



Humanists Of Idaho, BUUF Humanists,
Sages, Idaho Society of Reason

Free Thought

sponsored by Humanists of Idaho

December 2017

HOI President's Message

December has arrived, and 2017 is rapidly coming to a close. It has been an interesting year, with lots of changes and trying new things.

The year began with the Legislative watch. In Idaho, lawmakers often make laws based upon religion or emotional thought processes, rather than common sense and what is best for Idahoans, so we try to keep an eye on the legislative log, and encourage fellow Humanists to show up when the legislature tries to take a wrong turn.

Big this year were legislative efforts to ban Sharia law from Idaho, a failed attempt to get them to fund the Medicaid gap.

We also failed in our attempt to get the Idaho legislature to remove the religious shield law, which protects parents from prosecution when they let their children die of medical neglect, for religious reasons.

We only put the booth up twice in 2017 – PRIDE and Goddessfest. Both events were a lot of fun and had high attendance.

We didn't do Hyde Park this year, due to changes in their rules regarding parking, and the inconvenience that caused vendors.

Hopefully we can get out a little more often in 2018.

The Secular Student Alliance at Boise State is currently inactive, which affects local events, in that they were able to provide free meeting spaces/presentation rooms, as well as advertising in the school paper.

The fate of the SSA is in limbo, as they wait for a new leader to step up and take the reins.

This June, Humanists of Idaho and Idaho Society of Reason merged. With the breakup of the Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason and the fact that HOI and ISOR had a fair amount of crossover membership, the merger seemed to make sense.

Two big things that changed after the merger are the way we handle board meetings, and that we ended use of the conference room at the Flicks Theater for speakers/discussions.

The merger road has been a bit bumpy at times, but things are settling down, and we are all looking forward to the new and improved group, and exciting new directions, in 2018.

All events are still calendared at our Meetup page, and we now announce events on our Facebook page as well.

Getting big turnouts for events is a primary goal, so check out our online sources, and drop in on an event when you can.

Our next big event is the Winter Holiday Party, December 8th. Check out Meetup or Facebook for details.

For anyone who may be interested, we have one board position – Charitable Coordinator - that is vacant. Any paid member of Humanists of Idaho is eligible, and the board can fill the position temporarily until the next election, May 2018.

Anyone interested in this position can contact me directly at CelebrantVan@gmail.com.

D G Van Curen. President, Humanists of Idaho

ROOMS OF OUR OWN

Current Idaho Society of Reason leaders have a vision, a desire for a separate, independent place for the free-thought communities. They mention a community center in Denver as a model. In the history of Humanists of Idaho, the first proposal for something similar came from then-president Chris Struble.

Freethought Center Working Group July 20, 2000

In talking to a number of atheists and humanists in Idaho in the past year, one of the sentiments I hear again and again is, "We need a place of our own." When I explore this idea with other freethinkers, the place people envision has certain common elements.

It is a place where atheists, humanists and skeptics can come together in community and be accepted. It is a place where we can teach our children about our history, our heroes, and our values. Marriages and commitment ceremonies can be performed. It serves as a meeting facility, office and focal point for our activities in the community.

Such a place can make a huge difference, because once established, it provides increased legitimacy and credibility in the community, which can in turn attract more members. Polls tell us that about ten percent of the population in this country has no religious belief. That represents a huge untapped potential, even for Idaho.

Humanists of Idaho set up a Permanent Building Fund years ago to raise money to purchase or build such a facility in the future. However, very little money has actually been raised, and the goal of having such a facility is at least twenty years away if we continue to pursue it on our own.

Last year, when I attended the Rational Living conference in Oregon, I was impressed by the ability of five organizations to work together to put on that event and attract over one hundred people from throughout the northwest to attend. The recent solstice picnic was also impressive in its ability to attract people from different organizations. I am convinced that it is possible for freethought groups to work together even on fairly large projects. The goal of a place of our own may be reached by drawing on combined energy.

Idaho Society of Reason has joined Humanists of Idaho.

Meetings are held 2nd Sundays in Boise, 4th Sundays Nampa, starting with a noon potluck. Watch for any changes and details at

<https://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho/>

Objectivists meet last Wednesdays at 6pm, varying restaurants. Contact Tim Scharff, scharffdesignworks@icloud.com

I propose a joint working group of Idaho atheists and humanists, consisting of 2-3 people from each group. By the end of one year they can develop a realistic business plan for raising funds to purchase or build a free-thought center in Idaho that would meet the needs of both organizations. Once completed, the business plan would be submitted to the membership of both organizations, and if accepted in accordance with bylaws, implemented.

