



HUMANIST Monthly

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A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, December 12th, 2021 at 1 PM—a Zooming we will go!

Bo Bennett — *Positive Humanism: A Primer*



Positive humanism is an applied secular humanistic philosophy based on the scientific findings of positive psychology that focuses on personal, professional, and societal flourishing. As an applied philosophy, its focus is on ideas that lead to increased well-being. As a secular humanistic philosophy, there are no appeals to the supernatural, the magical, or the mystical.

The philosophy is founded on reason and critical thinking. The philosophy is science-based, meaning that it is void of the unsupported and/or exaggerated claims and the constant confusing of correlation with causality often found in the self-help genre. The philosophy is grounded in the theories of positive psychology, which is the study of the positive side of the mental health spectrum - human flourishing.

Bo Bennett is a businessman, author, programmer, philanthropist, martial artist, motivational speaker, amateur comedian, and most of all, a husband and a father devoted to improving the lives of others. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Marketing, Master's Degree in general psychology and PhD in social psychology.

Bo's personal motto is "Expose an irrational belief; keep a person rational for a day. Expose irrational thinking; keep a person rational for a lifetime." Much of his charitable work is in the area of education—not teaching people what to think, but how to think.

His many books include: The Concept: A Critical and Honest Look at God and Religion, Logically Fallacious, Uncomfortable Ideas, Rules of Reason: Making and Evaluating Claims, How To Sift Through Media Bullsh*t, and Positive Humanism: A Primer.

Bo's personal blog is called Relationship With Reason, where he writes about several topics related to critical thinking. His secular (humanistic) philosophy is detailed at positivehumanism.com. In addition, he is the creator and host of The Dr. Bo Show.

This program will take place online, via Zoom. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the meeting via e mail.

Anyone who is not a paid member can attend. Simply log onto our Meetup Page, <https://www.meetup.com/Capital-District-Humanist-Society/> and use the RSVP function. The link to the meeting will then be available to you.

Before your holiday calendar gets too full, don't forget to add our December social on the 18th at 7:00PM.

Due to an uptick in COVID numbers and many people uncomfortable with indoor venues, we'll do our part to keep everyone safe and have a Zoom "party".

Until then, be thinking about the worst gift you ever received or a "funny" situation around the holidays. And to add some more levity to the gathering, please wear an ugly holiday sweater. We want this to be a fun "happening" with lots of laughter. You will receive a Zoom link from Don Porterfield shortly before the program. You don't need to have an ugly holiday sweater to participate—you can wear any ugly garment you choose.

Please email me at candacelf13@gmail.com or call me, 518-653-1622. If you don't hear back from me, please try again.



Capital District Humanist Society, Inc.

Established 1986

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/CapitalDistrictHumanistSociety>



CDHS is affiliated with:

The American Humanist Association (AHA)

Center for Inquiry (CSI)

Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

Recap of our November speaker's presentation

Taner Edis is a physics professor at Truman State University. His talk was titled, *We!rdness — What Fake Science and the Paranormal Tell us About the Nature of Science*. **NOTE:** This was not the science veneration and pseudo-science lamentation you might expect.

Edis started by saying that fake science and science rejection are not just annoyances for the scientific community, but are "eating our politics alive," and threaten civilization (via climate change denialism). But cannot be combated simply by hammering on science facts. A lot of it is bound up with more generalized distrust of elites, with science seen as just another one. But anti-elitism is not wholly crazy — Edis pointed to what he called "predatory elites" whose societal ascendancy is actually a problem. Given that, what does it really mean to say, "Trust the science?"

