



The Idaho Humanist

The Humanists of Idaho is a chapter of the American Humanist Association and the Council for Secular Humanism. We are a nonprofit corporation organized to promote ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism in the state of Idaho through public awareness, education and community involvement.

February 2008

<http://Idaho.humanists.net>

Idaho@humanists.net

Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights, and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that all values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological and ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,
Official publication of the
American Humanist
Association

President's Message:

Is there Life after Crime & Punishment?

I've never been in prison, and don't suppose many of you have, either. A few of you may know people who are, or have been, in prison. America being the country with the largest percentage of its population imprisoned, though, means that we have many people who will be getting out of prison and reintegrating into society along with the rest of us. A discussion I was in recently raised several questions about what a number of religionists are doing, and what humanists might do, to help those convicted of crimes lead better lives once they get out of prison.

The Interfaith Alliance of Idaho conducts a monthly breakfast meeting called the Interfaith Religious Leaders Network (IRLN). I started attending this regularly when I became President of Humanists of Idaho in order to build personal relationships with leaders of groups who are most active on human rights issues in our area. Others who attend include Christians, Jews, Muslims, and New Age spiritualists. We do not agree on theology, but we agree on many humanistic issues. Several of the IRLN attendees conduct prison ministries whereby they work with inmates while they are in prison, and help newly released prisoners reintegrate back into society.

At our February meeting we had a guest speaker, Les Peterson, Chaplain and prison religious liaison at the Medium Security portion of the Idaho Penitentiary south of Boise. He discussed with us some of the issues people face while in prison and when they get out of prison. Les conducts Sunday services at the prison, which are attended by about 350 to 400 of the 1500 inmates. Outside those services, he works with inmates who desire counseling, assistance with the rare phone calls inmates are allowed, and to deliver news of deaths of family members, etc.

Les also oversees various self-help classes for inmates dealing with drugs, sexual abuse, parenting, and marriage skills. Many of these are faith-based. (The prison also conducts secular job-skills and other classes for inmates apart from the Chaplaincy program.) Les noted that prisoners with long sentences (10 years or more) go in and out of cycles of depression. They need caring people to talk to. Many of them do also want to serve or help in various ways, so some of them become teachers of these in-prison classes through the chapel programs. Some inmates also start helping other inmates, counseling each other, reading, talking, writing letters for them, etc.

Les was asked if there are racial or gang tensions in the prison. He replied that there were some gang tensions, but not too much racial or ethnic strife. The gangs do tend to be either Hispanic, or white supremacist. It turns out that "gays are not necessarily looked down upon, on account of the 'services' they provide."

One program in which inmates help each other is called "Companion Watch." When an inmate is on suicide watch, another inmate volunteers to sit outside the first inmate's cell, to be available to talk. (Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1) One local minister noted that he had been working with a particular inmate who “suddenly wasn’t there any more.” Later the minister found out that inmate had been transferred to a private prison in Oklahoma. Unlike some recent publicity, this inmate liked the private prison in Oklahoma much better than the traditional Idaho facility, getting pay for educational programs, better food, and better exercise facilities.

While Les himself is Christian, he is open to working with inmates of all beliefs. He noted that some inmates are Muslim, and are provided Korans and other materials. However, it is difficult to find local volunteers to minister to them. Les was not familiar with Humanism, or aware of any humanist inmates per se. He stated that atheist inmates simply did not show up for chapel-based programs.

It turns out that inmates can receive books, but only if they are sent to the inmate directly from a church or a bookstore, and the books must preferably be new.

Programs for just-released inmates in this area are all Christian-based. They are not officially affiliated with the state or the prison. Basically, once a prisoner is released, he or she is on their own, as far as the state is concerned, aside from the required meetings with parole officers. There is a Christian ministry to inmates, Prison Fellowship, that offers some assistance. The major programs are New Hope, which caters to drug and alcohol offenders, and Bethel House, which caters to sex offenders. Both are Christian-based.

“There are never enough” places in such programs for newly release inmates, Les said, and there is a need for more Mentors. Only official “Mentors” are allowed to work with inmates in prison and then also be in contact with the same inmates after they are released. The prison chapel offers a non-sectarian training program for Mentors. It is a one-day training class.

