

Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2016

Many Kick the Habit – Become Nones

As this is written, FFRF has 24,000 current members and counting — hundreds are joining (300 since Nov. 8). FFRF's also embarking on a major digital advertising campaign to turn some of our 450,000 Facebook "friends" into active supporters so FFRF can speak up for them and you with an even more powerful voice.

If you know of a likely prospective member, let us know! We'd be glad to send them a complimentary issue of our newspaper, brochure and invitation to join us: ffrf.org/info or phone 1-800-335-4021.

Extra! Extra! FFRF makes the news!

FFRF welcomed in February **Amit Pal**, a seasoned alumnus of The Progressive magazine who oversaw the magazine and its op-ed Media Project for many years, as our first communications director. Amit has written or overseen more than 300 news releases and 50 action alerts since being hired, polishing and broadening FFRF's communications. His charming special weekly email updates keep you informed in between issues of Freethought Today of all the legal victories, complaints, and media being generated.

Thanks to Amit's productivity and Communications Assistant **Laurn Seering's** efficiency in alerting the media, FFRF's state/church work, litigation and educational campaigns generated over 1,600 **bona fide news stories** about FFRF in daily and online media outlets, plus 196 **local and nationwide TV news segments**. If you're not watching the local TV segments detailing FFRF vs. Theocracy, you're missing entertaining coverage, especially when Bible Belters react to FFRF victories. See media coverage daily at: ffrf.org/news/media or ask to get news delivered into your inbox at info@ffrf.org (provide your name and address, please).



PJ Slinger.

FFRF's own media. Veteran Capital Times journalist **PJ Slinger** took the reins as editor of Freethought Today in January. Keep your eyes open for new looks and changes in the New Year! PJ works with newly hired graphic artists **Roger Daleiden** and part-time graphic artist **Jake Swenson**, whose talents are upgrading FFRF's merchandise and PR materials. **Editor Emeritus Bill Dunn** continues as a part-time contributor.

Freethought Radio, FFRF's weekly radio show and podcast, hosted by **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, is produced from the new **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** at Freethought Hall. All-time stats: **Freethought Radio has had 6.9 million podcast listeners since 2006**, and averages 10,000 downloads per weekly show. Our program includes your favorite authors, activists and FFRF staff, provides weekly commentary on news developments and highlights FFRF's breaking news. Get details or listen at: ffrf.org/radio/.

Freethought Now! blog, hosted by Patheos, at: patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/. FFRF posted more than 100 blogs so far this year, many by FFRF **Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel**. Analytics show over 484,000 page views from November 2015-November 2016, three-quarters by new visitors, a male/female split of 54/46 and Millennials making up 61 percent of users.



Photo: Chris Line

FFRF's "unabashed" staff and interns, October 2016.

New Year's resolution: Look for FFRF's upcoming TV show and more videos produced in the **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** in 2017!

FFRF restores historic Ingersoll statue

FFRF quickly raised funds — from 243 donors representing 42 states plus Puerto Rico and Canada — to refurbish the only public statue of "Great Agnostic" Robert Green Ingersoll, in a public park in Peoria, Ill. The project had been slated to take several years and involve partial taxpayer support. FFRF paid the entire bill. Thanks, donors, and sculptor **Zenos Frudakis** for overseeing it and saving us money, and Jeff Ingersoll with the Robert G. Ingersoll Memorial Committee! FFRF held a dinner party preceding the city's rededication in Glen Oak Park, where Dan and Annie Laurie were invited along with speakers such as descendants **Elliott Ingersoll** and **Jeff Ingersoll**.



FFRF's legal accomplishments – 2016

There are many! From October 2015 to October 2016, requests for help came from 3,301 contacts. FFRF sent **1,049 official complaint letters**, racking up **230 significant victories**, including ending **166 school violations**. (And more to come, as it often takes follow-up letters.) FFRF halted multiple violations in many school districts, stopped coach-led prayer, reined in religious clubs receiving school endorsement, halted 10 bible distributions, removed religious



Photo: Laurn Seering

FFRF Legal Department fighting for you!

postings or displays in 17 schools, and stopped prayer by six school boards, a major accomplishment.

