

Freedom From Religion Foundation

2011 Year in Review

FFRF tops 17,000 Members — Help Recruit More!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, which began with 3 original members in 1976 and was incorporated nationally in 1978, has grown to more than 17,000 members nationwide.

Making News! Making Progress!



Photo: Timothy Hughes

Our actions, lawsuits, PR campaigns and state/church victories generated more than 932 bonafide news stories about FFRF in daily newspapers or on TV news! You can check out that media coverage or sign up to get coverage delivered to your inbox at ffrf.org/news/media/. This includes more than 6 hours of TV coverage from last October to this October. Media highlights included FFRF Co-President **Annie Laurie Gaylor** debating Cong. Dan Lundgren on National Fox TV over “In God We Trust,” Co-Prez **Dan Barker** debating Mathew Staver of the Liberty Counsel on the Ten Commandments, and hundreds of diverse regional news and TV coverage of FFRF state/church actions and “Out of the Closet” campaigns. FFRF was even mentioned in some obituaries of newsman and nonbeliever Andy Rooney, because we had given him an Emperor Has No Clothes Award. (View the Convention 2011 Highlights ffrf.org/outreach/convention/)

Student Activist Awardees

FFRF designates two annual student/youth activist scholarship of \$1,000 each. But in 2011, we ended up recognizing SEVEN activist youths with awards of \$1,000 each, going to:

- **Sarah McNair**, for speaking out against Ten Commandments in Giles Co., Va. Public schools (subject of a new FFRF/W. Va. ACLU lawsuit).
- **Damon Fowler**, who protested (and stopped) unlawful school-led graduation prayers, with FFRF’s help, at his high school in Bastrop, La.



- **Duncan Henderson**, 15, featured on a “Nick News” segment, who fought censorship of his freethought club at his middle school in Auburn, Ala.

- **Harrison Hopkins**, who protested and stopped unlawful school-led gradu-



ation prayers, with FFRF’s help, at his high school in Laurens, S.C.

- **Jessica Ahlquist**, 16, a plaintiff in an ACLU federal lawsuit to remove a religious prayer from her Rhode Island high school.

- **Dylan Galos**, now a Ph.D. candidate, for his activism as part of FFRF’s “Out of the Closet” billboard campaign in Columbus. Dylan saw his billboard, which said “I can be good without God,” censored twice.

- A 7th award has been offered to a military student.

“We are proud to be associated with all of these students and youth activists,” says Dan. “It still takes so much guts to buck religion in schools and in society.”



\$16,600 Awarded Freethinking Students for Essays

In 2011, FFRF gave a total of \$16,600 in scholarships in its three essay competitions for students, one for college-bound high school seniors, one for currently-enrolled college students, and a third to grad and older students. Thirteen students got major prizes (with several ties), and an additional 23 students received \$200 “Honorable Mentions.” FFRF thanks **Herbert (“Harry”) Bushong**, a nonagenarian, for sponsoring the current high school competition. The college competition is a memorial to **Michael**



Hakeem funded by his bequest. Lifetime Member and **Professor Brian Bolton’s** sponsorship of the new graduate student essay competition is gratefully acknowledged.

Outreach – Campus Events

Speaking to crowds as large as 1,500 (and a couple as small as 50), **Dan Barker** made 50 speaking appearances from late 2010 to late 2011, visiting 25 states plus Mexico City and Ireland. Dan spoke on 31 college campuses often in partnership with Secular Student Alliance clubs (including four religious schools) and participated in 10 debates (including one held in a church and two debating a Muslim). Other events included two performances of “Tunes ‘n Toons” with fellow repentant (Mormon) missionary **Steve Benson** (in Arizona and Alabama). Dan gave several freethought concerts at the piano, and spoke at various regional conferences and meetings, including the midwest Skepticon, Sacramento Freethought Day,



Central Ohio Humanists, the World Atheism conference in Dublin, the national Atheism Mexico conference in Mexico City, Ethical Culture and Unitarian-Universalist congregations, the national Secular Student Alliance conference, Centers for Inquiry, and FFRF chapter events in Arizona and Alabama. Annie Laurie, who keeps the office fires going, made 8 appearances, including Winter Solstice events at FFRF's Tulsa chapter, a 12th anniversary dinner of the New Orleans Humanists, and a San Diego conference on freethought history.