It was noted that some inmates can be very manipulative. People who work with them must set firm boundaries, for example, to limit the number and size of personal favors that may be asked.

Would you be interested in becoming a humanist prison Mentor? If so, I could put you in touch with Les Peterson to get you involved. It would have its obvious challenges, as well as some rewards helping someone turn their life around.

Humanists of Idaho Monthly Meetings

We have instituted a new format for our monthly meetings. From 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM we are now the Humanist Supper Club. We invite everyone to arrive whenever they can at the Flicks, try some of their delicious food for dinner and join the group upstairs for informal discussion and socializing. At 7:30 we will start our program.

4th Monday of the month
The Flicks in Boise
646 Fulton, at 6th and Myrtle
6:30 PM Humanist Supper Club
7:30 PM Program

HOI Meeting - Monday, February 25th

BUUF Senior Sages

2nd and 4th Thursdays of the Month, 9:30 am at the Kopper Kitchen (2661 Airport Way)

This group of Humanist/Freethinkers meets over a cheery, no-host breakfast and discusses a variety of topics. They would welcome new members to join the discussion. If you would like more information or to get on the email list and/or phone tree contact Tom von Alten at 378-1217 or tva@fortboise.org.

The Humanist Perspective on Channel 11

Tuesdays at 6:00 PM

"The Humanist Perspective" now airs each Tuesday from 6:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and then repeats at 8:00-8:30 Wednesday morning on Boise's local cable access television station, TVTV Channel 11 on CableOne. To check on programming schedules, see the website at www.tvpatv.org. The Council for Secular Humanism (CSH) produces a weekly half-hour television program exploring issues of interest from a humanist point of view.

BUUF Discussion Group - Sunday, March 9th

Second Sunday of the Month at 11 AM

Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 6200 Garrett, Garden City

3-4 grade room in the north wing

With the change of time we hope more will be able to attend the lively discussion we have in this group. Everyone is welcome whether you consider yourself a UU or not.

This year we are having a series of discussions on the language of faith and how different meanings of words can make for misunderstanding between people. In March the discussion will be the meaning of sin.

In Memory of John Harms 1920 April 13 – 2008 January 29

In late January, Humanists of Idaho, and humanism in general, lost a great advocate in John Burton Harms. Born and raised near Gooding, Idaho, John developed a great work ethic and an even greater sense of character and virtue. He began studies to become a minister, but gave up belief in the supernatural when his studies led him to see a number of contradictions in all the approaches to religion that he investigated. He joined the Unitarian Universalist church and stayed in it throughout the rest of his life. John was a vocal advocate of the humanist approach within Unitarianism.

John left Linfield College after two years, and joined the Marines in 1940. John was stationed at various places in the U.S. and the Pacific theater during World War 2. In 1944 he married Vi, a Scottish woman he met at a dance. She was of like mind, and was as dedicated to human rights causes as John was.

After discharge from the Marines in 1947, John finished his undergraduate work at Idaho State University, and received a degree in veterinary medicine from Washington State University in 1954.

John operated a veterinary practice in Gooding, Idaho, for four years. During this time, he took in an intern who was a student at Idaho State University. John naturally took the young intern with him on calls to the farms and ranches whose animals required John's services. Some of the farmers were upset to discover John's intern was black. When they voiced their displeasure to John, he informed them that if they did not like it, they would have to find another veterinarian.

In 1958, John became a meat inspector for the USDA, and spent the rest of his career ensuring the health and safety of our meat supply. The family moved to Boise in the early 1960s and immediately became active in the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

John's social activism took many forms. He was a founding member of the ACLU of Idaho and of Idaho Veterans for Peace. He was also active with the NAACP, The Snake River Alliance, BUUF, and the International Association for Religious Freedom, and Humanists of Idaho.

At the memorial service for John, held 16 February 2008 at BUUF, all family members, friends, and acquaintances who spoke of John recalled his strength of character, determination, and unswerving integrity.

