



April 2006

SIN CITY SECULARIST

Official newsletter of The Las Vegas Freethought Society

Volume 1, Issue 2

The Las Vegas Freethought Society (LVFS) is an autonomous nonprofit, educational organization that serves as a forum for freethinkers - atheists, agnostics, humanists and other like-minded individuals in the Las Vegas area.

We promote freethought as a viable alternative to mystical and theistic belief systems.

We promote the Jeffersonian principle of separation of religion and government, the rights of nonreligious people in our society, free inquiry and thought, a naturalistic view of the universe, a reasoned criticism of supernaturalism and a reason-based, secular ethos.

Our membership is open to all like-minded people without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, or political or other affiliations.

Our membership includes people who maintain a variety of differing views on political and other topics, but all agree that one can live a meaningful, happy, productive and ethical life without superstitions.

<http://www.lvfs.org>

P.O. Box 19146
Las Vegas, NV
89123

Local Events

- **April 15, 2006 at new time 11:00 a.m.—LVFS Membership Meeting**
- **April 18, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.—Atheist Meetup**



John Farley, Physics Professor at UNLV, will speak to us about The Ozone Hole, The Greenhouse Effect, and Global Warming: Science, Skepticism, Power and Politics.

Join us afterwards at Ricardo's (Decatur and Flamingo).

- **April 16, 2006 at 2:00 p.m.—HALVASON meeting**

Join our friends at the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada for their monthly meeting. For details, visit <http://www.halvason.org>.

- **April 18, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.—Atheist Meetup**

Meet other local atheists and freethinkers for conversation and friendship! Come to an Atheists Meetup to discuss atheism-related beliefs and philosophies and consider spiritual and religious influence in America.

The Atheist Meetup is held at Jason's Deli located at 3910 S. Maryland Parkway (North of Flamingo Rd. and South of The Boulevard Mall).

For more information on the Las Vegas Atheist Meetup Group visit:

<http://atheists.meetup.com/30/>

For more information on Meetup please visit:

<http://www.meetup.com/>

- **April 23, 2006 — AIDS Walk**

See page 4 for details.

From the Sin City Secularist Staff



Rob Pickthall, Content Editor

Jenn Adams, Layout Editor

LVFS-Editors@yahoo.com

The second issue sure did sneak up on us. Hope you enjoy it. Our own Brandon Muller contributed the main article from musings he had previously written for *Skeptic* magazine. We've also included an array of news articles and media items of freethought interest. Thanks very much to everyone who shared article links. Please continue to keep your eyes open and email us with anything you find.

Watch your email for a Bar and Grill Night to be scheduled later in April.

From the Desktop of LVFS's President



Clark Adams
 President, Las Vegas Freethought Society
clark@lvfs.org

It's been a great month for the Las Vegas Freethought Society. We have about 40 members now - not too shabby for an organization that has only been fully functional for a couple of months! We also are unique in that, to my knowledge anyway, we have the lowest median age of any non-student freethought group around. I would estimate that our median age is about 35 to 40. A typical atheist, humanist or freethought group has a median age of probably 60 to 65, or even older.



We also had two great speakers last month. Professor Mehran Tamadonfar, Ph.D., chair of the Political Science Department at UNLV, spoke at our regular meeting on Middle East and Islamic politics. This was an enlightening and extremely topical presentation. It gave us a lot to talk about after the meeting over egg rolls at Chang's.



Last week, Margaret Downey, or "Margaret Downey Junior" as Penn Jillette calls her, spoke to LVFS and members of Halvason on the Boy Scout bigotry, and their use of government money to promote such bigotry. She was joined by Teresa Harris and her son Jake to give a local angle on this issue. The following morning, Margaret was a guest on Penn Jillette's national radio show and will be featured on this week's episode of Penn & Teller: Bullshit!



LVFS member Matt Ladwig also launched a "Godless in Vegas" group on Myspace. He's already attracted over 80 Myspacers to it. There are a lot of younger atheists in Las Vegas, and Myspace is one place to find them. We are planning a "Godless in Vegas" Myspace/LVFS party on 6/6/06, treating the superstitious date with appropriate whimsy. Stay tuned for more info on that.

Next month should also be a great month for LVFS. We have a great speaker, Dr. John Farley, who will address us at our regular meetings. I've heard Dr. Farley speak before and he was excellent. I, unfortunately, will miss his presentation this time as I will be speaking at the Atheist Alliance International/Secular Student Alliance joint convention in Kansas City. This month, we also will be participating on Penn & Teller's team in the annual Las Vegas AIDS walk. This issue contains more information on Dr. Farley and the AIDS walk.

I look forward to seeing you at an LVFS event!