Other victories included removing 11 religious displays from government property, halting religion at senior centers, removing Ten Commandments displays, devotional holiday displays and crosses. The final tally for the year will appear in the January-February 2017 Freethought Today.

Additionally, FFRF attorneys sent a whopping **1,390** letters to superintendents in five states warning them not to schedule public school field trips to Ken Ham's "Ark Park"!

FFRF wins six lawsuit victories/ legal rounds!

California. *FFRF v. Antelope Valley Union High.* FFRF, Antelope Valley Freethinkers and **David Dionne** sued the school district in April for refusing to advertise our freethought scholarships, while promoting religious scholarships. The case was victoriously settled within two months!

California. *FFRF v. Chino Valley School District.* On Feb. 18, a federal court ruled in favor of FFRF and our 22 eager plaintiffs against opening the board of education with prayer and bible readings. The board foolishly voted 3-2 to appeal to the 9th Circuit, but the district's been ordered to pay \$200,000 in legal costs.

Indiana. *FFRF v. Concord Community Schools.* We have a partial victory, winning a ruling against holding a live nativity performed by students as part of a Christmas concert in Elkhart schools, while teachers read from the New Testament. Stay tuned, as the judge said a non-live nativity at a school function is just fine.

Pennsylvania. In August, the 3rd U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in our favor that plaintiff **Marie Schaub** has standing as a mother of a student to sue over the 6-foot-tall Ten Commandments monument in front of the high school. The case was remanded to the same judge who last year



Marie Schaub.

found in our favor against a similar monument at a junior high in New Connellsville, Pa. We hope for speedy final victory.

Texas. *FFRF v. Brewster Co.,* filed in federal court in March, made Texas Gov. Greg Abbott eat crow. Before our suit was filed the governor insisted it was lawful for the sheriff to put crosses on the back of its patrol vehicles (for shame!). Bravo to **Kevin Price** and **Jesse Castillo**, both FFRF members and atheists, our brave plaintiffs. The crosses came down almost immediately and the case was closed by June.

New Litigation in 2016:

California. *FFRF v. City of Santa Clara.* FFRF with a local member is suing to remove a 14-foot Latin cross from a city park.

Connecticut. *FFRF v. City of Shelton.* FFRF and member **Jerome H. Bloom** sued in March after Shelton city officials refused our right to erect a display in December, while permitting the American Legion to put up a religious display.

District of Columbia. *Dan Barker v. House of Representatives.* Although Dan's U.S. representative kindly invited him to open a session with an invocation, the Catholic priest as chaplain barred him as an atheist. Boo!

Florida. *Kondrat'yev v. City of Pensacola.* FFRF and the American Humanists are suing over a 25-foot cross in Bayview

Park, Pensacola.

Pennsylvania. *FFRF v. County of Lehigh.* FFRF and local members filed suit in August to remove a Latin cross from the official county seal and flag.

Texas. *FFRF v. Gov. Abbott.* You're a mean one, Mr. Governor. We sued Abbott in February for removing our duly-permitted Bill of Rights "nativity" display from the Texas State Capitol.

Wisconsin. *Gaylor v. Lew.* It's back to federal court for Dan and Annie Laurie, who've been denied their "housing allowance" refund, which clergy are eligible for under discriminatory IRS regs. This is the blockbuster case FFRF won in federal court in 2012, creating panic in churches nationwide, but which was overturned on standing by the appeals court in 2014. We're back!

Ongoing litigation. Florida: *Williamson v. Brevard County.* With the ACLU and Americans United, FFRF is suing on behalf of **David Williamson** and others censored from giving nontheistic invocations by Brevard County Board of Commissions. **New Jersey:** *FFRF v. Morris County.* FFRF and member **David Steketee** filed suit against Morris County in state court over egregious public funding of church repairs.

Amicus briefs. FFRF staff attorneys filed **five amicus briefs**, including four on religious exemptions in the **Employee Retirement Income Security Act** favoring churches over employees. Three appeals court circuits have already ruled in favor of the employees suing! We're awaiting a fourth ruling. FFRF's **Patrick Elliott** filed a brief for FFRF on behalf of **Final Exit Network** in Minnesota, and to support the city of Madison, Wis., levying taxes on unused property by a wealthy Catholic church (with the city ruling in our favor).