The memorial program included this fitting poem, "Epitaph On My Own Friend And My Father's Friend, Wm. Muir In Tarbolton Mill" by Robert Burns:

An honest man here lies at rest
[As e'er God with his image blest;*]
The friend of man, the friend of truth,
The friend of age, and guide of youth:
Few hearts like his, with virtue warm'd,
Few heads with knowledge so informed:
If there's another world, he lives in bliss;
If there is none, he made the best of this.

* This line was omitted from the memorial program. I'm not sure if the omission was intentional or not, or what John might have thought of the omission. *(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3)

In response to our call for members' recollections of John Harms, we received two:

Nicolle Foster, Humanist Celebrant and former President of Humanists of Idaho recalls, "One evening my husband and I went over to help him with some lighting and wiring issues in his front yard. It was colder than I thought outside, and I was warming up in the car. John came out with the biggest fluffiest down coat; black on the outside, and startling hot pink in the inside. He bundled me up, and even sent me home in it, and told me I should keep it. I tried to argue, but reluctantly agreed. Now I wear it every winter. I even wore it today while riding my scooter. I think of him every time I wear that coat, when I'm all wrapped up and warm. What a nice gift!"

Jeanette Ross of BUUF and HOI recalls, "John's daughter, Gwyn Reid, has a photo of John and a busload of other Boiseans ready to ride to north Idaho to protest the actions of the Aryan Nations of Hayden lake. Date on photo is April 8, 1989. John organized the trip.

John and his wife Vi were longtime members of the International Association for Religious Freedom. After attending international conferences in Amsterdam and at Stanford, John wrote letters to advocate follow-up actions. After learning of the Nazi persecutions of Unitarians and other free-thinkers, he wrote to UU leader William Schultz, arguing for a memorial to be added to honor the more numerous, better-known victims of the holocaust. As a result of this letter, John was asked to deliver the words of dedication, in 1983. (Bill Schultz since served as UUA president and is currently president of Amnesty International.)

John wrote letters and visited church and other community leaders to organize a funeral watchdog group, the Idaho Memorial Association. This group, still active as Funeral Consumers of Idaho, continues to serve the needs that John identified – doing a yearly price survey of funeral service providers, providing educational material, providing a 'kit' of papers for making one's desires known, and contracting with a local provider to provide low-cost, no-pressure services.

John's interest in this came from his youth. When John's mother died, the family buried her on their own land in a cardboard box, and then had a memorial service at church. John was impressed by the way the family's Presbyterian minister approved of this.

Elaine Durbin remembers that John's objection to capital punishment led him to stand on a corner of the Statehouse grounds in protest of killing in the name of justice – an hour or more, each week – for many years. He was also an advocate for participation in the United Nations as the best hope for international cooperation toward humane goals for all.

John's causes were not limited to the large issues. 'When we decided to take over an abandoned cemetery in Canyon County, we went through county officials to clear it and use it. We then used it for the wife of one of our members,' says Elaine.

John won the respect as well as the affection of all who knew him. Randy Arnzen of Accent Funeral Service, the longtime contractor for FCAI, expressed his respect for John's role in humanizing the end of life."

Interested readers who missed it may be able to find the "In Remembrance" article about John Harms in the Idaho Statesman, 2008 February 10 at: <http://www.idahostatesman.com/387/story/291438.html> .

Creating a Humane Habitat

By RUTH N. GELLER HumanistNetworkNews.org Feb. 6, 2008

A film directed by a humanist touting the benefits of biodiesel fuel was the toast of this year's prestigious Sundance Film Festival. But are humanists doing enough to help clean up their environment off-screen? Josh Tickell's *Fields of Fuel*, was awarded the Audience Award for Documentary Film at Sundance last month. The 90 minute documentary was filmed over 12 years in 5 countries. It features a team of scientists and filmmakers exploring the impact of our current fossil fuel production and promotes the use of biodiesel as an alternative fuel source. "The film was the talk of the Sundance experience," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association (AHA). "It was the only film to get long standing ovations." In 1997, Tickell first drove across the U.S. in a "Veggie Van" fueled solely by used cooking oil from fast food restaurants. He made his first short film about this experience.