Brandon Muller is a local atheist and up and coming comedian. From 2003 to 2005, Brandon wrote a humor column for *Skeptic* magazine (<http://www.skeptic.com>) titled "Demon Haunted Times." It was an Onion-type news report dealing with paranormal topics. The following was reprinted with Brandon's gracious permission. For more of Brandon's comedic brilliance visit <http://www.brandonmuller.com>.

Demon Haunted Times from *Skeptic* magazine Vol. 11 No. 4

God Offers Human Race on eBay

GOLDEN PALACE, HEAVEN—The creator of the cosmos put the entire human race for sale last week on eBay. God, who created the species just 10,000 years ago, says he never thought he'd sell what many consider the pinnacle of his creation.

"I didn't think anyone would be crazy enough to buy them," admitted God. "Then I saw a bidder pay \$28,000 for a picture of my son breaking apart a grilled cheese sandwich at the Last Supper. That's when I knew anything could be sold online."

Or so he thought. Despite the opening price of \$0.01, there have been no bids thus far. The 7 day listing ends Sunday.

"I don't want to just throw them away in the garbage," said God. "I won't even charge for shipping and handling."

Initially, eBay pulled the auction thinking it was a joke. But after a few emails, God convinced them the auction was legitimate.

"I know they want to protect buyers, but c'mon, I have a 99% positive feedback rating!" proclaimed God. "The only negative comments I have are from delinquent buyers who wanted a free gift, but didn't want to pay for it."

Now into his late infinities, God no longer has the patience to deal with human beings.

"Why should I put up with this?" asked God while holding up the latest ratings for the hit TV reality show *Religious Idol*. "I place them in charge of all my creation and all they want to do is watch wanna-be cult leaders compete against each other while some guy with a British accent lobs vicious critiques."

After waiting thousands of years for human value to rise, God is ready to move on.

"Some of them don't even believe in me," complained God. "And the ones who do get all the specifics wrong! Only the Reorganized Church of the Reformed Latter-Seventh-Day Hare Krishna Saints of Muslim Science comes anywhere close."

There are a few humans God says he will miss like the one who played the androgynous character "Pat" on the TV show *Saturday Night Live*.

"Letting go of him or her won't be easy," confessed God. God maintains he does not regret creating humans, despite their shortcomings.

"I'd been creating nonstop for six literal days," recalled God. "I was plumb out of ideas until I saw some dust on the ground and got inspired. Afterwards, I was so exhausted I had to retire. That was pre-Atkins, so I wasn't in very good shape."

The human race isn't the only thing God is selling. Other auctions in God's eBay store include the Horsehead Nebula, thunderbolts, and an autographed LP of The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*.

Once humans are sold, God plans to breathe a soul into another species.

"I've always had a fondness for beetles, but there are too many species to choose from," mused God. "Then again, why start with something organic? Maybe I'll breathe life into a leisure suit or a '57 Chevy. At least they won't eat forbidden fruit."

News of the online auction sparked heavy trading in planet Earth stock (COSMOSTOCK: GAIA) which closed the week up 67% at \$4.52.

Here is the item description from eBay: "You are bidding on the species *Homo sapiens*. No Reserve! SOLD AS IS. Only wiped out once. Made in my own image. 100% intelligently designed with only minor flaws such as wisdom teeth, male baldness, varicose veins, and the back, knee and hip joints. At the time, I thought it was good. Serious bidders only. No warranty (voided in Eden). California and Mount Olympus residents add 8.25% sales tax. Seller prefers praise, but will accept PayPal."



The 16th annual AIDS Walk will take place, Sunday, April 23, with all donations benefiting AFAN - Aid For AIDS Nevada. For 22 years AFAN has provided assistance to individuals and families living with HIV/AIDS. The walk will take place in downtown Las Vegas, starting on 3rd Street between Ogden and Stewart. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. with the walk starting at 9:00 a.m.

For the fourth year in a row Penn & Teller (<http://www.pennandteller.com>) will serve as the Grand Marshals of the AFAN AIDS Walk. LVFS and the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada (<http://www.halvason.org>) have a sub-team "Penn and Teller (Freethought)" under the Penn & Teller parent group. By joining Penn and Teller's team, the "Bad Boys of Magic" themselves will match every dollar we raise.

If you raise (or donate) \$50, you will receive two tickets to Penn and Teller's show and an official 2006 P&T AIDS Walk t-shirt. If you raise (or donate) \$250 you will receive four tickets to Penn and Teller's show, The t-shirt and a backstage meet 'n greet.

Signup sheets will be available at the next LVFS meeting. For more information go to <http://www.afanlv.org> or email clark@lvfs.org.



