

Hard CoR News

The insider bulletin of the United Coalition of Reason

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Local/Regional Conference News

Check out the bumper crop of reports from seven local, state, and regional conferences that were held since our last newsletter!

Pittsburgh, PA (August 29-31, 2014)

Following in the wake of UnitedCoR's successful litigation against the Pittsburgh-area transit system, the 2014 Pennsylvania State Atheist/Humanist Conference offered a stellar lineup of speakers covering a wide range of topics. These included John Loftus on his famous outsider test for faith, Sarah Haider of [Ex-Muslims of North America](#) on Islam and misogyny, Faisal Saeed Al Mutar on the realities for atheists in the Middle East, Biologist Jerry Coyne on the incompatibility between science and religion, photographer Chris Johnson sharing images from A Better Life, his coffee-table book for atheists, FFRF President Annie Laurie Gaylor on the "Battle between Church and State," Luis Granados telling about an important freethinker from the book Damned Good Company: Twenty Rebels Who Bucked The God Experts, philosopher Andy Norman revealing "How a Little Conceptual Jiu-Jitsu Will Help Us Win the Culture War," [Vyckie Garrison](#) sharing her experiences with the Quiverfull Christian movement, and UnitedCoR National Director Fred Edwards speaking on the work of UnitedCoR and conducting a two-hour media-training seminar. Also featured were music, comedy, a mentalist, and a karaoke night.



Rapid City, SD (August 30, 2014)



This year marked our Second Annual South Dakota Conference of Reason, hosted in Rapid City by the Black Hills Freethinkers. The speakers were all South Dakotans and spoke from their individual areas of expertise including a professional fossil hunter and a Professor of Philosophy and Biology from South Dakota State University. The President of [Black Hills Freethinkers](#), Josh Combs, entertained and informed the conference goers with a breakdown of the miss-applied quotes from the annual Hobby Lobby newspaper ads. South DakotaCoR Coordinator, Eric Novotny, delivered an informative address about key issues within the South Dakota legislature. Then the keynote address was delivered from the president of [Black Hills Center for Equality](#), David Patton.

After the conference, attendees climbed to the top of Dinosaur Park in Rapid City. The park is atop one of the largest hills there and provided all with one of the best views one could have astride a concrete dinosaur! While

everyone was there, a heavy storm quickly moved in from 20 miles away. Everyone could see dozens of lightning strikes as the storm came closer. Their theodicy joke was that if ever some deity wanted to strike dead all of the openly-professing atheists in South Dakota, here was the chance: just aim at the brontosaurus and all would be gone. However, after tempting the deities that these unbelievers declined, they took their picture and left the Park just as the torrential rain started to fall.

The Third Annual South Dakota Conference of Reason, to be held in 2015, will be held in Sioux Falls, hosted by the [Sixouland Freethinkers](#). The speakers' lineup is almost complete!

--Reported by Eric Novotny, [South Dakota CoR](#)
South DakotaCoR Coordinator

Morgantown, WV (September 13, 2014)



They call it an ASH Bash because it's a fun afternoon picnic for Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists. And although it's put on by Morgantown CoR, it attracts people from all over the state of West Virginia. Some drove for hours to get there and share their food creations in this annual potpourri of pot luck. Being a picnic, it welcomes families who enjoy games, conversation, music, and poetry. The featured speaker this year was UnitedCoR National Director Fred Edwards, whose talk focused on how-to techniques for better organizing and growing of local groups. And although the weather looked ominous that Saturday in mid-September, the rain held off until the picnic was over.

Fargo, ND (September 13-14)

ZETETICON
THINK FOR YOURSELF.
 SEPTEMBER 13-14 • DOUBLEWOOD INN • FARGO, ND

- SCIENCE
- RELIGION
- HUMANITY
- HEALTHY SKEPTICISM

August Berkshire	Richard Carrier	Matt Dillahunty	Fred Edwards	Katie Kruse	PZ Myers	Beth Presswood	Aron Ra	David Silverman

ZetetiCon is the successor event to the Project 42 Freethought Conference that had been held in Fargo during September of 2010 and 2011. This first installment under the new name, held September 13-14, made everyone glad it was back. Kudos to the hard work of Great Plains Atheists and the people of Fargo CoR, who brought in the heavy-hitter speaker lineup shown above, which was matched by a significant attendance. The fact that so many were happy to congregate in the wilds of North Dakota serves to demonstrate the momentum our movement has been gathering all across the country.