And — how do we distinguish between real and fake science? Edis pointed to what he called the "checklist" approach. The scientific method applies principles of falsification, parsimony, and natural explanations. Characteristics of pseudo-science include unfalsifiability; reliance on anecdotal information; cherry-picking; technobabble; lack of self-correction or peer review; exaggerated claims; attitudes of certainty; logical fallacies; and conspiracy theories. Quite a list. For example, "young earth creationism" — holding the cosmos is only about 6,000 years old — flies in the face of tons of actual knowledge. But its advocates make up excuses for why that real evidence is untrustworthy. But then Edis pointed to the scientific concept of Dark Matter, to explain why there's less identifiable matter in the Universe than the law of gravity deems necessary given what we observe. Edis queried whether Dark Matter (so named because we actually don't know what it is) was something made up to rescue gravitation from failing the falsifiability test — resembling false science gamesmanship. Thus he suggested the boundary between the two is fuzzy.

And that the "checklist" paradigm is an outdated view. Instead he posited that real knowledge (of *this* world, with nothing magical or supernatural) is a construct derived via a network of mutual support — institutionalized criticism and learning. Fake science, in contrast, rather than being some sort of property in its beliefs themselves, is most basically a failure of institutions. For example, "creation science" certainly has a network of institutions supporting it — but that's just the point — their purpose is not to find knowledge but to produce excuses. "Apologetics factories," Edis called them, needed to defend concepts that are a bad fit with what we know of physics, biology, and chemistry. Yet they're often very good at it, deploying a blizzard of "factoids" that are hard to debunk in simple terms. Thus creationists in debates can "wipe the floor" with evolutionists.

Those organizations are part of a larger right-wing populist enterprise, organized to a degree far greater than anything on the other side. (Though it was pointed out that anti-science isn't exclusive to the right; opposition to genetically modified crops, for instance, is a left-wing pathology.) However, argued Edis, while creationism in particular is steeped in religion, mainstream science is not conducted in a belief vacuum. Use of reason is tethered to worldly interests, and we all have cognitive biases. A "just the facts" approach is not enough. You need social and political analysis as well, to understand what's going on. Edis suggested that some (non-hard) sciences like economics, social science, the humanities, operate more like ideologies, more concerned with meaning than facts.

Put another way, it's hard to disentangle science from values. Ideally, said Edis, one should adopt the "view from nowhere" and set aside values. He did also hold that science represents our best effort at understanding, and usually does it very well, but a heroic image of science is not accurate.

Recap by Frank Robinson

THREE-PART NOVEMBER SOCIAL

On November 21st, we gathered for a three-part pre-Thanksgiving celebration as we dined at the Lakeview Restaurant on Crystal Lake in Averill Park, then wandered over to the Sand Lake Center for the Arts to see "The Thanksgiving Play". The third part of our extended gathering was a Zoom discussion of the play that evening. A good time was had by all. Thanks to Dee Portzer for arranging the lunch and theatre and thanks to Don Porterfield, for hosting the evening discussion.





Looking forward to January.....

Risk and Ethics in the Attempt to Contact Extraterrestrial Intelligence

The recent emergence of a second space age, generated in part by the increasingly rapid commercialization of outer space access, has stimulated interest in the possibility of making contact with intelligent beings who might live on other worlds. Technical challenges are considerable when it comes to messaging extraterrestrial intelligence (METI), particularly since we don't even know if anyone is out there. Although astronomers and others have worked hard to address these challenges, they have given little attention to the risks and ethical issues that the attempt to make contact indexes. This talk focuses on the moral, cultural, and risk-related factors associated with METI by critiquing attempts such as the Arecibo Message and the Voyager Golden Records.

John W. Traphagan, Ph. D. is a social anthropologist and Professor of Religious Studies and in the Program in Human Dimensions of Organizations and Mitsubishi Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. He also holds a visiting professorship at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. His research focuses on the relationship between science and culture and falls into two streams: life in rural Japan, and the culture and ethics of space exploration. He has published numerous scientific papers and several books, including *Science, Culture, and the Search for Life on Other Worlds*, *Cosmopolitan Rurality, Depopulation, and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in 21st Century Japan*, was published in 2020. His most recent book is *Embracing Uncertainty: Future Jazz, That 13th Century Buddhist Monk, and the Invention of Cultures*.