Some of the questions the working group will have to answer:

Should the fund be jointly administered by both groups, or should a new entity, perhaps a non profit organization directed by both groups, be set up to administer the fund? Should the same entity administer the free-thought center once it is set up? If set up as a separate entity, would this entity have access to the mailing lists of both groups?

In the event that a substantial amount of money is raised, but not enough for a permanent center, could money be used to rent a facility? Could the fund be used for other joint projects?

If new freethought groups emerge, will they use the facility?

What control or support might we expect from our respective national organizations?

Where should it be located? What should the center be called?

What can we learn from the successes or failures of other groups with similar facilities?

Chris Struble, President HOI in 2000



Humanists of Idaho, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. See the meetup page or Facebook for calendar of events.

Officers for Humanists of Idaho

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Beginnings: Humanists of Idaho

from HOI archives, research by Jeanette Ross

In 1990 or so, two men began investigating the possibility of forming a local humanist group. They sent for and received helpful information from the American Humanist Association, as well as from other organizations.

The first meeting was held in the Boise home of Tim Teater, October 10, 1991. Looking at their options, they decided that the most appropriate association, for them, was as charter members of the American Humanist Association.

Next, those attending elected officers, with Tim as President and Mary Fran Groll as secretary. [We have the records that are my sources because Mary Fran Groll not only continued as secretary for nearly ten years; she also wrote many of the statements used to describe Humanism for the larger public.]

According to Mary Fran's report of the meeting, which was soon published in summary in the *Idaho Statesman*, monthly meetings were planned for the first Thursday of each month, to be held at 5008 Pierce Park, in the fireplace room of the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. According to the letter sent by the new secretary, BUUF was an appropriate meeting place given that a solid majority of the organizers were Unitarians.

The group jumped into action from the start. They appointed not only a full slate of officers but also a public information officer to publicize meetings as widely as possible. They contacted the Secretary of State for rules of incorporation as a non-profit and ordered a sample set of bylaws from AHA.

"Various other items were discussed such as publishing a newsletter, collecting an informational library, getting meeting notices in the paper, etc.

"Several members expressed a strong desire to be listed under 'clubs' or interest groups rather than 'religions.' It was suggested that we incorporate a dues notice in the next mailing." And then they adjourned.

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More at www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho

Next Step: Rules and Recreation JR summarizes

At their next meeting, less than a month later, the group had a model for bylaws that they handed to their secretary for rewrite. Their small budget had covered registration with the state of Idaho; they agreed to spend another hunk to begin applying for 501c3 nonprofit status with the IRS.

"Other discussion revolved around outreach, public education, activism versus education, alliances with other groups on specific issues, putting out a newsletter.

"Fund-raising ideas included a book and/or plant sale or a booth at the local flea market.

"Outreach ideas included a luncheon with a speaker and discussion, and placing an ad or a news item in the campus newsletter."

One month later the draft copy of bylaws was discussed, amended and approved.

And one last piece of business: How legal was the common practice of using area churches as polling places? Wouldn't schools be better? The president agreed to look into the legality of this for their next meeting.

At this, they adjourned, brought out refreshments, and held what they called their first annual Solstice celebration.

RETURNING TO THE MINUTES: FOURTH MONTH

By February of 1992, sixteen paid members of HOI crowded the UU Fireside room and the group started looking for larger space; the upper meeting room at the Flicks was suggested. They appointed its first newsletter editor. Might the AHA be able to help with printing costs? They would check.

Discussion turned to their primary purpose, "education versus activism and a positive stance versus a negative one." This would be next month's topic for discussion.

March, still elbow to elbow in Unitarian space, they added a social time before each meeting.

What community needs did they see? John Harms (later to serve as president) "invited interest in supporting homeless families until they could qualify as residents of Idaho. This was thought to be too costly a project for the group at this time," says the secretary, laconically.

The secretary was asked to write to several respected national organizations to request permission to reprint articles.

The correspondence section records Mary Fran's success, with the American Humanist Association, Free Inquiry, Freethought Today, Freedom from Religion Foundation (a postcard signed by Annie Laurie!), Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Americans for Religious Liberty and the Voice of Reason all writing back to say, yes, borrow as you will, giving credit as you do.

Next month, April of 1992, a treasurer's report showed steady increase and 21 paid members. A newsletter committee began gathering member profiles to mix in with meeting notices and rabble rousing around violations of church in the business of state.

The group agreed to creating a banner in time for all who could to join the Sunday March for Reproductive Rights. A card table was to be set up with handouts available.

By May 1992 twenty people assembled in the loft of the Flicks, arriving early for food and conversation. A first historian was appointed out of the thirteen attendees.