Countries visited included Mexico and Ireland. States visited included: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, Washington DC, and Wisconsin.



FFRF, with its **Alabama Freethought Association chapter**, run by **Pat Cleveland**, cohosted the 22nd annual July 4th extravaganza at Lake Hypatia, Alabama, where FFRF's Atheists in Foxhole monument rests. Vets got their photos taken by it, and a

number of state/church and southern activists were featured on the program.

Litigation

Giles Co., Va. Ten Commandments. FFRF is working with the ACLU of West Virginia in a federal lawsuit on behalf of a high school student and parent, to challenge the Ten Commandments being posted in public schools there. **Parish exemption.** Following a decision by the Supreme Court in a non-FFRF case impacting the right of taxpayers to sue, FFRF, with **attorney Richard Bolton**, reconfigured and refiled its "sleeper" federal challenge of the "parish exemption" — preferential tax treatment set up by Congress in 1954 giving clergy significant benefits if paid through a "housing allowance." **Release-time abuse.** FFRF with pro bono help by **George Daly** is in the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals challenging academic credits for "release-time" instruction in a South Carolina school. **Governmental days of Prayer.** FFRF's historic district court victory last year declaring the National Day of Prayer unconstitutional was, alas, thrown out on standing by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in April. However, FFRF pursues related educational litigation in Colorado state court, and, is also suing Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer (with pro bono help by **Richard Morris** and **Marc Victor**) over her Arizona Day of Prayer.

Suing Gov. Perry. FFRF's highest profile case this year was suing Texas Gov. Rick Perry for being the name, face, host and initiator of a "day of prayer and fasting for



our nation's responses" on Aug. 6 at the Reliant Center in Houston, in conjunction with the American Family Association. Our federal lawsuit handled by Rich Bolton seeking a restraining order was thrown out asking that the governor's name, photo and gubernatorial letter of invitation be removed from the website promoting the event. FFRF held a counter "feasting and non-prayer" dinner with 70 delightful area FFRF'ers the night before. Dan debuted a new song, "Get Off your Knees and Get to Work," dedicated to "Rip van Perry-winkle, who overslept not 30 but 2030 years." Stalwarts showed up to picket with Dan, Annie Laurie and summer intern Taylor Myers in the 107-heat-index heat. Because FFRF's attempt to lease a billboard near the stadium was censored, we rented a mobile billboard saying: "Beware Prayer by Pious Politicians: Get off your knees ad Get to work. FFRF also flew a plane overhead saying GOV — KEEP STATE/CHURCH SEPARATE. FFRF.ORG.



Photo: Pat Sullivan/AP

90+ Legal Victories in 2011!

Between October 2010 and October 2011,

FFRF impressively won more than 90 significant legal victories without having to go to court! Formal letters of complaint in that period numbered a whopping 495! (Many violations require multiple contacts over a period of time to end. Other letters are sent with the expectation of educating, rather than ending violations where the court precedent is against us. We atheists are realists and don't believe in miracles!) The most common complaints involve religion in public schools, especially unlawful prayers. Many FFRF complaints and victories receive widespread media attention, thereby educating the public at large.

Among victories this year, FFRF finally got the Social Security Administration to agree that if applicants have already provided a birth certificate, they won't be asked if they have a baptismal or other religious record of birth. FFRF first began complaining about this practice in 2008! It does pay to complain . . . and complain . . . and complain.

Among other significant victories, FFRF:

- Ended prayers at high school athletic games, school award banquets and annual awards ceremonies, graduations or religious assemblies in school districts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. FFRF halted prayer led by coaches in public schools in Florida, Michigan,



Photo: Brent Nicastro



Tennessee and Virginia.

- Persuaded the school board in Ilion, N.Y., to drop prayer opening its monthly meetings.
- Ended kindergarten prayers (!) at a school district in Tennessee, given, incidentally, by a local Church of Christ minister “in Jesus’ name.”
- Ended a proposal to teach creationism along with evolution at a Ohio school district, and stopped creationist instruction in science classes in Texas and Illinois.
- Halted prayers or bible reading in algebra classes (!) in school districts in Tennessee and Texas.
- Stopped Gideons from entering school grounds to illegally distribute New Testament bibles in multiple school districts, including Indiana, and barred a pastor from praying as children arrive on elementary school property in Florida.
- Persuaded the school district in Fishers, Ind. to drop a religious “developmental asset” (a previous subject of a successful FFRF lawsuit).



