

Grass Roots News

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION CHAPTER ASSEMBLY

Dedicated to Promoting Chapter Development Volume XIX, Issue 1, March/April 2006

PLANNING & HUMANISM TRANSFORMED IN FLORIDA

Robert D. Finch
Chair, Chapter Assembly

I recently read what I consider to be a most informative as well as exciting Ph.D. dissertation, *From Arm-Chair Philosophy to Social Agency: A Case Study in Participatory Action Research with the Humanists of Florida*, by Gin Kohl Lieberman. Gin's area of study is communication, a subject in which I have little knowledge, due to my background in physics and engineering. So, half my fascination was in getting introduced to some of the major writings in communication theory. However, the other half of my excitement was from reading Gin's very articulate story of the change that has occurred in Florida Humanism over the last seven-and-a-half years.

In Humanist circles in Texas we are inclined to think that the large number of AHA chapters in Florida must be due to the retirement of wealthy liberals from the East Coast for golden years in the sun. But Gin points out that another factor could have been the influence of Dr. Edwin H. Wilson, a signer of the original Humanist Manifesto, first editor of the Humanist magazine, first Executive Director (from 1949 to 1970), and later a board member and President of the AHA. After retiring as Executive Director, Ed moved to Cocoa Beach, Florida, where he lived until 1990 and was instrumental in establishing several AHA chapters and influencing a whole generation of Humanist leaders in the state, including Sol and Harri Klotz, Sid Goetz, Smitty (and Jim) Hooper, and Edmund Cannon. Ed finally moved to Salt Lake City where he started the Humanists of Utah, before he died at the grand age of 96. These people all mentioned Ed as inspirational in their involvement with the Humanists of Florida (HoF). Gin sees the elements of charisma in Dr Wilson's leadership. He was described as a wonderful talker, with great ability to speak with everybody and anybody, with a gift of being open, welcoming, and kind. It was said that he had a charismatic personality because of the quality of his life experience and his facility of expression. His influence lived on in Florida after he moved to Utah.

continued on page 7

Chapter Leader Profile

Scott W. Walton, president
Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago

How were you first exposed to Humanism?

I was first exposed to Humanism in a comparative religion course at college in the late 1960s. Ten years later, I became a member of the Unitarian Church of Evanston, a substantial suburban Chicago congregation located just north of the city. At the time I joined, many, perhaps the majority of its members, considered themselves to be humanists. However, in recent years, the church was getting caught up in a process of returning to its Christian roots, a trend which my wife and I could not support. After several years, we felt the need to leave.

How were you first exposed to the group?

In late 2000, my wife and I discovered the Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago, a philosophical community of self-identified humanists. An article about the organization appeared on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune's* Metro section, mentioning that they were a non-theist religious community. This whet our curiosity about the group and its underlying philosophy. Subsequent visits to the Society and its regular Sunday Meeting proved positive. The programs were interesting and the people we met were caring, friendly, and rational; in sum, it seemed a good fit. Within six months we became pledging members. Incidentally, people we met as we walked through the door the first time are still good friends five years later. The *Humanist* magazine editor, Fred Edwards, has been a featured speaker at the Sunday program a couple of times. In 2003, I attended the American Ethical Union's (our national federation) General Assembly in Philadelphia as a delegate for our local group. Fred spoke at that gathering as well.

What keeps you involved with the group?

One of the first people we met was Susan Burck who later served as president of the Society. She involved us in several activities from the start. Since my wife and I are 'doers,' getting us involved was easy and natural.

continued on page 3

Volume XIX Issue 1 1

OFFICERS OF THE CHAPTER ASSEMBLY

Chair	Robert Finch 211 Lombardy Sugar Land, TX 77478 281/491-1608, rdfinch@flash.net
Vice Chair	Jack Sechrest 452 Burr Oak Drive Oswego, IL 60543
Secretary	Hilton Brown 2144 Creeden Way Mt. View, CA 94040-2215
Treasurer	Bernie Schatz 4418 Josephine Lane Robbinsdale, MN 55422 be6rn6ie6@juno.com
Members at Large	Dick Radtke 3 Jackson Road Burlington, MA 01803 781/784-1538 Beverly Church 24 Adkinson Court Sacramento, CA 95835
Executive Director	Roy Speckhardt

Fund for Chapter Expansion Committee of Trustees and Grants (COTG)

Paula Rochelle, Chair; Arthur Jackson, Ron Renard, Kathy Schmitt, Flo Wineriter, Bob Finch and Janet Woodward.