Possible group activities: "a sign-up sheet was passed around" to volunteer at Winterhouse, Boise's homeless shelter. "Another sign-up sheet was circulated for "Paint the Town." Several promised to help protest the upcoming appearance of Oliver North in Nampa. The president described the stages of growth discussed at a recent AHA convention.

AUGUST 1992 at HOI

The energy of a start-up wavered, fewer at meetings, yet the enthusiasm and public response to a booth at Streets for People brought high interest and none of the harassment that had been feared. Full of hope, the group paid to have a booth at the Hyde Park fair.

Alas, the minutes also capture the first of what would be a recurring problem. The editor said, "It is becoming more difficult to publish a quality newsletter every month, with not enough input from members." Should they alternate a newsletter with postcard reminders for upcoming meetings? That was not settled.

Duties were shared. One person would write the regional AHA staffer to request more literature. Another drafted a letter to go to the city council, with objections to prayer at city council meetings. The secretary handed out copies of the most recent Humanist Manifesto, as preface to discussion the following month.

Two task committees were set up, one to propose activities for educational outreach, the other to investigate church and state concerns.

"Educational ideas such as having a forum, seminars, a speaker's bureau and a certified humanist counselor were suggested."

By **September 1992** a familiar pattern was emerging. Public interest was high at the Hyde Park Street fair. Sign-up sheets had 35 names expressing interest in more information; merchandise brought in \$90. But this did not lead to a jump in memberships.

The group still leaned on each other for programming, with Mary Fran offering to lead a discussion on "Humanism: Let's Know Ourselves First."

In October that same year, the group agreed to setting up a building fund, with 10% of annual dues to go into the fund. They added occasional potlucks in homes to scheduled business meetings; Pat and Dale Hall offered theirs, as did John Harms. The president's letters to AHA asking for names of possible outside speakers had led to two offers, both requiring some financial assistance from the group to make it feasible.

November 1992 report showed membership now at 29. But the Mayor had not responded to their letter regarding prayers before council meetings.

And a grim aside from the secretary led the newsletter editor to promise to find a proofreader. Added the editor: "Essentially three people have written every issue."

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1993: Social Action is Challenging for HOI

February 1993 The newly named Secular Social Sunday potlucks were thriving and two regional AHA speakers were scheduled, Naomi Sherer for spring and Gordon Stein for the fall. One member took responsibility for organizing Streets for People and Hyde Park fair. Mary Fran added more possible volunteer options, helping at Booth Memorial Hospital and Habitat for Humanity. There was also a need for helpers to read to the blind.

April 1993 was the beginning of another major effort, with the board joining ACLU as sponsors of a panel discussion at BSU. The topic: "Politics, Religion and Civil Liberties: a Clash of Values?." Stephanie Witt was moderator; Rev. Cynthia Scanlin, George Patterson from the ACLU, and Dennis Mansfield, executive director of Idaho Family Forum were panelists and Tim Teater, the HOI president, was asked to serve, also. The BSU ACLU club made the invitations, allowing use of the Jordan Ballroom.

This led to a media storm, when Dennis Mansfield objected to the use of the \$3 admission funds. A last minute settlement allowed the event to proceed on April 27.

The results of a member survey were returning, with a clear preference emerging, one that set the pattern for another 14 years. Members wanted programs at each member meeting, "more speakers, more specifically humanist content, particularly ethics and values." They also asked for more local news in the newsletter (which required, of course, more reporters/writers.)

One city councilman had responded to HOI objections to prayer before meetings. Councilman Mike Wetherell wrote to say he saw no harm in this practice and "we will have to agree to disagree on the issue." However, "if the state or the US Supreme Court should decide that the practice is unconstitutional, the city council would then abandon the practice."

May 6 Attendees mulled over the city council's degree of comfort with invocations and set up a team to write a humanist version that would be set out as a part of the rotating practice. Then they did something rarely done since, voting to donate \$25 to a team of candidates called "Voices for Education," running for school board in Meridian. These candidates were invited to speak to a June meeting, "about the rights of students not filtered through anyone's personal, moral, religious or ethical agenda," in the words of Secretary Mary Fran Groll.

At the **May 20 1993** board of director's meeting, Tim Teater spoke of a new group that he was part of, "Voices for Human Rights," a coalition formed to oppose the anti-gay initiative and to promote human rights for other minorities. Added Mary Fran: "We need to know how to effectively counter the so far successful efforts of the religious right to stack local school boards, governing bodies and legislatures."

