

"Religion consists of a set of things which the average man thinks he believes and wishes he was certain of."
— Mark Twain

Critical Thinker

The Bimonthly Newsletter of United States Atheists | March / April 2004

2003: The State of USA

by James E. Archer *President, United States Atheists*

This is the first of two articles on what I will call the "state of USA." In this, the first article, I will focus on what was accomplished in 2003. In the next issue I will discuss the plans for 2004.

Last year we took on the task of redesigning our Web site to focus on simplicity, gaining new Web supporters, and maintaining the site. The new site was a major success, helping us add over 40 new supporters. The new site was successful in providing a quick and effective way of learning about USA.

The Highway Cleanup program celebrated its first anniversary of public service and entitled us to our very own sign proclaiming United States Atheists as supporters of the program. Watch for our sign the next time you visit the Portland International Airport.

The newly-redesigned bimonthly *Critical Thinker* publication also is a year old and continues our commitment to outreach and education.

Our Family Sponsor program continued for the third year, providing a happy holiday for a family that might not otherwise have one. Food and other items were donated to the family as part of our commitment to public service.

As part of our commitment to providing a more social environment for atheists, we held an ice cream social that was very well attended and exceeded our expectations.

Other major activities that have a long-standing tradition include the

"Bunk Busters" TV program, weekly meetings,

Solstice parties, our library and, of course, the continued operation of the Atheist Community Center.

Finally, we received a promise of a large financial donation that will be used in 2004 as part of a matching funds program; more on this later.

Although space does not permit recognizing all who have helped, I would like to give special mention to Steve Lindell, Alfredo Torrejon, James Smith, Jerry Billings and Nan Steinebach for their support in making the above accomplishments a reality.

Here are a few numbers that help paint a picture of last year's accomplishments:

- Increase in new contacts: over 80
- Increase in "members": over 70
- Increase in "Web members": Over 40
- Increase in average monthly meeting donations: \$25
- Increase in average non-meeting donations: \$200
- Decrease in average weekly meeting attendance: 2

This was my first year as president of USA and overall I am pleased with what was accomplished. Thanks to all you good atheists for your support and let's all get ready for an even better year in 2004. ■



Upcoming Events

Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup

Saturday, Mar. 13, 9:00 AM Join us for about two hours of cleaning up the stretch of highway "adopted" by USA. Meet at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Dress for the weather and bring a pair of work gloves.

Weekly Meetings

Every Tuesday, 7:30 PM Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome to attend.

March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

April 6, 13, 20, 27

"Bunk Busters"

"Bunk Busters" is the cable TV show produced by USA and co-hosted by Jerry Billings and Kendall Auel. It is cablecast through Portland Cable Access. Contact: Alfredo Torrejon at bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com.

Schedule (subject to change):

Tuesdays	7:30 PM	Ch. 22
Saturdays	1:30 PM	Ch. 23
Sundays	5:30 PM	Ch. 11

Note new time on Sundays!

For an up-to-date program schedule: www.pcatv.org/programming/tab.htm#m2681_

Web Site

Check our Web site for the latest info. www.unitedstatesatheists.com

Dial-An-Atheist

For a weekly message of common sense, dial 503-ATHEIST (284-3478).

Critical Thinker

Deadline for next issue: April 15, 2004. Submission guidelines at: www.unitedstatesatheists.com/criticalthinker. Send submissions to the editor at criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com, or mail in care of the USA address.

USA Pie Social

Words and photos by **James A. Smith** *Critical Thinker Editor, United States Atheists*

On February 17th, USA hosted a Pie Social at the Atheist Community Center in Portland. Many people came and enjoyed pie, coffee and good conversation. The gathering

brought out a number of USA members who don't often come to meetings, as well as some first-time attendees.