This program will take place online, via Zoom, on Sunday, January 9th, 2022 at 1 PM. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the meeting via e-mail.



We mourn the passing of Myrna Becker, 85, a long-time member of CDHS.

She passed from this world on November 14, 2021. She left behind her husband Richard Becker, a son David Barnet (Julia Richards) in Delmar, NY, a daughter Nancy Barnet Adams (Robert Brown) in Clifton Park, NY, a sister Doris Kadish (Raymond Woller) in Athens, GA, stepchildren Richard Becker, Jr., Lauren Rittberg (Roy), Karen DiPierro, as well as several grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

Born in New York City, Myrna was an inspiring mix of curiosity, determination, creativity, and generosity. She enjoyed many artistic pursuits, having obtained a degree in studio art from SUNY Albany. She loved the intellectual life, having obtained a master's degree in Public Administration from Russell Sage College while working full-time. Her greatest achievement, she often said, was her children. But over her long and productive life, she nurtured and mentored many others as well, in her family and the workplace, especially women. Myrna was politically active since early adulthood, supporting candidates and causes consistent with her values. She first honed her uncommon organizational skills in the League of Women Voters. She went on to exercise them working in New York State government and volunteering with the Capital District Humanist Society, for which she served ten years as president.

Those wishing to remember Myrna in a special way may make a contribution in her name to the Capital District Humanist Society, PO Box 11209 Loudonville, NY 12211, Emily's List (win.emilyslist.org/a/donate-to-emily) or Community Hospice (www.communityhospice.org/donate). A non-denominational service to celebrate Myrna's life will be held on Sunday December 5th at 10:30 am at Levine Memorial Chapel (649 Washington Avenue, Albany).

All visitors attending the service in person must provide proof of vaccination upon entering the building; remote access will be available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j60uovYZlgo>

This is from Marcus Brightstock, an English comedian, actor and satirist.

"We humans who are on earth
humanity is special
our kingdom has come
do what we innately know to be right on earth, because that's all there is
share the bread we have
try not to screw up
while others screw up, understand
we can't have everything that tempts us
deliver ourselves from evil
because this is it, the Earth,
the power to do right and the glory to come if we do is ours
now and forever. Hu-man"

'Imagine' life of humankind

by Phil Zuckerman (the Albany Times-Union)

Fifty years ago, John Lennon released one of the most beautiful, inspirational and catchy pop anthems of the 20th century: "Imagine."

Gentle and yet increasingly stirring as the song progresses, "Imagine" is unabashedly utopian and deeply moral calling on people to live, as one humanity, in peace. It is also purposely and powerfully irreligious. From its opening lyric, "Imagine there is no heaven", to the refrain "and no religion too", Lennon sets out what is to many, a clear atheistic message. While most pop songs are secular by default—in that they are about the things of the world, making no mention of the divine or spiritual – "Imagine" is explicitly secularist. In Lennon's telling, religion is an impediment to human flourishing—something to be overcome, transcended.

As a scholar of secularism, and devout fan of the Beatles, I have always been fascinated by how "Imagine", perhaps the first and only atheistic anthem to be so enormously successful, has come to be so widely embraced in America. After all, the US is the country that has—at least until recently —had a much more religious population than other Western industrialized democracies. Since being released as a single October 11, 1971, "Imagine" has sold millions, going number one in the US and UK charts, and its popularity has endured.

At interviews, Lennon was at times ambiguous about his beliefs on religion and spirituality, but such ambiguity is at odds with the clear message of "Imagine". The song's irreligious echoes is frank. The first verse speaks of there being "no heaven", "no hell above us, only sky." In such clear distilled words, Lennon captures the very marrow of the secular orientation to me, Lennon is saying that we live in a purely physical universe that operates along strictly natural lines - there is nothing supernatural out there, even beyond the stars.