Photo: Brent Nicastro

- Canceled a school “field trip” by a school district in New York state to the Catholic Seton Shrine in Maryland.
- Persuaded the school district in Clinton, Miss., to drop “faith in God” as part of its mission statement.
- Protected the rights of students in Los Angeles to opt out of participating in the religious Pledge of Allegiance without punishment.

Ended prayer at county board meetings in Eau Claire, Wis.

- Successfully protested illegal “church bulletin discounts” by restaurants around the nation.
- Persuaded several local bodies to provide religious affirmations in oath-taking.
- Stopped daily recitations of the Lord’s Prayer over the microphone at a public-funded senior center in Michigan, among many other victories!

Office Growth!

FFRF is having to get creative to find space for its supplies and “lucky 13” fulltime staffers (plus interns, volunteers and part-timers) in our 3300-square foot downtown office building. Last year we unveiled plans for a lovely and creative 3rd floor addition to our beloved building, part of which dates to 1855. The City of Madison had approved the addition. Unfortunately, a convoluted “condominium agreement” grants FFRF’s next-door neighbor veto power, and that veto power was unexpectedly wielded. FFRF is looking at all its options.



We hope to soon be able to announce a building project and capital campaign! Stay tuned!

Volunteers. FFRF thanks regular volunteers **Phyllis Rose** (3 afternoons a week since 2000), **Wendy Goldberg** (2



days a week), and **Susan Barry** (1 afternoon a week). An unexpected bonus has been weeks of dedicated fulltime volunteerism by **Scott Carney**, a young Wisconsin student in between university transfers.



Staff. FFRF said goodbye to assistant **Bonnie Gutsch** (bound for med school), and welcomed as new publicist this fall **Katie Stenz**. Joining the staff as a fulltime attorney was former intern **Stephanie Schmitt**, who has had a string of victories ending school violations, and in November, **Andrew Seidel**, who graduated magna cum laude from Tulane University Law School, and completed his Master of Law at Denver University Sturm College of Law with a 4.0 GPA. Andrew was a major winner in last year’s graduate essay contest. They are joining Junior Staff Attorney **Patrick Elliott** and Senior Staff Attorney **Rebecca Markert** to work on the hundreds of annual requests to end state/church violations. Congratulations to Rebecca and Mike Markert, proud parents of Dexter, born this fall. Also a new mother is FFRF Office Manager **Jackie Douglas**. Jackie and Matt Douglas’ daughter, Clara, was born in August. Working fulltime clerical for several months is **Charlotte Stein**, a new grad, while she awaits a Peace Corps placement in Morocco.



Officers. FFRF thanks **Edward Susterich** for years of oversight and service on its Executive Council, and welcomes new officer **Wendy Goldberg**, a retired attorney and multi-talented FFRF volunteer, as Secretary.

Legal Interns. FFRF’s very industrious interns this year include spring semester students **Jayne Durkee** and **Jane Kleven**, both from University of Wisconsin Law School. FFRF’s two volunteer fulltime legal clerks this summer were **Kristen Fox**, UW Law School, and **Ash Khosrowshahi**, UC Berkeley Law of School. Also working a full-time summer internship was **Taylor Myers**, a Mt. Holyoake undergrad who is already an office legend. **Laura Steigerwald**, a new grad who entered law school this fall, worked part-time this summer. This fall’s UW law school interns are: **Ken Earl**, **Kristen Fox**, and **Susan Lund**, and **Aubrey Laursdorf**, an undergrad interning for course credit. **Sarah Braasch**, FFRF’s first legal intern, returned for a brief reunion at the end of last year, before entering a Ph.D. program. FFRF continues to work with the Harvard Society for the Separation of Church and State.