Take a bow, FFRF staff attorneys, for developing, overseeing litigation and working with outside litigators on legal complaints and briefs.

FFRF's ad campaigns pull out the stops



Secular vote campaign, censorship. FFRF pulled out the stops in this election year not only to get out the secular vote (there was an increase, according to studies), but to get pols to pay attention to us secular citizens. We took our message to the **RNC** (with a billboard featuring **President Reagan's quote**: "Church and state are, and must remain separate") and to the **DNC** with a variety of "atheists vote" ads on 30 downtown kiosks, as well as a prominent billboard. FFRF's billboard, showing Uncle Sam advising "God fixation won't fix this nation," was "**too hot**" for **Tupelo, Miss.** Our first-ever billboard in that state, paid for by a Life Member, had a lifespan of only four days! FFRF's working with our **Albuquerque chapter** on an end of the year state/church message.

Reason Rally. FFRF moved much of its hard-working staff to D.C. for several days to staff tables and speak, enjoying reunions with many of you. **Co-Presidents Dan and Annie Laurie** spoke at

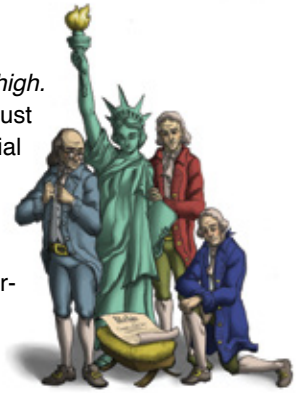




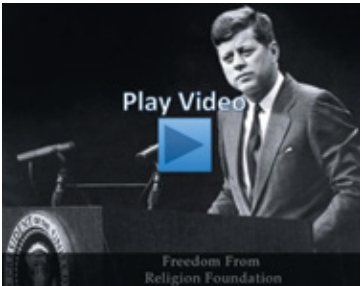
Photo: Andrew Seidel

Reason Rally.

the rally, and **FFRF Attorneys Rebecca Markert, Andrew Seidel and Sam Grover** spoke at the mini-convention.

FFRF took over D.C. transportation for two weeks before, during and after the June 4 Reason Rally. “I’m an atheist and I vote” wraps went on two **commuter buses**, and we took attractive **Capital BikeShare ads** featuring young Millennial atheist voters (obliging FFRF staffers and members doubled as models).

TV advertising despite network blackouts. Our election-year



30-second spot with footage of candidate John F. Kennedy (“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute”) was refused national airtime by CBS this year, although it ran nationally in 2012! FFRF instead ran the ad in 21 major markets *regionally* on The Late Show with

Stephen Colbert (CBS) between March 7-March 20, appearing a total of 84 times. The JFK ad ran on the **Rachel Maddow Show** nine times in February. NBC itself refused to air it nationally, although it had accepted the ad for “Meet the Press” in 2012. We ran the effervescent **Ron Reagan TV endorsement** (“Hi, I’m Ron Reagan, unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell”) on 12 spots on **CNN** in March (the ad is banned by CBS, NBC, ABC!).

Print advertising. FFRF’s monthly one-third page ads in **Scientific American** featuring testimonials by scientists or scientific thinkers, many honorary officers of FFRF, continue to attract committed new members. FFRF timed a full-page ad in **The New York Times, Washington Post** and **USA Today** around the Reason Rally, headlined “Atheists don’t have a prayer in Congress: That’s Why the Freedom From Religion Foundation & Its Co-President Dan Barker, Are Suing Congress.” FFRF also placed a full-page ad, “Yes, there *are* atheists in foxholes” in USA Today’s special edition distributed to veterans on Nov. 11, and to the Pentagon, Congress, Army, Navy, Air Force, military bases, plus a million military personnel who received a digital copy. The ad shows WWII veteran/Board Member Joseph Cunningham at FFRF’s monument outside our Madison office honoring “atheists in foxholes.” Generous donor **Brian Bolton** paid for five educational full-page ads, asking “**What does the bible really say about abortion?**” in memory of Anne Nicol Gaylor, running in dailies in targeted Southern cities.



Joe Cunningham with Atheist in Foxhole Monument.