Grass Roots News Staff

Editorial Director	Fred Edwards
Associate Editor	Jamie Padula
Production Manager	Sonia Nikolic

American Humanist Association Field Staff

Field Assistant	Jamie Padula
-----------------	--------------

AHA Chapterzone

www.AmericanHumanist.org/chapterzone

Only if specifically noted does material published in Grass Roots News constitute an official statement of the CA or the AHA. Permission to reprint is granted if Grass Roots News and the AHA are credited. Please send all letters and other correspondence to:

GRASS ROOTS NEWS
AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION
1777 T STREET NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20009-7125
202/238-9088; 800/837-3792
Fax 202/238-9003
GRN@AmericanHumanist.org

Humanists of Idaho Chapter Highlight

Humanists of Idaho (HOI) was formed in the mid 1980s by a small group of secularists, including some Unitarians, who wanted to provide an alternative to, and answer, the very conservative religious and political slant on many issues in the area. "Idaho, overall, is pretty conservative on social and religious issues. Southern Idaho, especially, is heavily Mormon, and that influence is felt in prayers before public school events," said HOI president, Paul Rolig. "Most of HOI's members are, and have been, from Boise, in Southwest Idaho, which is much more diverse in nature, but several local state legislators still carry the banner for government-backed Ten Commandments displays and anti-gay and anti-abortion legislation," Rolig went on to say.

Most of HOI's meetings focus on discussions of books and current events related in some way to Humanism. This fall the group had an HOI outing to visit the traveling exhibit of Georgia O'Keeffe's work, which came to the Boise Art Museum. Several members got together to walk the gallery exhibits, watch a documentary video on O'Keeffe's life, and then lunch at a nearby restaurant.

However, HOI works hard, in more overt ways, to advance Humanism in its community. HOI members took part in CROPWALK, and raised several hundred dollars for local and worldwide anti-hunger programs. CROPWALK, organized by Church World Service, is a cooperative humanitarian ministry of thirty-six Protestant, Orthodox, and Anglican denominations, providing sustainable self-help and development, disaster relief, and refugee assistance in more than 80 countries. "HOI decided this would be a good way to put a positive face on Humanism. Other walkers, who expressed some surprise that Humanists should appear at an effort thought of as Christian-oriented, were positively impressed that Humanists share their value of feeding hungry people," said Rolig.

In October of 2004 HOI cosponsored, along with the Humanist subgroup in the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, a symposium covering such topics as morality without supernaturalism, community action, and children's moral education. American Humanist Association President Mel Lipman, and Clark Adams of the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Internet Infidels, were the headline speakers. "The event was received very well by the twenty-five people in attendance, and we picked up a few new members from it," Rolig noted.

Also, HOI members have participated in a "Rally for Human Dignity" in opposition to a Fred Phelps anti-gay demonstration, in a religious liberty rally on the statehouse steps

on the same day as the National Day of Prayer, and, about two years ago, an HOI member spoke at a Boise City Council meeting in support of its decision to move a Ten Commandments display out of a city park and into a prominent churchyard.

Although HOI has lost a few of its members, it has managed to maintain its size. With word of mouth and Internet postings new people have been attracted to the group. And, importantly, HOI has managed to provide fellowship for those with Humanist values in Idaho. When asked, “What unites your group and draws people to your community?” Rolig sums it up.

Our common theme is that we are all people who share Humanist values (which is to say the most basic secular values of most of the world), and who are becoming more and more alarmed at the rise of religious fundamentalism. We think people will be drawn to us when they can see that such a group as ours actually exists, promoting something positive as well as opposing the religious campaigns against evolution, sex education, contraception, and gays and lesbians.

continued from page 1 - Chapter Leader Profile

How did you get into a leadership position?

I started out by participating on the program committee, which is responsible for getting speakers and arranging presentations for the Sunday morning program. Within six months, the Committee Chair, Alan Kimmel, asked me if I would serve as co-chair with him. I accepted his invitation. Six months later I was nominated from the floor to the Society’s Board. I served for one year and then was elected treasurer for two years before being elected vice president. In June, 2005, I became the Society president.

What are your goals for the group? Where do you see the group in five years?