Welcoming New Chapters! FFRF now boasts 10 chapters, including the newly formed **Freethought Association of Northern Michigan** (FANM) run by Kendal and Christine Taylor, and the **Nittany Freethought**, run by Betsy and Chuck Berry. These join chapters in Alabama, Albuquerque, N.M., Colorado Springs, Duluth, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Spokane, Raleigh, N.C., and Tulsa. Find full contact info: <http://ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters/>



New Honorary Director joins distinguished roster

FFRF welcomes novelist and philosopher **Rebecca Newberger Goldstein** as its newest Honorary Officer. She joins: **Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Ernie Harburg, Jennifer Michael Hect, Christopher Hitchens, Susan Jacoby, Mike Newdow, Steven Pinker, Katha Pollitt, Ron Reagan, Oliver Sacks, M.D., Robert Sapolsky, Edward Sorel and Julia Sweeney.**



Public Relations/Advertising Campaigns

It was a busy year as FFRF took its new “Out of the Closet” billboard and bus sign campaign around the country. FFRF and the **Triangle Freethought Society** in Raleigh, N.C., with adroit organizing by **Amy Glenn**, placed a dozen beautifully-designed billboards featuring smiling FFRF’ers with their thoughtful or witty testimonials throughout Raleigh in April, receiving lots of positive press. The **Tulsa chapter** soon followed suit, with a campaign going up in late May featuring ten freethinking individuals, couples or families on colorful and thought-provoking billboards. “I don’t need an eternal reward to be moral,” as Ric Nourse, an artist, husband and father, told the ultra-religious Tulsa community. Volunteer **Rhonda Dorle** did the legwork on the Tulsa campaign. FFRF, with member **Ed Sweeney’s** coordination, took its myth-dispelling campaign to **Columbus**, with



seven billboards and eight participants. Ed’s billboard read: “I don’t believe in Zeus, either.” **FFRF Valley of the Sun Chapter** director **Anne Mardick** helped coordinate the current campaign in Phoenix (nine billboards) and Tucson (two). They feature families, couples, a blind student whose statement is: “Faith without reason is true blindness,” a Spanish-speaking participant and a plain-spoken bus driver. **Dr. Stephen Uhl**, who participated in the Tucson billboard campaign, made expansion of the campaigns possible with his wonderful boost of \$25,000.



FFRF took its secular message in the **District of Columbia** in time to protest the May “National Day of Prayer,” including exterior bus ads, behind-the-driver ads featuring secular statements by presidents, and metro dioramas. An octogenarian farmer who is a Wisconsin Lifetime Member paid to have a billboard he suggested, “**Enjoy Life Now: There is No Afterlife,**” placed near Columbus, Wis.,



for two months as a legacy for his grandchildren. NCW Freethinkers of **Wenatchee, Wash.**, and FFRF co-sponsored a billboard there saying, “**God & Government: A Dangerous Mix.**” A kind local in **Terre Haute, Ind.**, paid to place FFRF’s signature billboard, “**Imagine No Religion**”

near fairgrounds during the fair. “Reason’s Greetings from the Freedom From Religion Foundation” will appear in **New York City** in December.



FFRF Goes Interactive! “Outs” Nonbelievers!



We “tweet,” we be-Friend on Facebook, and now FFRF even has an interactive app, our very cool make-your-own-virtual billboard! You’ll learn a lot and feel among friends if you take the time to browse the thousands of virtual billboards posted at FFRF’s website by freethinkings willing to “come out of the closet”: <http://ffrf.org/out/?stack>. View staff picks, our celebrity participants and make your own: <http://ffrf.org/out/>

34th Convention on East Coast

FFRF held a memorable 34th annual national convention in Hartford, Conn., taking advantage of the locale to arrange a pre-conference group tour of the fascinating Mark Twain House and Museum. Stealing the show were three young student activist awardees, and distinguished Broadway composer (“Annie,” “Bye, Bye Birdie”) **Charles Strouse**, recipient of an Emperor Has No Clothes Award. Strouse spoke, then gave a magical concert at the piano. There was hardly a dry eye left in the house when he ended with a gently moving rendition of “Tomorrow.” **Steven Pinker** and **Rebecca Newberger Goldstein**, an intellectual “power couple,” wow’ed the audience. **Mitch Kahle** was named “Freethinker of the Year” and **Steve Trunk** received the Atheist in Foxhole Award, among other highlights.



Mark your calendar now for the 35th annual FFRF



convention in: Portland, Oregon, at the Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Ave., on the weekend of Oct. 12-13, 2012.

See you there!