Attendance at the **June** meeting was light enough to cancel all but the picnic until September. Then they adjourned to hear Ann Best describe the results of the Meridian school board election.

Summers were slow, again; on **September 23** neither proposed speaker was tied down and someone suggested Dan Barker from FFRF. The lagging attendance and drop of membership numbers was talked about. End boring meetings, was the conclusion. Still, buttons sold briskly and folk signed up to know more about humanism. Mary Fran suggested offering a class on humanism through Boise community education classes. Pat Hall organized a 'social' get acquainted evening Thursday Nov 4 for those signing a list at Hyde Park. Flicks contributed snacks. And a student humanist club was forming at BSU. HOI December meeting was gathering at BSU for a discussion on secular ethics: does this require a supreme being?"

November 18 board meeting had details about the BSU group, mentioning Sean Brandt and Andy Lloyd planning a debate. HOI agreed to participate in a Snake River Alliance peace fair, and is there something planned for Dec 10, Human Rights day? Discussion: how to revive the newsletter. Last business: setting the date for the solstice party.

January 27 board meeting: no minutes available on the discussion of the dangers of school vouchers, because Mary Fran was absent. Business: how to focus an application for a Labrun fund grant through AHA? Discussion topic for next month: What were your beliefs before becoming a humanist? What led you to humanism?

February 1994 and six members. Could they develop a course of study for high school students on the philosophy and practice of humanism? They agreed to invite UU Rev. Elizabeth Greene to speak. At the board meeting that month, two board members teamed up to write the humanism class. Attendees formed a calling tree to offer phone reminders to absent members.

April 7 1994 attorney Jon Bauman spoke of areas where religion affected schools: "prayer at graduation ceremonies, release time for religious purposes, school busing to secondary classes, a proposed ISU/LDS land trade in Pocatello, the Table Rock cross, the Idaho Citizens Alliance initiative, United Fund, etc." is Mary Fran's summary.

Sages December: In for a dime, in for Thaler

In October, Richard Thaler was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in Behavioral Economics. Many moons ago, Jim Lyons found himself a first-year MBA student in Professor Thaler's Microeconomics class at Cornell. Jim remembers him well for things like the "sunk cost fallacy." In his own teaching over the past decade, Jim has relied on a bevy of "Thaler stories," flying in the face of traditional economics.

Professor Lyons shares tales out of school at the final 2017 meeting of the BUUF Sages, 9:30 am, Thursday, Dec. 14, at the Kopper Kitchen (2661 Airport Way). Newcomers are welcome! Join us for friendly conversation and a no-host breakfast. Contact Tom von Alten (tva@fortboise.org or 208 378-1217) for more information.

BUUF Humanists meet for conversation 3rd Sundays, 11:15 am, in the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship library, this month on December 17 to consider ideals and practice of the union movement in this country.

BUUF Sages meet 9:30am, 2nd Thursday only in December, at the Kopper Kitchen, near the Boise airport.

from December 2, 1993, presentation by BSU Professor Alan Brinton for Humanists of Idaho.

Selections from Plato's Euthyphro:

Socrates: Well, bear in mind that what I asked of you was not to tell me which particular kinds of actions are holy; I want you to tell me what is the essential form of holiness which makes all actions holy.

Euthyphro: Well, then, what is pleasing to the gods is holy. Holiness is what the gods all love, and its opposite is what the gods all hate...

Socrates: We shall soon know better about that, my friend. Think of this. Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?

Questions: Does morality require a religious foundation? Can there be a moral obligation without the existence of a divine being? Can we know what our moral obligations are independently of the assumption that there is a divine being?

What makes an action right or wrong? How do we know that an action is right or wrong?

Can we take the idea of moral obligation seriously on the assumption that there isn't a divine being?

More importantly, given the outcomes of enforcement of the dictates from those claiming moral authority in the name of a divine being, does religion provide an adequate foundation for morality?

How do we judge the validity of any particular religion by its articles of faith? By its stories of inception? Can we grant partial credit? Do we take points off for failed execution, for practices promulgated in the name of a divine being which are in conflict with other teachings ascribed to that being?

Extra credit for identifying ennobling beliefs or practices shared by believers and non-believers.

Third Year of HOI, Concluded J Ross, summary

May 5 1994 Six members attended the annual membership election meeting. HOI agreed to have a table at the Gay Pride event and a donation was given to the Idaho Women's Network.

June 2 Wendy Jordan reported on efforts to mobilize "against the agenda of the far Right."

June 23 report to the board: five persons attended the Community Schools class. They agreed to send invitation letters to join, sent to all on mailing lists. Someone offered to start "a simple newsletter" again.