New Haven, CT (September 20, 2014)



Nearly 30 people attended the Secular Leadership Summit, with representation from each coalition member organizations. Following Mike Werner's engaging workshop with tips on leading secular groups, new and renewed important connections were made between groups during a networking session. A full session of the Connecticut CoR board meeting was held, which allowed each of the groups to provide input on and celebrate the various initiatives each member group of Connecticut CoR is preparing. Each group representative gave presentations about their group, what programming and ideas they had found successful, and provided input for future initiatives and programs. Mike Werner concluded the day with a thought-provoking session about ethics.

Feedback from the attendees has been overwhelming positive, in that they felt as if the training and inter-group discussion and planning sessions immediately applied to their local challenges and successes. Several groups have committed to work together on programs, and others are planning to work together to launch a new group in the "quiet corner" of Connecticut (the northeastern corner of the state which currently does not have a secular group). We are hopeful that this event demonstrated the value of the coalition and will foster future group cooperation, and we are grateful to Mike Werner's time, expertise and training that he delivered.

--Reported by [Patrick McCann](#)
Connecticut CoR Co-Coordinator

Omaha, NE (September 19-21)



Apostacon attracted a large number of attendees during the 2014 sauciest meeting in the noodleverse. Friday afternoon workshops were conducted and delivered by Margaret Downey, Neil Carter, Matt Dillahunty, J T Eberhard, Amanda Knief who all added to the enlightening experience of the conference. Following the workshops, a dinner was hosted to celebrate Dr Neil deGrasse Tyson, who spoke during the Evening of Scientific Inquiry. A packed line-up of such as Kelly Damerow, David Silverman, Aron Ra, and Cara Santa Maria set the tone for the featured keynote speaker, Dr. Lawrence Krauss. Following Saturday's VIP Dinner with the Stars, godlessly-funny entertainment was delivered by well-loved comics Steven Hill and Eric Schwartz. To add to the conference's sauciness, attendees were invited to a three-hour "Meatball Costume Party" on Saturday. After book-signing sessions, talks by Debbie Goddard, Teresa Macbain, David Smalley and a debate between Faisal Al Mutar and C.J. Werleman, conference-goers bid each other farewell until next year.

Charlotte, NC (September 26-28)



The fourth annual Carolinas Secular Conference was held Sept. 26-28 once again in Charlotte, NC. The theme of the conference was "Diversity." Featured speakers included: writer, artist, filmmaker and Humanist activist, Steve Ahlquist; writer, blogger, and author Greta Christina; president of Black Nonbelievers, Inc., Mandisa Thomas; president of the Detroit affiliate of Black Nonbelievers Bria Crutchfield; founder of the Global Secular Humanist Movement, Secular Post and public relations director for Global Secular Organizing and Strategy Faisal Saeed Al Mutar; national director for the United Coalition of Reason Fred Edwards; president of Triangle Freethought Society Harry Shaughnessy; humanist speaker and activist Conor Robinson; executive director of Atheist Alliance America, president of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry and camp director of Camp Quest - SC Amy Monsky; political coordinator for the Center for Freethought Equality Bishop McNeill; and founder of HowStuffWorks.com, and former host of the prime time show "Factory Floor" on the National Geographic channel Marshall Brain. Entertainment was provided by Gene Elliot. During the awards dinner banquet, Bria Crutchfield gave the keynote address, activist Joseph McDaniel Stewart received the "Carolinas Freethinker of the Year" award, and Madison Kimrey received the first "Rising Light of Reason" award. Pictures from the conference can be found [HERE](#).