The AHA gave \$25,000 dollars to Tickell to help make the film and encouraged charitable contributions by other humanists to help fund the film as well. A biodiesel-fueled convoy which traveled from Venice, Calif. to Park City, Utah, site of the Sundance Film Festival was led by AHA member Michael McOmber. Called the Fuel National Edutainment Action Tour (NEAT), the trip was tied to the release of Tickell's film. Josh Tickell, who is also the founder of the organization [Biodiesel America](http://BiodieselAmerica.com), believes that biodiesel made from vegetable oil, is an "economically sustainable, environmentally sound alternative fuel that could, potentially, greatly lessen America's oil dependence." Tickell has written several books about the viability of biodiesel and lectures widely on the topic. Speckhardt thinks that it's time that humanists give more than "lip-service" to environmental causes.

Taking action to preserve our natural resources and safeguard the environment was one of the principles set down in the [Second Humanist Manifesto](http://SecondHumanistManifesto.org) (1973), noted Speckhardt. However, until very recently, humanists have not put a lot of their energy fighting for this cause. Secular humanists have often worked in the environmental movement or the humanist movement, but not often combined the two, said Speckhardt.

The AHA's Mary and Lloyd Morain Humanist Center, a 101 year-old building in Washington, D.C., has recently gone "green."

AHA has installed new thermal windows and doors, replaced Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) computer monitors with newer, energy-saving Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screens, and switched to a printing company for its mailings which is completely run on windpower.

"Humanists need to keep the church-state separation as the foremost concern, but that doesn't mean that we should abandon other issues," said Speckhardt.

Environmental critic James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Geography of Nowhere*, and other works criticizing suburban sprawl, thinks that expecting that we can run the U.S.'s enormous fleet of autos on the current options for alternative fuels is a "fantasy."

In a podcast interview with HNN, Kunstler [said](#) "They're really very unreal. I mean, you can do them as science projects on a small scale, but they don't scale up to 200 million vehicles. You can run X number of vehicles on ethanol, or biodiesel, or french fried potato oil that's been used and thrown out, but can you run the entire U.S. automobile fleet on the interstate highway system, and WalMart and Walt Disney World? Forget it. It ain't going to happen."

Speckhardt acknowledges criticism from some quarters but thinks the critics are misinformed. "...people think we're promoting crop production for fuel but we're not."

"Biodiesel isn't the same as ethanol," said Speckhardt.

Biodiesel is a renewable fuel made by a chemical reaction of alcohol and vegetable or animal oils, fats, or greases. Through refinement, the glycerin byproduct is removed and can be made into soap. Biodiesel can be used in any diesel engine in pure form or blended with petroleum diesel at any level.

Ethanol fuel is ethyl alcohol, the same type of alcohol found in alcoholic beverages. It is easy to manufacture and process and can be made from common materials such as sugar cane. It is commonly used to fuel cars in Brazil.

Anhydrous ethanol (ethanol with less than 1 percent water) can be blended with gasoline in varying quantities up to pure ethanol, and most spark-ignited gasoline style engines will operate well with mixtures of 10 percent ethanol. The use of 10 percent ethanol gasoline is mandated in some cities where harmful levels of auto emissions are possible.

Delivery systems for biodiesel are already in place of some parts of the country. For example, California already has a significant number of biodiesel stations where you can fill your tank.

Kunstler's longing for walkable car-free communities, aesthetically pleasing urban design, and a comprehensive public transportation system, isn't possible to put into place right now. Maybe 100 years from now, said Speckhardt.

"His ideas are equally fantasies," said Speckhardt.

He says neither the film or AHA endorses the idea that biodiesel is the only solution to our environmental crunch, but that if more Americans chose to run their cars on vegetable oil, it could make a significant positive effect.

"We have to address global warming. Oil is a terrible pollutant in a way that biodiesel isn't," said Speckhardt.

Realists of all stripes would probably say that non-believers and believers will be forced to work together more in the future as the earth's environmental crisis worsens.

Harvard University Biology Professor Emeritus and self-described "uncompromising secular humanist" E.O. Wilson is doing just that.

In his most recent book, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, he argues that religious believers and scientists need to put their differences aside and work together on environmental issues.

Wilson won two Pulitzer Prizes in non-fiction for his earlier works: *The Ants*, with Bert Holldobler, and *On Human Nature*. Through his study of ants, he found clues to human behavior. This led to his belief that there is a biological basis for the social behavior of all animals, including humans.