Fred Edwards wrote in *Free Mind* in December, 2004 that fourteen percent of adults have no religion. Since the AEU and AHA have reached only a tiny fraction of that percentage, my basic goal is to significantly increase our local society’s membership. To move toward this goal we have held several brainstorming and planning sessions. From these we have determined that we needed to seek new strategies and longer range plans for developing our organization, increasing membership, and improving our financial picture.

In particular, we need to focus on the following needs and objectives:

- Balance our budget.
- Increase member pledges.
- Reduce expenses.

- Increase investment income.
- Do more analysis and develop more workable strategies for membership development.
- Increase our age spread and ethnic diversity.
- Increase our connections to and community building with other Humanists.
- Increase public outreach.
- Survey members skills, needs, and interests to better serve our local humanist community.
- Improve our programming and appeal.
- Increase use of our building through more internal programming and activities, and through outside rentals.
- Expand membership interest and involvement in governance and taking more responsibility for the regular work of the society through volunteerism.
- Integrate constituencies.
- Increase our presence and participation in public ethical action.
- Do more institutional investment.
- Improve retention of visiting guests and engage them as potential members.

To address and reconcile these goals we determined some of our strengths and challenges. We felt the fifteen or so major items cited above closely matched our earlier goals. Our next step is to break these mostly long-range goals down by area, appropriate committee assignment, and time frame.

Have you faced any challenges as group leader?

Since we own our own building, all the practical challenges of regular maintenance and smooth function are our responsibility—the usual property ownership demands, unanticipated surprises, and emergencies. Also, our endowment would benefit from more intensive management.

Our greatest challenge is in the development and encouragement of strong volunteers and expansion of membership. Since we have only one part-time paid staffer, volunteer assistance and regular lay involvement is critical to our continued health and existence, not to mention further growth.

What are some things you have learned, or advice you’d like to give to fellow group leaders?

Be patient and concentrate on your goals. Our group is democratically run and often requires substantial consultation before decisions are made. For example, it took several months, a “town meeting” style discussion, and a formal motion at our official annual meeting, capped by lengthy discussion, before a vote was taken to upgrade our membership from an AHA Affiliate status to AHA Charter Chapter. Progress may sometimes be slow, but it’s important to keep moving forward. Eventually productive things can and do happen.

Speaker Profile

David Niose, AHA Board Member



DAVID NIOSE was elected to the AHA board of directors in 2004, and is currently the AHA's treasurer and chair of the AHA's Media Committee. His background includes experience in both law and mass communication. A graduate of Boston University's School of Public Communication and the Suffolk University Law School, he has worked in print and broadcast media, practiced law for fifteen years, taught both history and law, and has written extensively on a wide array of social and political issues.

David has also worked for freethought groups both as an attorney and media consultant. As Media Committee chair, David helped develop the AHA's ongoing campaign to promote Humanism to the public. As an attorney, David filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission on behalf of the Secular Coalition for America protesting the granting of educational television channels to televangelists. David is an officer of the Humanist Association of

Massachusetts, a member of the Secular Student Alliance, and a founding member of Greater Worcester Humanists. He also sits on the advisory panel of the Secular Coalition for America.

In addressing groups around the country, David emphasizes the promotion of Humanism as a method of reversing America's dangerous drift towards religious conservatism. Viewing Humanism as a movement, he sees tactfully and carefully crafted public communications as a critical part of a strategy to improve the public's image of Humanism. "The religious right's worst nightmare is an America where open identification as a Humanist is seen as admirable, where even politicians aren't afraid to identify as secular Humanists," he says. "This can happen if we successfully promote Humanism in the marketplace of ideas." In a talk entitled "Humanism in Plain English," he offers tips for effectively explaining Humanism to those who are unfamiliar with it.

David can travel to address groups, and asks that engagements be scheduled at least 60 days in advance, if possible. He will usually ask that travel expenses be reimbursed, and that groups make a donation to the AHA in lieu of a speaker's fee.

David can be reached at dniose@direcway.com or by calling his office at 978-343-0800.

CAMP QUEST

A Summer Camp for Humanist Kids

"It's Beyond Belief"

Six camps to serve you in 2006!

Camp Quest of the Smoky Mountains – June 4-11

Camp Quest West (California) – July 15-21

Camp Quest Classic (Ohio) – July 15-22

Camp Quest of Minnesota – July 23-30

Camp Quest of Michigan – August 13-20

Camp Quest Ontario – dates to be announced



For more information, log onto www.Camp-Quest.org

How to Get a Proclamation

by Harry Greenberger, President

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association.