\$40,200 in student essay scholarships

This year the **William J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship**, for college-bound high school seniors, helped 16 students, with \$9,950 total in prizes. Our college competition, a memorial to **Michael Hakeem**, a sociology professor, awarded a total of \$20,200 in scholarships to 23 college students in a dual contest. A general competition asked students to write about “Why I am a Freethinker.” A second was geared to young nonbelievers of color. Generous Lifetime Member **Professor Brian Bolton** sponsors the graduate



Essay Winner Nadia Duncan.

student essay competition, which had 11 winners receiving a total of \$9,050 in prizes. Thanks to **Dorea and Dean Schramm**, for providing each winning student who’s a member of a secular student club (or FFRF) with a \$100 bonus.

\$19,000 in student activist awards and counting



Sarah Barrios.

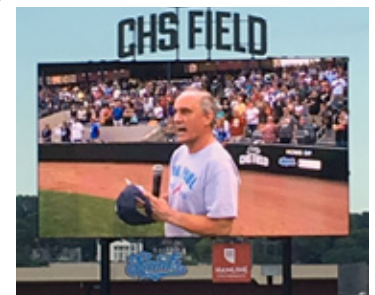
Sarah Barrios, who persuaded her college, Nicholls State University, La., to drop its commencement prayer, received the \$1,000 **Strong Backbone Student Activist Award** (endowed by a New York member, age 82) as did **Dustin Hickok**. For halting religion at his high school graduation, **Douglas Ciampi** received a \$1,000 award, as did **Seth Wrinkle**, a former FFRF legal extern, and summer legal intern **Nathan Niemeyer**. Bangladeshi atheist activist **Muhammad Shohiduzzaman** received \$2,000 to help his education after being forced to flee to the Philippines due to death threats and assaults. Legal extern **Chris Line** received the \$1,000 **Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Scholarship** endowed by Annie Laurie Gaylor.

\$10,000 awarded to young minority freethinkers. FFRF proudly gave \$10,000 from the **Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award** once again to four ongoing, freethinking college students of color with financial need, in partnership with Black Skeptics of Los Angeles. Awarded \$2,500 each were: **Kola Heyward-Rotimi** (Amherst College), **Makeda Scott** (University of Iowa), **Jorge Banuelos** (Carleton College) and **Sabria Harper** (UC Berkeley).

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Outreach – Campus and speaking events

FFRF staff was in demand, making **43 appearances in 15 states**. **Co-President Dan Barker** spoke at 26 events, including two debates and 10 campus appearances. Highlights included protesting the opening of the **Ark Park** in Kentucky, debating “What should be the role, if any, of religion in U.S. public policy?” (fast answer: None!) at George Washington University, speaking at the state capitol in Oklahoma for “Atheist Day,” and about his latest book, “God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction.” Dan memora-



Dan Barker singing anthem

bly opened the one-day “Mr. Paul Aints” baseball game with the National Anthem, spoke (and marched!) at DragonCon, and addressed the national conference of the Secular Student Alliance. **Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor** spoke at nine events, including at chapter functions for **Lake Superior Freethinkers** and **Northern Ohio Freethought Society**, and at **Women in Secularism 4**.

Staff Attorney Andrew L. Seidel spoke at six events, notably including the **Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest Salon Series** with scholars Doug Laycock and John Ragosta, and, along with Dan, at the Freethought Florida Conference. He spoke to the **FFRF-Metropolitan Chicago Chapter** and at Freethought Festival 5. **Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert** spoke at the Openly Secular event in Madison, Wis. **Attorney Patrick Elliott** addressed a Muslim prayer room controversy at the Secular Students of Iowa and a public interest law forum at the UW Law School. Elliott and **Attorney Liz Cavell** presented a continuing legal education program to the Legal Association for Women in Madison, earning CLE credits themselves! **Attorney Sam Grover** testified against a ban on future FFRF ads on D.C. buses, and before a **Wisconsin Senate** committee. **Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne** spoke to humanists in Illinois and freethinkers in Milwaukee.

Chapters spread the word

FFRF welcomed our newest chapter, **FFRF East Tennessee**, in 2016, which joined 19 other chapters run by committed volunteers. Seek one out in your area: ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

2016 Office/Staff/Board

FFRF’s Executive Board of Directors are: **Dan Barker** (co-president, half a vote), **Stef Moritz**, secretary; **Cheryl Kolbe**, director at large; **Joseph Cunningham**, director at large; **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-president, half a vote), **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Todd Peissig**, director at large, **Steve Salemsen**, treasurer; **James Zerwick**, director at large, and **Mike Cermak**, director at large. We thank outgoing Board Members **Jim Bredeson**, retiring secretary, for his wonderful help, and **Patricia Cleveland**, for nearly three decades of volunteer service and guidance.