"Imagine" entails a humanistic desire to see an end to suffering. The spirit of empathy and compassion throughout the song is in line with what scholarship has found to be strong traits commonly observable among secular men and women.



Local humanists champion social justice, welcome all faiths and idealistic atheists

Learn about the philosophy of humanism

By **Fred Levine**—in the Albany Times-Union (Faith and Values) - November 27, 2021

The Capital District Humanist Society just donated \$5000 to the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. Raising money and volunteering for charity is key to our humanist values.

CDHS members share humanist values, which include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern and fellowship. We welcome people of all religious faiths and we welcome those who are nonbelievers in God or gods.

You'll be in great company. Renowned humanists include author Kurt Vonnegut, Apple co-founder and philanthropist Steve Wozniak, LGBTQ activist and journalist Dan Savage, Young Turks founder Cenk Uygur, physicist Albert Einstein, John Lennon, feminist pioneer Gloria Steinem, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, sci-fi trailblazer Isaac Asimov, biologist Richard Dawkins, astronomer Carl Sagan, novelist Margaret Atwood ("The Handmaid's Tale"), American patriot Thomas Paine and Shakespeare.

Humanism is a philosophy that focuses on personal, professional and societal flourishing. As a secular philosophy, there is no dependence on the supernatural, the magical or the mystical. The philosophy is founded on reason and critical thinking. It is science-based, and therefore void of the unsupported or exaggerated claims in the self-help genre. The philosophy is grounded in positive psychology, which is the study of the side of the mental health spectrum that encourages human development and intellectual growth.



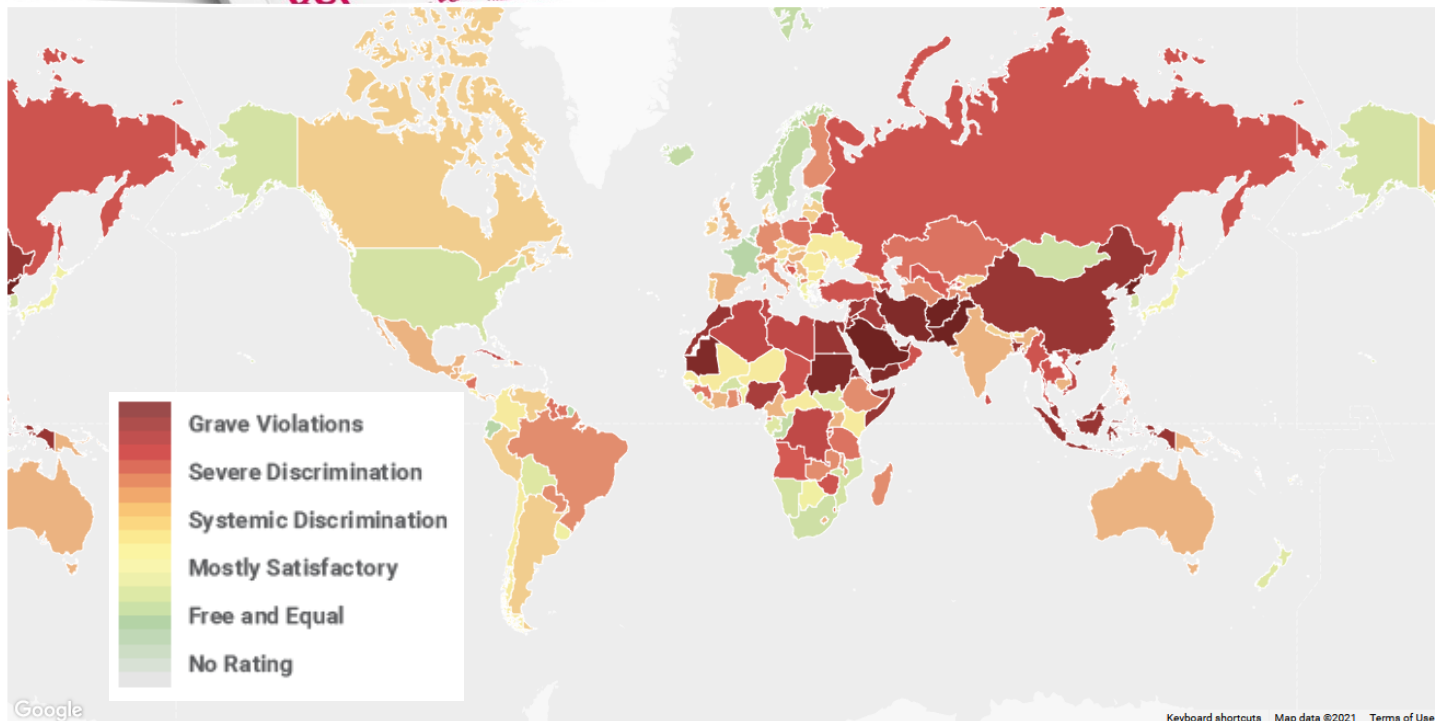
Actress and animal rescue activist Kristin Bell of "The Good Place" describes herself as a humanist rather than adhering to a specific religion. Humanism is a philosophy that traces its roots to the 15th century Renaissance when reason, logic, and science attracted believers who were disheartened by the suffering caused by belief in witchcraft, religious wars and anti-Semitism.

"ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM—THE FEAR AND DISTRUST OF THINKING PEOPLE—IS A DISEASE WE MUST SIMPLY STAMP OUT, JUST AS WE'VE STAMPED OUT SMALLPOX AND TYPHOID AND POLIO." -

Hubert Humphrey 4



The Freedom of Thought Report by Humanists International assesses every country in the world on the basis of human rights and the legal status with regard to humanists, atheists, and the non-religious.



About the map: The map above shows a summary score for each country (this is the average severity of the worst assessment criterion applied across each of four thematic strands)

What follows is an invocation given on March 25th by Herb Silverman before the Charleston City Council. When the Mayor introduced Silverman for the invocation, several City Council members got up and left, returning when he was finished, in time for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Thank you for this opportunity to "invoke" a minority point of view.

Each of us is a minority, with respect to something. It might be race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other way we may be regarded as different. Each of us is also part of some majority. It is when we wear our majority hats that we need to be most mindful of how we treat others. We must pledge our best efforts to help one another, and to defend the rights of all of our citizens and residents.

What divides us is not so much our religious differences in this diverse country, but the degree of commitment we have to equal freedom of conscience for all people. We are gathered today, both religious and secular members of our community, with the shared belief that we must treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity. I don't ask you to close your eyes, but to keep your eyes constantly open to the serious issues that city government can and should solve or improve. I don't ask you to bow your heads, but to look up at what you can accomplish by applying your considerable talents and experience to the problems that confront us.

As you work together on behalf of all who live in this city, may you gain strength and sustenance from one another through reason and compassion.

I'd like to close in a bipartisan manner by quoting from two presidents I greatly admire-one a Republican and the other a Democrat.

First, the Republican:

When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That is my religion.