Because New Orleans mayors need the support of African American ministers in order to get elected, they are naturally reluctant to be associated with a group like the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association. But my philosophy has been that the way to get an official proclamation for the “National Day of Reason” or any other desired objective is just to ask for it, knowing that the response might be “yes” or “no.”

So, for our first attempt several years ago, I adapted the standard proclamation wording to include the right dates and the Mayor’s name. Then I simply mailed it to him with an explanatory cover letter. Shortly afterward I called the mayor’s office to find which staff person handled “proclamations” and learned that it had already been sent to the Mayor for signature. When I was later advised that it had been signed I was able to go pick it up at City Hall. Though the mayor knew me at that time, I think he might simply have signed all proclamations placed on his desk, simply relying on the judgment of his staff.

However, when we tried again under a new Mayor who I didn’t know, I was advised that he chose not to issue the proclamation. But proclamations can also be issued by the city council. So I met with my councilman, who is a regular critic of the mayor and who therefore might be influenced to support it *because* of the mayor’s rejection. And, indeed, he proved very receptive, even to the mission of New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, and thereafter obtained the signatures of every councilperson, had it read at the opening of a council meeting, and even introduced me and allowed me to provide a secular invocation. Regrettably in the case of the latter, that historic presentation received no media coverage.

BE IT KNOWN THAT
MAYOR C. RAY NAGIN



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

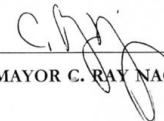
HAS THIS DAY
PROCLAIMED

A National Day of Reason

Encouraging all citizens, residents and visitors in observing this day and focusing upon the employment of reason, critical thought, the scientific method, and free inquiry to the resolution of human problems and for the welfare of human kind

ATTESTED TO THIS

*Fifth Day of May
Two Thousand and Five*


MAYOR C. RAY NAGIN

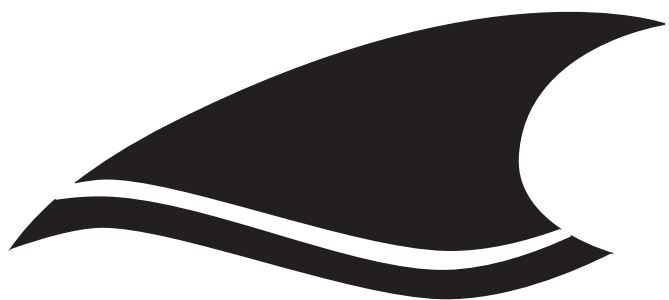
**Group leaders, are you looking for an activity for your next few meetings?
Consider a DVD presentation!**

The AHA is loaning its DVD box set of the PBS special series,
Evolution, to any interested groups.

Beginning with Darwin’s revolutionary theory, this seven-part series explores all facets of evolution and how it continues to affect us everyday.

The series is narrated by Liam Neeson, and runs for 8 hours on four DVDs.

If you are interested in reserving this box set, please contact Jamie Padula at the national office.
800.837.3792 - jpadula@americanhumanist.org



THE WAVE OF REASON

Dear Chapter Leaders, here's the Schedule of Events for Thursday, May 11, 2006. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 202-238-9088, or e-mail me at fshakerin@americanhumanist.org

See you in Tampa,
Farhad Shakerin

registering online at <https://www.americanhumanist.org> and clicking on the conference logo.)

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Leadership Reception
(Ballroom Foyer)

6:30 pm – 7:30 pm

A Humanist Communitarian Chapter
Hilton Brown coordinator
(Ballroom East)

7:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Strengthening Activism in Local Groups
Jennifer Hancock and Jerry Leiberman coordinators
(Ballroom East)

8:30 pm – 9:30 pm

Chapter Strategic Planning
Bob Finch coordinator
(Ballroom East)

I will guide participants through a professional media training program and will provide interested activists an opportunity to practice their new found skills in this interactive workshop.

- Margaret Downey

Speakers will discuss the problems of strategic planning for a local chapter. Should the emphasis be placed on the educational function of the chapter, fellowship among the members, outreach to the community, or political representation of the Humanist position? Or does the strategic plan need to encompass all of these goals? Also, speakers will answer such questions as how does a chapter get organized, what sort of meetings might the group want, how does the group find a place to meet, and what sort of resources are necessary? And attendees will learn what the AHA national office and the Chapter Assembly can do to help as well as how the plans of the local group can mesh with those of the AHA overall.