The USA board wishes to thank Nan Steinebach for all her hard work in

organizing the event and serving pie. Thanks also go out to everyone who donated pies. Check future issues of the *Critical Thinker* and the USA Web site for information on upcoming events. ■



What Would Jerry Do?

by **Jerry Billings** Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

Dear WWJD Man,

I am proud and happy to Declare that I have a Personal Relationship with my Creator and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. You have no idea of the Beauty of my Love for God nor of His Love for me. God is outside of Space and Time. He not only created the Universe and the Space surrounding it, He created Time, itself. He is the Eternal, from Everlasting to Everlasting. If you would just take a tiny bit of your time on Earth to reflect upon God's Love for you, instead of putting on that atheist TV show then you and that sidekick of yours could have a Personal Relationship with Him, too.

— Waiting for Glory,
Johnson City, OR

Dear Waiting,

A reality check is definitely called for. It is amazing how some people can fool themselves into making outrageous statements. In your case, maybe it is all of those capital letters that you are so generous with. The old "God is outside of space and time" claim is a prime example. I have yet had a single believer tell me how it is that one can have a so-called "personal relationship" with a being not of this space or this time. How does one form any relationship with another that one cannot see, touch, sense or have a two-way communication with? An owner is closer to his goldfish in a living room tank than with anything outside of the space and time that you and I share.

— Jerry

I do not understand why you atheists are so offended by the words "In God We Trust." I notice that you will accept money with those words boldly printed on the back. Our courtrooms often have the same words on the wall behind the judge. Even the director of the Central New York ACLU is quoted as saying "It's a mere secular statement. It is a statement that there is a higher law that we must obey. It is a tradition with our court system that is not tied to a religious belief. It doesn't say that you are being judged by my deity, neither is it put up as a moral or religious statement in any way."

So, why don't you just put this behind you and move on? Remember, this is America and the majority rules.

— A Curious Christian

Dear Curious,

Do we both speak the same language? The simple fact is that the words "secular" and "religious" have directly opposite meanings. To say that the phrase "In God We Trust" is a secular statement is oxymoronic in the truest sense. To add that "...neither is it put up for a moral or religious statement in any way," is a fine example of doublespeak. I am amazed that anyone might consider that such statements are out to make the atheists feel any better. The truth is that neither atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, humanists nor rationalists are consulted about how they see this issue. No survey is taken as to how non-believers feel about religious slogans being posted in public places. The well-known

Judge Roy Moore case is directly in point. He was removed from office for refusing to obey a court order to remove his 5,000 pound, religious slogan-covered rock from the lobby of the justice building. The Moore case makes clear that it is improper and illegal for public buildings to advertise God-belief. But the point of this discussion is to see how this affects non-religious folks—most of whom would prefer to accept money without religious graffiti.

Not to paint everyone with a broad brush, but many Bible-believers want to post God slogans on every square foot of visible public surface. The most important thought that I can add is that our beloved U.S. Constitution is based upon protecting the rights of minorities. Generally speaking, the majority needs no protection. And please, do not talk to me about majority rule. No matter how large a majority might decide that every wall of every public building will be adorned with "In God We Trust," it would still be illegal and unconstitutional. Look at the last presidential election — certainly the majority did not rule in that event because our Constitution said otherwise.

— Jerry

Join us for lively discussions and good times at our weekly meetings, held every Tuesday night, 7:30 PM at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland.

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Join United States Atheists!

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www.unitedstatesatheists.com

I am an Atheist and would like to join United States Atheists.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: () _____

E-mail: _____

If you provide your e-mail address we will add you to our e-mail list to keep you updated on USA news and events. If you do **not** wish to be added to the list, please check this box:

Your personal information will be used only for United States Atheists purposes and will not be sold or shared with other organizations.

I would like to help out financially. Enclosed is a charitable donation:

Student or Low Income (\$15) Basic (\$40) Couple (\$60)

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Please make check or money order payable to United States Atheists and mail to:

United States Atheists

6514 SE Foster Rd.

Portland, OR 97206-4659

You may also join at any of our regular meetings, held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 at the above address. Contributions are also gratefully accepted at our meetings.

United States Atheists is a 501(c)(3) educational charity run by volunteers. Donations are tax-deductible. Consult a licensed tax expert for details on how it would apply in your tax situation.

Critical Thinker March/April 2004

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