International (ir)Rational News

Afghan Christian convert granted asylum in Italy

From Yahoo! News, Wednesday, March 29, 2006

An Afghan man who chose to convert to Christianity was sentenced to die for the transgression. Under international pressure, authorities in Afghanistan released him. He was granted asylum in Italy.

<http://tinyurl.com/gra8n>

Indian 'witchcraft' family killed

From BBC News (online), Sunday, March 19, 2006

A family in northeastern India was beheaded for allegedly practicing the Dark Arts.

<http://tinyurl.com/gezx4>

When solar fears eclipse reason

From BBC News (online), Tuesday, March 28, 2006

It seems solar eclipses can still be a source of irrational reactions.

<http://tinyurl.com/p4u6j>

National (ir)Rational News

Plaintiffs say Air Force recruiters told to use religion as tool

From USA Today, Thursday, March 9, 2006

Five plaintiffs have filed suit against the Air Force claiming that they were required to use religion in recruiting.
<http://tinyurl.com/m9ptj>

Huge crowds extend Darwin exhibit in New York

From Yahoo! News, Wednesday, March 22, 2006

A Darwin Exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History was recently extended due to "overwhelming public support."

<http://tinyurl.com/khqto>

Study: Praying Won't Affect Heart Patients

From Yahoo! News, Thursday, March 30, 2006

A \$2.4 million study funded by the Templeton Foundation found that prayer does not help heart patients recover.
<http://tinyurl.com/ojcr2>

U of M study finds atheists are least trusted

From The StarTribune (Minneapolis, MN), Friday, March 24, 2006

'nuff said.

<http://tinyurl.com/rtk26>

National Events

- ◆ **Atheist Alliance International Convention**, Kansas City, MO, April 14 -16, 2006. Speakers include Julia Sweeney, Lori Lipman Brown, Hector Avalos, Paul Mirecki and LVFS' Clark Adams. <http://atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.html>
 - ◆ **American Atheists Convention**, San Antonio, TX, April 14 -16, 2006. Speakers include Michael Shermer, Robert Dreyfuss and Eddie Tabash. <http://www.atheists.org/convention>
 - ◆ **American Humanist Association**, 65th Annual Conference, Tampa, FL, May 11-14, 2006. Speakers include: Julia Sweeney, Stephen Pinker, Michael Newdow and Herbert Hauptman. <http://www.americanhumanist.org/conference/>
 - ◆ **Iceland Atheist Conference**, Reykjavik, Iceland, June 24-25, 2006. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, Julia Sweeney, Dan Barker and Margaret Downey. <http://www.samt.is/conference/>
 - ◆ **Camp Quest West**, Camp Watanda (north of Sacramento, CA), July 15-21, 2006. If you know of any young people (ages 8 to 17) that are eager for a great camping experience, and would delight in exercising their critical thinking in the process, then help them enroll at Camp Quest West. The inaugural, and only session this year, runs from July 15 - 21, 2006 at Camp Watanda, about 70 miles north of Sacramento. **April 30th is the last day for early registration**, at the fantastically low price of just \$360 per camper. If there is still space available, it will be \$460 thereafter. Have your prospective camper check out the details at <http://www.campquestwest.org>
-

Freethought in Media

Television:

The creators of South Park, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, had a falling out with Isaac Hayes, the voice of the character Chef, over an episode that lampooned Scientology. Mr. Hayes, a Scientologist, left the show and the first episode of the latest season of South Park addressed the issue with the usual biting wit.

South Park 'battling' Scientology

From BBC News (online), Saturday, March 18, 2006

<http://tinyurl.com/r8b82>

South Park gets revenge on Chef

From BBC News (online), Thursday, March 23, 2006

<http://tinyurl.com/ffmuz>

Blasphemous Humor:

Steve Benson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning U.S. editorial cartoonist for *The Arizona Republic*. Benson is the grandson of former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and LDS prophet/president Ezra Taft Benson. Late in 1993, Benson very publicly left the LDS Church after claiming that its leadership was covering up his grandfather's senility and allowing church members to believe Ezra Taft Benson was still in charge of the church's day-to-day affairs. To read more about Steve's departure from the LDS church, read his article "Good-bye to God":

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/benson2.shtml>

Check out Steve's March 26, 2006 cartoon in the Arizona Republic spoofing Tom Cruise's reaction to South Park's scientology episode:

<http://tinyurl.com/z7jau>

Steve's most recent cartoon (and an archive of previous cartoons) is available at:

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/opinions/benson/>

Radio:

Check out Penn Jillette's radio show weekdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Spike 1140 AM. For more information go to:

<http://penn.freem.com/>

Internet:

Austin Cline's Agnosticism/Atheism site on About.com has some great information. One can even sign up for a newsletter or some informative online courses.

<http://atheism.about.com/>