October 20 the new newsletter editor passed around a draft for corrections and additions.

November 3 Another good report on the positive responses to the HOI information booth. New member Matthew Shapiro reported on a resolution by the Meridian school board "regarding the teaching of morals, patriotism, character, and respect for life, property, authority..." An attendee spoke of "the need for a humanist counselor or advocate who could perform weddings, funerals."

December 22 the board set goals for 1995: "Promote more public awareness and understanding of humanism; bring outside speakers at least twice; have four scheduled social events; increase funds to bring in out-of-area speakers; hold monthly meetings with programs; expand membership to all parts of the state.

Opportunities for Public Service suggested at meetings of Humanists of Idaho, 1992-3 summarized by Mary Fran Groll at the February 4, 1993 meeting.

Do we, as a group, want to sponsor some worthwhile public service project in the community? Do we have the numbers, time, energy, money and individual commitment to follow through on a project at this time? If so, what should that project be?

The following have been suggested at past meetings. Please mark those that most interest you, if any, and come prepared to discuss this at the next meeting.

- Cleaning up a section of the highway
- Sponsoring a Rational Recovery group
- Helping out at the homeless shelter
- Paint the Town
- Supporting a child in a third world country
- Volunteering help for Planned Parenthood
- Volunteering with mental health organization, Central District Health organization or organizing a suicide prevention hotline
- Sponsoring a refugee family
- Acquiring books for libraries
- Developing and teaching a class on Humanism for community schools
- Raising money for other nonprofits, community, national or international
- Volunteer to help with the Sounding Board for conflict resolution
- Participate in or otherwise support environmental restoration, reseeded, replanting
- Volunteer with Idaho Conservation League
- Volunteer with Idaho Fish and Game projects, including the Morrison Knudson Nature Center
- Sponsor a scholarship for minorities
- Sponsor a Thomas Paine scholarship
- Sponsor a child to attend Camp Quest
- Sister City activities
- Sponsor providing a trained Humanist Counselor
- Identify a candidate to receive training as a Celebrant of marriage, commitment or memorial services
- Support the Idaho Memorial Society (*now Funeral Consumers Alliance of Idaho*) or similar non-religious programs
- Set up a library or reading room with materials related to humanism
- Donate blood or plasma
- Work with parolees or inmates
- Volunteer with the Idaho department for the Blind, recording books on tape
- Assist School Counselors with classes in child-rearing, family conflict strategies
- Learn more about anti-bullying programs; assist school awareness programs

Additions to the 1993 list of ways to volunteer

Boise now has many more opportunities for service. The Learning Center provides tutoring in English for adults. Programs related to assisting refugees and new citizens abound. One new program, important since the path to citizenship is increasingly more expensive and difficult, can be accessed through any of Boise's agencies for resettlement.

Physical and Mental health programs all need more volunteer support than ever before. Low income participants in the Terry Reilly clinics need rides to and from appointments.

Start with self-education; if you don't subscribe to a local newspaper, read them at the public library and make note of contact information. Public libraries have sections filled with books on problems you may not have noticed in your own experience, just starting with a few, autism disorders, anxiety disorders, many aspects of mental and physical health. There are support groups in many areas, including those diagnosed with auto-immune disorders such as ALS. Parents Unlimited always needs volunteers to assist with their programs for children with disabilities.

Or visit a museum and offer to become a docent.

UPCOMING HOI ELECTIONS

This spring, members of Humanists of Idaho will elect its officers: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Charitable Coordinator and Media Coordinator. Current By-laws state that:

“The Vice President shall preside over elections and nominations. The Vice President shall nominate one or more persons for each office. The President may appoint a Nominating Committee to assist the Vice President. Additional nominations may be made either at a meeting of the Board or membership, or by petition of 5 members. No person shall be nominated without their consent.”

“The May Membership meeting shall be the ‘Annual Meeting’ and, in even numbered years, at which the election of the Board of Directors shall be certified. The Vice President shall check, count, and report on the ballots. Results will then be certified by the board. The President may appoint an Election Committee to assist the Vice President. Election shall be by vote of a majority of those voting thereon.”

Those who need more information can query HOI President Van, or current Vice President, Patricia Acks. See contact information on page 3.

Humanists of Idaho
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***Please consider joining us with a membership
in Humanists of Idaho, the sponsors of this newsletter.***

*A single one year membership of \$25 or family membership of \$45
means that you are supporting the humanist cause in Idaho.*

*With assistance from activists in Idaho Society of Reason, HOI organizes
events, maintains social and other media (including the newsletter) and
educates itself on policy and law related to secular society.*

See page three for who to contact and how.