponsored by a religion.

If there is a downside to *Up*, however, it’s in details. Pixar’s normally tight – if not flawless – screenplays are rightfully lauded for their exceptional quality. Indeed, Pixar has made a name for itself by acknowledging that its audience is not merely a roomful of wide-eyed children gobbling up whatever is offered. For the first time in Pixar’s feature-length film-making career, however, there ap-

pear plot holes. Though, or course, we are willing to engage in a suspension of disbelief in a *quid pro quo* for an entertaining time at the theater, the film’s verisimilitude is stretched a tad too thin in places here. Our hero, Carl, alights upon one end of a crescent-shaped plateau and quickly makes it his goal to walk to the other end. In several shots, we see the crescent as a jagged, barren landscape. During the trek, however, Carl must trudge through forests, high cliffs, caves, and other features. Worse, Carl agrees to a mission of mercy, in which it appears he completely backtracks his days-long journey in a matter of hours. Later, we meet up with Carl’s childhood hero – a plot point that left me scratching my head: the chronology is completely baffling. For a film so rooted in reality at the outset, the bizarre, fantastical exposition of the final two-thirds of the film doesn’t fit quite right. A scene of Kevin (a giant bird) fawning over Russell is particularly cringe-inducing. I kept wondering if *Up* would

conclude with a dazed Carl waking from a dream.

But a flawed Pixar film is still, after all, a Pixar film. And that equates to a memorable experience at the theater and, I’m predicting, the Best Animated Film of the year.

Depiction, where explicit or implicit, of deities (0 = very

theistic; 5 = very atheistic): 4/5  
Depiction, whether explicit or implicit, of religion: 4/5  
View of valuing this life as opposed to an afterlife: 5/5  
Positive view of self-reliance: 5/5  
Championship of reason: 4/5  
Bottom line: 4/5

**Cryptogram answer**

God puts to death everything that stands up to him, beginning with reason, intelligence and the critical mind.

-Michel Onfray

*The Sunny Skeptic*

Crystal Dervetski

## How Did You Hear About Us and Why Did You Join?

When you join up with Minnesota Atheists, you are asked two questions: “How did you hear about Minnesota Atheists?” and “Why did you join Minnesota Atheists?”

I know, you're an atheist, you're a skeptic, and you're cynical about these questions. It's totally understandable if it seems like they are bordering on an intrusion of your privacy. You do not, of course, have to answer these questions at all. Please keep in mind, though, there are a few really basic reasons why we'd like to know these two things about you.

**HOW?**

Knowing *how* you found out about us helps us increase our viability. If we weren't sure where the majority of our members were hearing about Minnesota Atheists, it would be like a shot in the dark as to what we should be doing to raise awareness of atheism in our area. Because people answer the 'how', we know if what we're doing is even *reaching* people. Effective outreach will help us grow and attain more members.

You don't have to be specific, but something even as general as 'internet search', 'friend', 'event', or 'found a Minnesota Atheist pen' really helps us figure some information out. 'Internet search' means we have some kind of web presence that people can access as needed. 'Friend' means people are talking about us and recommending us, which is great! 'Event' means you went to a social or educational event presented by us and you liked it. You really, really liked it. 'Found a pen?' Order more pens! I'm sure you can see that even these general statements assist us in figuring out where we are most needed, and exactly what is working in spreading the word.

**WHY?**

*Why* did you join? No, seriously. Do you want to be involved in activities, do you want educational events, do you want to contribute financially, do you want to volunteer? What do *you* want out of Minnesota Atheists? Again, there's nothing we can do for you or make available to you if we don't know what it is that you want.

When I originally joined, I did so only to be 'counted' as an atheist in Minnesota. I had absolutely no intention of being involved in any way, and I wasn't at first; being

counted was good enough.

I know that my “why” answer would be quite different today. Minnesota Atheists has provided a community where I feel welcomed and productive. Minnesota Atheists events give me social activities where I can always be myself. As corny as it sounds, in some ways Minnesota Atheists has made me feel better about my life. Now I know that I would still be able to live a full, enriched life no matter what happens to me. I know I would have a network of support with Minnesota Atheists.

One of the best things about being an atheist is that it's not like we're going to twist your arm. You don't have to tell us anything you don't want. Go ahead and be a secretive hermit, you're still an atheist and we really respect you for that. I just want all to be aware that the more we know, the better we can serve our membership and grow as an organization.

So, what do you want from Minnesota Atheists? Email the board of directors at [board@mnatheists.org](mailto:board@mnatheists.org) or you can also email any of us individually. We are all here for the members of MNA, and will do anything we can to support our group and its membership.

## Electronic MNA Newsletters

**Increase the effectiveness of your Minnesota Atheists membership dues—switch from a paper to an electronic newsletter.**

**It costs us about \$22.00 per year per person to print and mail a paper version of the newsletter. It costs us *nothing* to email an electronic version. Also, you'll receive the electronic version sooner and it will be in full color.**

**If you're interested in making the switch from the paper to the electronic version of our newsletter, please contact [editor@mnatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnatheists.org).**

# Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org  
P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406

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- \$35 – Individual Membership
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- \$600 – Life Membership
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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

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

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting**. (No meeting in July or August.) See MNAtheists.org for details.

Every Sunday, 10:30 - noon, **Brunch Social**. Q.Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue South, Edina. Bring your AWE for a \$2 discount.

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$6.66. (May, August, and November 2009).

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.)

Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Dinner Social**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W. 66<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66<sup>th</sup> St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

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

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. New China Buffet, 105 85th Ave. NW, Coon Rapids. Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, nup@Minn.net. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** See

cashumn.org for program and location.

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists Talk" TV taping**. MTN, Studio A, 125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn64@hotmail.com or (507) 259-4237.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. Grant Steves, 651-774-1992

**To sign up for Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, go to <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.**

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**“Only God, supposedly, and Wrigley Field,  
actually, are perfect.”**

**— *George Will***

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At  
Mnatheist.org.”**