- Bob Finch

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Jennifer Hancock coordinator
(Lee room)

11:00 am – 12:00 noon

Education and the Curriculum in Local Groups
Jack Sechrest coordinator
(Ballroom East)

12:00 noon – 8:00 pm

Conference Registration
(Ballroom Foyer)

12:15 pm

Break

1:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Grassroots Media Training (Pre-conference seminar)
Margaret Downey
(please register by calling Farhad at 202-238-9088, or by

The dissertation opens with a chapter describing HoF circa 1990, just about the time my wife Sheila and I joined the Humanists of Houston. The scene in Tampa was evidently similar to that in Houston. The meeting topics and state conference themes have a familiar sound and we remember some of the national meetings that Gin mentions. The problems that Gin listed in the group in Florida are very similar to those in Houston: the group arguing over being too philosophical or activist or vice-versa, and the lack of vision and strategic plan. In Houston we were noticing the absence of young people and thought ourselves to be elderly, but in Tampa the folks were even older, with many groups averaging in their 80's. I read somewhere that when people reach that age they blow away the niceties – and these people were apparently really decided on CHANGE. One thing President Sol Klotz did was to line up an advocate for change and an eventual successor: Jerry Lieberman, who joined the Board in 1998 and became President in 2002. The key to Jerry's success was to inject some vision, some planning, and some new resolution into chapter affairs. He intended to secure funding by identifying progressive-oriented foundations and philanthropists in Florida.

Gin takes us through the formulation of the first of HoF's strategic plans. The process started under the Presidency of Nan Owen, who had come from Chicago where she had at one time been a member of a far right group. She had progressed from this through atheism to Humanism. After arriving in Florida, Jerry's initial goals included: increasing membership; preparing a three-year budget and fundraising; providing paid professional management; strengthening and adding chapters, increasing visibility; and building partnerships with other progressive groups. The process continued with drafting, debating and eventual approval of a "Progressive Social Action Plan." In parallel to this, there was a Strategic Planning Committee (chaired by Jerry himself) and a Program Committee. Details of the Social Action Plan probably merit an entire article in and of themselves. These deliberations are what eventually led HoF to start a charter school program, and implementation of the plans continued with the hiring of Jennifer Hancock as Executive Director in 2001.

From Arm-Chair Philosophy to Social Agency chronicles the history of Humanism in Florida through the acquisition of an AHA charter for the HoF in 1986 and the conferences that followed to the time that Jerry Lieberman became involved in its organizational change. The history sets the stage for the case study (1998-2001) and enables the reader to witness that change *did* occur during the time of the study. And, drawing from Communication Theory, Gin identifies those

theorists whose works best described what had advanced the significant change in HoF, down to its name change to Humanists of Florida Association (HFA). Her final chapter discusses the role of 1) ambiguities of language, 2) leadership, 3) documents, 4) a changing board, and 5) association in effecting change. Perhaps James Carey best summed up her premise: "Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed."

Overall, the Dissertation is well written but has the off-putting idiosyncrasy of referring to people by given names which makes identification difficult. (Gin explains that this is a requirement of what is known as *The Institutional Review Board*.) Should all Humanist leaders read this book? Well, it is long (230 pages), but available on the Internet. However, there is a way to absorb its lessons easily: come to Tampa in May to learn how well HFA is doing now and in particular hear Jennifer Hancock and meet Jerry and Gin Lieberman in person at the Chapter Sessions during the pre-conference program on Thursday, May 11, 2006. Jerry is Chairman of the Florida meeting. It seems to me that the transformation of Humanism which has taken place in Florida is of great importance to the rest of the AHA and merits our close attention.

National Day of Reason May 4, 2006

www.nationaldayofreason.org

Join in a day of events across the nation to celebrate reason and stand up against the government sponsored exclusion seen in the National Day of Prayer.

Be sure your Chapter's NDR event gets publicized! If your organization is planning an event or activity in conjunction with the National Day of Reason, please send an e-mail describing your planned event to events@nationaldayofreason.org.

Grass Roots News

1777 T Street NW

Washington, DC 20009-7125

Grass Roots News

In This Issue:

Planning and Humanism transformed in Florida	1
Chapter Leader Profile	1
Humanists of Idaho - Chapter Highlight	2
Speaker Profile	4
How to Get a Proclamation	5

**You can also receive
Grass Roots News via email!
Send an email to
GRN@AmericanHumanist.org
for more details.**