FFRF’s distinguished Honorary Directors. Harvard’s **Steven Pinker**, the rock star of evolutionary psychology, sits at the helm as honorary president. Other distinguished honorary directors are: **Jerry Coyne**, **Robin Morgan**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel** and **Julia Sweeney**. Physicist **Lawrence Krauss** joined the board in 2016.

FFRF Staff. FFRF’s fulltime staff of 21, plus several part-timers and growing, is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**, who’s also busy managing the big administrative/financial picture. Other new staff: IT whiz and **Digital Product Manager Tim Nott**, **Legal Assistant Whitney Steffen**, **Intake Director Seth Wrinkle**, part-timer **Renee Oberhart**. **Attorney Ryan Jayne** is staying on for a second year as **Elaine and Eric Stone Legal Fellow**, thanks to their munificent \$50,000 sponsorship, and **Attorney Maddy Ziegler** for her second year as **Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow**.

Interns and externs. Interns and “externs” (who work for credit only) in 2016 were: **Chris Line**, **Nathan Neimeyer** and **Lucas Swank** (University of Wisconsin Law School), **Seth Wrinkle** (Lewis and Clark), **Davin Skalinder** (University of Michigan); **Alex Zacharczenko** (Duke). Legal undergrad interns were **Mayan Essak** (Law-

rence University), **Evan Stang** (UW-Madison), writing interns **Zhe (“Jill”) Zhang** (Sarah Lawrence) and **Molly Hanson**, (UW-Madison), and **Lindsey Zenz** (Madison College), administrative.

Volunteers. FFRF warmly thanks **Linda Aten**, **Jeff Brinckman**, **Tom Brock**, **Guerin**, **Mark** and **Brenda Frei**, **Charles D. Hoornstra**, **Judi Jacobs**, **Vince Jenkins**, **Linda Josheff**, **Dan Kettner**, **Kathy Kunz**, **Chuck Maurer**, **Stefanie Moritz**, **Bob Ramsdell**, **Sue Schuetz**, **David O. Staats**, **Scott Storm**, **Paul Uebelher** and **Karen Lee Weidig**. Most were patient student essay readers/judges, and/or kindly helped with office clerical projects (and one works in our gardens). Board Member **Todd Peissig** amazingly volunteers one day every six weeks. Convention volunteers included **Todd**, **Kristine Danowski**, **Ian Gaylor**, **Liz Vaughn**, **Jeff Prebeg**, **Stephen Hirtle**, **Eric Lawrence**, **David** and **Jocelyn Williamson**.

Celebrate the 40th anniversary convention Sept. 15-17, 2017, Madison, Wis.

FFRF’s 39th annual national convention in Pittsburgh attracted over 525 participants from 33 states and D.C., Canada and Hong Kong in early October. The event was preceded with a tour of fascinating Fallingwater. We thank our FFRF Board Chair, Professor **Stephen Hirtle** of Pittsburgh, for his kind help, plus hardworking staff and volunteers. Awardees included physicist **Lawrence Krauss** and Bangladeshi-American atheist activist **Rafida Bonya Ahmed**. Former Rev. **Carter Warden** came out publicly at the convention as an atheist. Young student **Nadia Duncan** wowed the crowd. Speakers included **Susan Jacoby**, **Professor Daniel C. Dennett** and **Jerry Coyne**. FFRF was on the receiving end of an award itself this year, when **Henry Zumach** presented FFRF with his **Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award**, including a \$10,000 check! Thank you, Hank!



Photo: Ingrid Laas

Hank Zumach.

Help us celebrate the **40th annual FFRF convention** at the **Frank Lloyd Wright Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center**, Madison, Wis., the weekend of **Sept. 15-17, 2017**. **Mark your calendar now!** Included will be a tour/brunch at the new Freethought Hall, FFRF offices.



Freethought Hall, FFRF’s newly expanded offices in Madison, Wis.