CoR of the Month



UnitedCoR has begun featuring a local “CoR of the Month” in the slideshow on our home page. Last month we featured San Diego CoR, and this month we are featuring Butte County CoR. We would like to feature your CoR in the future. We are asking each coalition coordinator (or someone representing your CoR) to send us the story of your CoR and any images you might have to help tell it. Group shots of members of your CoR (possibly taken in front of your billboard) will also help (but please be sure no one in the pictures minds having their image online).

To read about the CoRs featured so far—and to see the type of thing we are looking for—please see the page featuring San Diego CoR [HERE](#) and the page featuring Butte County CoR [HERE](#).

Send your CoR’s story and pictures to Joseph at Joseph-Stewart@live.com.

CoR People

Fred Edwards



With Woody Harrelson at the Sundance Film Festival and speaking at the AHA national conference

Fred first became active in the secular movement in the late 1960s and became president of the Humanist

Association of San Diego at the end of the 1970s. Also at that time he served as West Coast regional coordinator for the American Humanist Association, helping develop and advise its local chapters in California, Oregon, and Washington. Following this he was hired as national administrator and then executive director of the American Humanist Association, serving from 1980 through 1999. He was also editor of the *Humanist* magazine and president of Camp Quest. Then in March 2009, a month after the organization's founding, Fred became national director of the United Coalition of Reason.

Now he's moving into a new role: that of director of planned giving for the Humanist Foundation of the American Humanist Association. This half-time job will involve him connecting with AHA members to encourage them to think "beyond the grave" and realize that, since they probably won't spend their last nickel with their last breath, they will leave something for others after they are gone. And since they are doing that, then while they provide for the future of their families (their "genes") they will also want to provide something for the future of their values (their "memes"). Their families won't likely miss some small percentage of the estate going to the advancement of humanism, but it will make a big difference to the humanist movement.

Fred won't be leaving UnitedCoR, however. His hours will merely be reduced. With the establishment of Jason Heap as UnitedCoR's national coordinator, taking care of the details of maintaining a network of 76 coalitions, Fred can stay focused on the bigger picture. And the newest element of that bigger picture is UnitedCoR's "circuit leader" program. This program will provide matching funding to help local groups in the community of reason combine their financial efforts to hire a professional organizer-administrator-leader to manage their affairs. It will bring experienced leadership to local secular communities, thereby professionalizing our movement and building new career opportunities.

If your local group, in concert with others, has wanted to hire a professional leader but was unable to afford it, please contact Fred Edwards right away for details. Only three of these leaders will be put in place this year. So the time to act is now. Email Fred at Fredwords@UnitedCoR.org.

Whispers in the CoRner

Three weeks ago, Jase started his campaign to phone-up every local CoR coordinator to see how things are going. Here's your chance to eavesdrop on some of these conversations and see if they give you some ideas for your CoR:

"We didn't know it was possible for our local CoR to rent the county courthouse's lawn to hold an event. A few paperwork chases and a nominal fee, and we were in."



"We wanted to do more social justice work in our community, but weren't sure who would welcome our volunteering. We talked to Ethical Culture and UU, and got involved with helping their Meals on Wheels program. We enjoyed it, and met some great folks out there!"

"Local food banks are always short of volunteers. We've been such regulars that they call us first to take care of things. We've even got people like Wal-Mart contacting us to come and collect a couple of tons of canned food to distribute to the community."

"We've put so much emphasis into SMART Recovery that the local AA groups are almost non-existent. You know: recovery without all the extra nonsense of religious guilt. It's fun to know that churches refer people to us rather than to their usual help societies."

"Our community has an interfaith dialogue committee. We wanted to get our point across to them, so we asked to join. Yeah, it took a while, but now that

committee is called 'Interfaith and Life-Stance,' which recognizes that we exist in the community and have a strong voice and perspective to give. When we want to do things together as a combined effort, we're happy to work alongside others. But I promise you, we pull no punches when we represent who we are, what we believe and why we have these beliefs. The committee still hasn't completely accepted our representation after two years, but at least we have a spot at the table, which is better than being completely ignored."