Wilson frequently speaks and writes about the importance of "scientific humanism" and is a major voice in efforts to maintain the Earth's biodiversity.

Raised a Southern Baptist, he thinks that both believers and non-believers should grant each other more basic respect and work hard to find common ground around environmental issues.

During an [interview](#) with HNN given at last spring's Harvard's Humanist Chaplaincy Conference, Wilson said "...I go out of my way to avoid conflict up front by saying, at some length, 'With due respect' then asking for help. There is no way, no way better, than asking for help to get the friendship of a person, and I do like to think that while the military wing of our fellow humanists will gain a few converts, particularly those who are very uncertain, I think I am much more likely to get the ear of the faith community and actually persuade many more people to give serious consideration to what scientists are finding and what humanists, the New Humanists, all the inclusive humanists, are trying to say."

Ruth N. Geller is the editor of [Humanist Network News](#), the weekly e-zine of the [Institute for Humanist Studies](#).

Moments & Milestones

Weddings and other family celebrations Custom designed to suit the needs & preferences of the participants located in Boise, but serving most of Idaho

*Services performed by **D. G. Van Curen***

A Celebrant, Ordained through the Humanist Celebrant Certification Committee

www.angelfire.com/id/vancuren/weddings.html

HOI Membership

We have 40 full memberships and 3 newsletter subscribers.

To those of you who have received this newsletter complimentary, I hope you will decide to join our group. Please fill out the form below and send in the payment for the level of involvement you wish to the address below.

Nancy Rolig, Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Membership Administrator

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Humanists of Idaho Board</p> <p>President: Paul Rolig377-0535 or roligpd@spro.net Vice President: Van Van Curen:.....376-5475 or saw2thking@aol.com Secretary: Nancy Rolig..... 377-0535 or nrolig@spro.net Treasurer: Jan Rowe376-5475 or janiejolee1@aol.com</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Auxiliary Positions</p> <p>Webmaster/Yahoo Group Administrator:..... Van Van Curen 376-5475 OR saw2thking@aol.com Newsletter Editor/membership Administrator:.....Nancy Rolig 377-0535 or nrolig@spro.net 9877 W. Ripley St. Boise 83704 Charitable Giving Coordinator:Jan Rowe 376-5475 603 or janiejolee1@aol.com Publicity Chair:.....Van Van Curen: 376-5475 or saw2thking@aol.com Permanent Building Fund:Paul Rolig roligpd@spro.net 9877 W. Ripley St., Boise 83704</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Organization Information</p> <p>Your support of this local chapter with your membership, donations and ideas is greatly appreciated.</p> <p>Mailing Address: Humanists of Idaho P.O. Box 44913 Boise, ID 83711-0913</p> <p>Website: http://Idaho.humanists.net Yahoo Group: idaho-humanists@yahoogroups.com Email Address: Idaho@humanists.net</p> |
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Humanists of Idaho Membership and Donation Form

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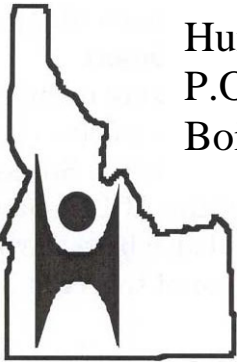
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- \$25 **Individual** annual membership and Newsletter subscription
- \$45 **Couple** annual membership and Newsletter subscription
- \$15 Newsletter subscription only
- \$___ donation to help promote public awareness of Humanism
- \$___ Humanists of Idaho Permanent Building Fund Donation

Mail to:
Humanists of Idaho
P.O. Box 44913
Boise, ID 83711-0913



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Thursday, February 21th , 9:30 AM BUUF Senior Sages
Kopper Kitchen, 2661 Airport Way, Boise

Monday, February 25th – HOI Monthly Meeting
6:30 PM Humanist Supper Club, 7:30 PM Program

Sunday, March 9th – 11:00 AM – BUUF Humanist Group
Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 6200 Garrett, Garden City,

Thursday, March 32th , 9:30 AM - BUUF Senior Sages
Kopper Kitchen, 2661 Airport Way, Boise