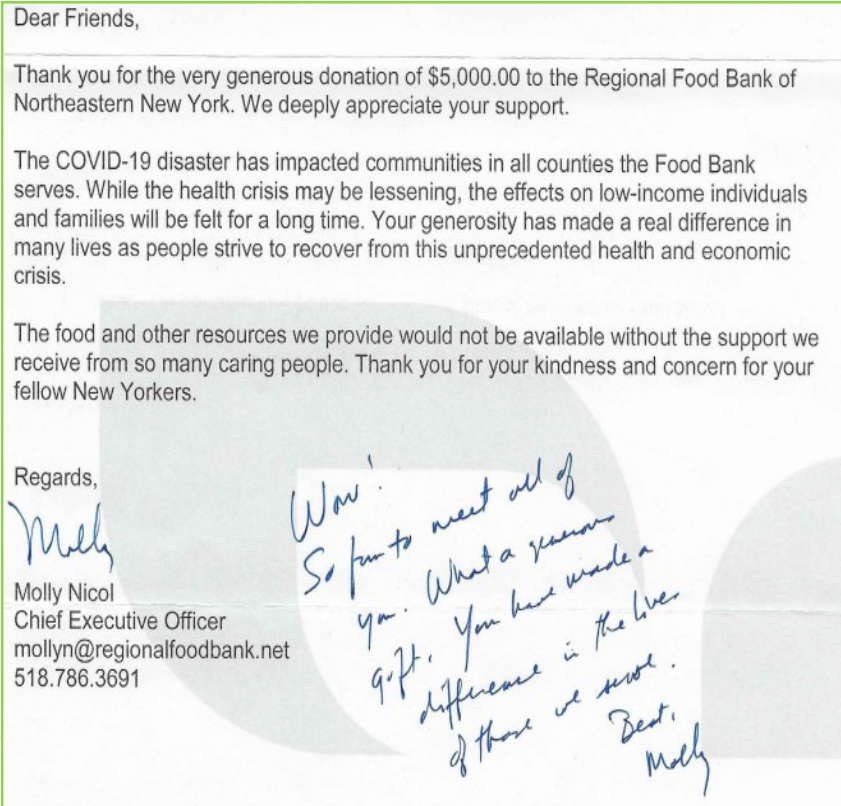
-- Abraham Lincoln

And then, the Democrat:

It's remarkable how much you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.

-- Harry S. Truman

From the Regional Food Bank...



A friend of ours in Malta has adorned her bathroom walls with interesting photos and cartoons. This one seemed right to share for the upcoming holiday season—Frank



Supreme Court: NY can't enforce strict covert restrictions on houses of worship



In a preview of how much damage a conservative majority on the Supreme Court can cause, the justices ruled 5-4 late last night that religious institutions do not have to abide by a public health order in New York limiting how many people can gather in one place. While nothing will change immediately, it opens the door to massive in-person super-spreader events at churches and synagogues that could threaten the health of millions of people.

Here's the basic back story: New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order earlier this year that created limits to how many people can gather in one spot depending on how serious the covert outbreak was in that region. That was a responsible, science-based decision. In the most dangerous areas, that meant a maximum

of 10 people could attend a religious event at one time, even with precautions, while slightly less dangerous areas allowed for a capacity of 25.

There were, however, exceptions to that rule. For example, more people could be inside a grocery store (with masks) since they are not hanging around and chatting with each other. You're in, you're out, is essential. The Catholic diocese of Brooklyn and the coalition of synagogues, individuals, and an Orthodox Jewish group sued Cuomo, saying the restrictions interfered with their religious freedom by limiting their attendance. They also said it was unfair that the "essential" exceptions to the rule didn't apply to them.

New York officials said this case was basically moot since the revised covert restrictions map that went into effect last Friday meant those institutions were no longer subject to those limits. However, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the religious groups anyway, with Justice Amy Coney Barrett being the defiant decisive vote (while Chief Justice John Roberts sided with the three liberals, it was only because he agreed the whole issue was moot. The restrictions are not currently in place, he said, but if they were reinstated, he might rule otherwise.)

By Hemant Mehta in friendlyatheist.patheos.com/ (11/26/2021)

Italy sees a surge of people demanding to be de-baptised

CERTIFICATE OF DEBAPTISM

After due deliberation, I,


.....

having been subjected to the Rite of Christian Baptism in infancy (before reaching an age of consent), hereby publicly revoke any implications of that Rite and renounce the Church that carried it out. In the name of human reason, I reject all its Creeds and all other such superstition in particular, the perfidious belief that any baby needs to be cleansed by Baptism of alleged ORIGINAL SIN, and the evil power of supposed demons. I wish to be excluded henceforth from enhanced claims of church membership numbers based on past baptismal statistics used, for example, for the purpose of securing legislative privilege.