"When the Sunday Assembly launched last week, they had over 80 people show up for their first meeting. That's 80 more people who also now know of the work of our local CoR, because Sunday Assembly is one of our cooperating groups."

Local CoR Social Media

If your local CoR has its own Twitter or Facebook accounts, please remember to link them with UnitedCoR: [facebook.com/CoalitionOfReason](https://www.facebook.com/CoalitionOfReason) for Facebook and @UnitedCoR for [Twitter](https://twitter.com/UnitedCoR). We would also like to ask you to link in with the Secular Directory's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/seculardirectory> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/SecularDir>.

Reach out to each other's CoR by linking your Facebook and Twitter accounts with them to help spread interest in what each other is doing. An event that works well for your CoR might just be the event that helps another CoR take off and flourish. Further details on Twitter and Facebook links with other CoRs will be available soon!

Road Sign Vandalized!



On August 25, 2014, Butte County CoR's coordinator George Gold noticed that the Adopt-a-Highway road sign for Atheists of Butte County had been vandalized. Someone pasted the phrase "God loves" above the printed words, "Atheists of Butte County." This was promptly reported to the California Department of Transportation and covered by local media as well as by UnitedCoR. Although it might seem like two words on a sign, this isn't the first time that the nontheistic community of Butte County have been victims of criminal activities. In 2013 someone pasted the word "Pray" on the pole holding up the road sign. And in December 2012 the billboard placed by the Butte County CoR that bore the slogan: "Don't believe in God? Join the club." had the word "Don't" cut out of the vinyl, as well as part of the local CoR's web address. All of this has been directed towards the ButteCoR, whose commitment to their local community is demonstrated by exceeding the required litter pick-up sessions! The full story of Butte County CoR's struggle has been covered through local media and on the [UnitedCoR website](#).

If your local CoR suffers any vandalism, please take photographic evidence, write down some notes of what happened and contact UnitedCoR's office for support and assistance.

Secular Invocations in Chico, CA and Tavares, FL

In response to the disappointing United States Supreme Court ruling in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the Humanist Society launched a new program, "[Secular Invocations](#)," on May 5, 2014. The Secular Invocations program will provide resources for atheists and humanists to deliver secular invocations during legislative meetings. The [website](#) provides sample secular invocations and an interactive map to find a humanist who can deliver an invocation in one's local area--although a person does not have to be a celebrant to deliver an invocation. While this is a new program, there are already more than 150 individuals approved to give secular invocations, and the program is actively seeking to bolster this number. Contact [Rachael Berman](#), the Grassroots and Celebrant Program Coordinator at the American Humanist Association, for further information, including sample secular invocations and guidance for how to apply to your local government to deliver the convocations as a representative of the secular community.

This program has already experienced overwhelming success, as nearly 25 secular invocations have been delivered since May 2014, with some already in preparation for 2015. It's important for us to consider these secular invocations in light of responses of disapproval ("[Removal of the prayer? Wow, shame on you](#)") as well as [overwhelming support](#) in some areas.

Leadership Needs

Are you an interested volunteer able to help one of these local CoRs? Learn what's needed and how you can help.

[Detroit CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[New Mexico CoR](#) (Coordinator)

[San Francisco / Oakland CoR](#) (Coordinator)

If you are interested, please contact UnitedCoR for more information and for help with leading a local CoR.

CoRrelated Groups



Tuesday, November 11, 2014, will be a very special Veterans Day as we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I, "the war to end all wars." Many local CoRs have asked for ideas regarding projects that can unite their communities, and we can think of no better way than to remember the service and sacrifices made by the women, men and families of our armed forces. By reaching out to a local chapter of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers ([MAAF](#)) and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation ([MRFF](#)), you can discover national and local contacts as well as gain some ideas to support our military with projects such as [adopting a local unit](#) or [Bowling for the Troops](#).

For more information, contact the MRFF: info@militaryreligiousfreedom.org, (800) 736-5109 and the MAAF: community@militaryatheists.org, (202) 656-MAAF (6223).