Signed.....

Witnessed by.....

This..... day of..... 20.....



Around ten years ago, a campaign by the Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics – abbreviated in Italian as UAAR – made it possible for Italians to get de-baptized. Since then, according to Religion News Service, more than 100,000 people have filled in de-baptism forms. The UAAR campaign launch came a few years after a de-baptism initiative was devised by a former President of the UK's National Secular Society.

CDHS Executive Council

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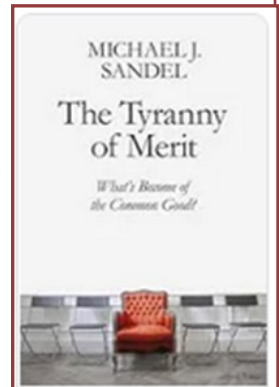
Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Mira Peck
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson

CDHS BOOK CLUB

The Book Club is discussing The Tyranny of Merit by Michael Sandel.

The group meets on second and fourth Thursdays of each month, between 1 and 3, however, the dates of the Zoom gatherings this month are still to be decided.



ALL PROCEEDS GO TO



Direct Relief

Direct Relief is supporting medical facilities in the U.S. and throughout the world with protective gear to safeguard health care workers.



**December 19th
Saturday
2:00 PM
Albuquerque, NM**

**@UNM Johnson Center Field
\$6.66 per person**

Sit on Satan's lap and get a picture (must wear masks)



Capital District Humanist Society, Inc. PO Box 11209, Loudonville NY 12211-0209

(518) 533-2666 E-mail us at [webmaster \(at\) humanistsociety \(dot\) org](mailto:webmaster@humanistsociety.org)

Visit us on the web at humanistsociety.net

The Capital District Humanist Society (CDHS) is an independent, non-profit (and non-prophet), non-partisan and strictly non-religious educational and social organization for those who share humanist values: commitment to education, rational and free inquiry, democracy, social concerns and fellowship. CDHS is affiliated with the four major humanist organizations - the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the Humanists International (HI).

There are six types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr; Family, \$80/yr; Student \$25/yr; Sustaining, \$100/yr; Patron, \$150/yr; Lifetime Member, one contribution of \$1000 or more.

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote by mail each September on the make-up of the governing Executive Council. Members are eligible for election to the Executive Council and may also serve as appointed officials. Members are welcome to attend Executive Council meetings.

The IRS recognizes CDHS as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all donations, both cash and materials with established "fair market value", qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Donations are gratefully accepted to help speed our growth. CDHS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization under the IRS Code. Financial disclosure information and our annual report are available upon request.

If you know of someone who may be interested in CDHS, please pass this newsletter along or give us the name; we will send a sample copy or two with no obligation.

We value your input. In the best humanist tradition, CDHS has no rigid picture of itself. We ask you to join us, not follow us. What activities and services would you like CDHS to provide its members? Send us your suggestions, questions, and comments.



CDHS

PO Box 11209

Loudonville, NY 12211-0209

FIRST CLASS

Address service requested

CDHS ++ PO Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211-0209 ++ (518) 533-2666

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Name(s) _____ 'Phone _____

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Email _____ Fax _____

How did you hear about the Humanist Society? _____

All this information will be included in our Directory, which is distributed to members only, unless you request otherwise by checking and signing here [] I do not want to be listed in the CDHS Member Directory _____

Levels of Member Support

Annual Payment

Date ____/____/____

[] Individual Membership

\$ 50

[] Family Membership

\$ 80

[] Sustaining Member

\$100

[] Patron

\$150

[] Life Member one-time contribution of \$1000 or more

[] Additional tax-deductible donation

\$ _____

Please Make checks payable to CDHS

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