A Season for Reason



We are approaching the 2014 winter holiday season when many of us will celebrate HumanLight, Winter Solstice, Festivus or just acknowledge the changing of the seasons. This is also the time of the year when people of good cheer in the general population tend to become protective of public land around local courthouses, municipal buildings and public parks. Religious citizens have long assumed that those tax-supported areas are reserved for displaying only their traditional religious symbols. They ignore, and at times passionately avoid including, any other minority winter symbols--leaving out the diversity of a community.

Many local United Coalition of Reason affiliates have expressed a desire to have the nontheistic community included in public winter holiday displays. They seek to emphasize the diversity within the secular community as well as to make their presence known. The UnitedCoR national office encourages local CoRs to consider using a unique and lovely winter nontheistic symbol, the [Tree of](#)

[Knowledge](#). The Tree of Knowledge is a perfect opportunity to unify your local CoR at this time of year and will provide a visual reminder that the secular community is growing.

The Tree of Knowledge was designed in 2007 by Margaret Downey, founder and president of the Freethought Society. In 2008, the FS became one of the first co-founders and members of PhillyCoR in 2008.

Tree of Knowledge ornaments are laminated color copies of popular books that mean so much to the nontheistic, skeptic and rationalist community. When fully decorated, this tree stands as a visual symbol of communal relationships between theists and nontheists alike. Knowledge, after all, is what is responsible for humanity's greatest accomplishments.

Winter is the perfect time to celebrate science, history, real-life heroes, philosophy, social advancement and art. On the FS [webpage](#) you can view photographs, a [YouTube film](#) and even print out a [step-by-step](#)

[manual](#) on how to make a local Tree of Knowledge a great success.

SPECIAL OFFER:

UnitedCoR is ready to financially help support a CoR Tree of Knowledge project. Should a local CoR want to purchase ornaments, and signage, UnitedCoR will help defray some of the costs. **This is a first-come-first-serve offer!**

Local CoRs have the option of purchasing fully-laminated ornaments direct from FS. The cost of ornaments are \$1 to \$5. A large tree would require 50 to 80 ornaments. Additionally, Downey recommends that local CoRs purchase a laminator (found at many stores for about \$20) and make a party out of creating ornaments. Individual group members can provide two color copies of their favorite books (unfolded) which will then be used to create ornaments for The Tree of Knowledge. (Samples available upon request through FS). "The Tree of Knowledge project unified the Freethought Society," Downey stated.

Downey went on to say, "As we created the ornaments, we became stronger and stronger in our goal to demand equal representation in the community during the winter season. The Tree of Knowledge gave us all a sense of pride and belonging. The project bonded our members more than any other endeavor."

UnitedCoR is highly recommending this project and the FS website provides a great resource for interested groups. The legal department of the American Humanist Association is available for consultation should any public area placement difficulties arise.

FREE Online Resources to Help Grow Your Local CoR

<http://www.meetup.com> With this website, you can advertise and attract people with similar interests to your local CoR. For instance, you could use "atheist," "skeptic" or "freethinker" to describe and advertise your local CoR's interest. Other people who use Meetup will then be able to search for these descriptors, and your local CoR will be listed. Meetup also has an app which lets you put your group's activities into people's hands even quicker. Estimated time to create a Meetup listing: 4 or 5 minutes.

Here is a wonderful example of a group within a local CoR's Meetup page that has been generating a lot of interest within their local community: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Humanist-Community-of-Ventura-County/>

<http://SecularDirectory.org> You can visit this website and make sure your group can be found by searching for groups in your area. If your group is listed, you can sign in and ask to take over management of your group's contents on the site. If your group isn't already listed, you can sign in and submit your group to be added to the search database.

<http://lanyrd.com> This website is dedicated to conferences. Local CoRs can list their conferences on Lanyrd.com with descriptions to advertise the conference by subject. Lanyrd.com also allows you to put information such as your website, Facebook and Twitter accounts to allow people to contact you for further information. Estimated time to create a Lanyrd listing: 2 or 3 minutes.

<http://conferencehound.com> Similar to Lanyrd.com, ConferenceHound.com is another resource for listin