



HUMANIST Monthly

Vol. XXXVIII No. 9
September 2024

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

Sunday, September 15th*, 2024

In Person at 12:30 PM and Online at 1:00 PM

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



Ben Wang

Since its inception in 2004, National Preparedness Month is observed in the U.S. during the month of September. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) encourages everyone to take steps to prepare for emergencies in their homes and in their communities.

Benjamin Wang was a member of New York City's Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) before relocating to the Capital District, when he soon became a member of CDHS. CERT is a community outreach program within NYC's Emergency Management Office, which was established in 1996. CERT members are dedicated volunteers who help prepare their communities for emergencies and disasters. CERT members are trained to support first responders in disaster events, help people displaced from their homes, and educate communities about emergency preparedness. While in NYC, Benjamin participated in many community support events and gave multiple Ready New York presentations for his CERT chapter.

This meeting will discuss the potential emergencies and natural disasters the Capital District may experience and how to prepare you and your loved ones for such an event. Topics will include making a plan, gathering supplies, sheltering in place, and evacuations. The presentation will be about 30-40 minutes and leave plenty of time for Q&A and conversation. Benjamin will also have guides and materials for all in-person attendees which will help prepare you and your loved ones for an emergency or disaster.

This event is free and open to the public. It will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, New York and via Zoom. Light refreshments will be available before the talk, but **please bring your own beverage**. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please follow the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend.

ANYONE WHO IS NOT A CURRENT PAID MEMBER of CDHS can attend. Send an email request to: CDHS.Albany@gmail.com. Please send the request several days prior, or you may log onto our Meetup page: <https://www.meetup.com/Capital-District-Humanist-Society/>, then click on JOIN, then click on ATTEND, and use the RSVP function, and the link will be available.

***PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE FOR SEPTEMBER MEETING**

Due to a typographical error in the August issue, the date of the September 2024 monthly meeting has been changed to September 15, 2024. We apologize for the error and hope that the change has not caused you any inconvenience.

— Ed.

The Capital District Humanist Society provides a supportive community for exchanging ideas, heightening our knowledge of the world and ourselves, fostering moral and ethical growth, and promoting the principles of secular humanism. CDHS is a member organization for people with humanist values. Our values include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

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)

On Sunday, October 13th, 2024, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

The Well-Connected Animal: Social Networks and the Wondrous Complexity of Animal Societies

It's all about who you know. Whether vampire bats sharing blood meals for survival, macaque monkeys forming grooming pacts after a deadly hurricane, marmots warning others of danger lurking in the mist, or long-tailed manakins singing and dancing their little hearts out---it pays to be well connected.

Dr. Lee Alan Dugatkin is a Professor and Distinguished University Scholar in the Department of Biology at The University of Louisville. He is an animal behaviorist, evolutionary biologist, and historian of science. Dr. Dugatkin is the author of over 175 articles on evolution and behavior in such journals as Nature, The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and The Proceedings of The Royal Society of London. He has published three books on the evolution of cooperation. Dr. Dugatkin has had the privilege of speaking at over 150 major universities all around the world including Harvard, Oxford University (England), Cornell, The University of Chicago, The London School of Economics, and Cambridge University (England), and is a contributing author to Scientific American, the New Scientist, Newsday, the Washington Post, Cerebrum, BioScience and the Wilson Quarterly.

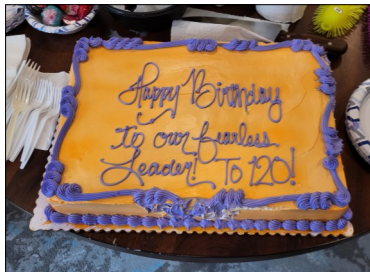


Lee A. Dugatkin

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) via Zoom. The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the on-line meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see page 1 to request an email invitation to attend.

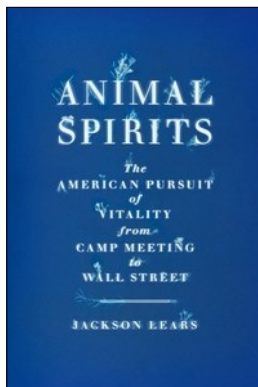
Happy Birthday, Don!

At the August 11 meeting, our "fearless leader", Don Porterfield, was surprised with a cake and a heartfelt, if off-key, rendition of "Happy Birthday". Don, best wishes for many more, and thank you for everything you do!



CDHS Book Group is reading *Animal Spirits: The American Pursuit of Vitality from Camp Meeting to Wall Street* by Jackson Lears. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays.

Contact Frank Robinson if you would like to join the spirited and informative discussion.



CDHS Executive Council

Executive Director	Don Porterfield
Acting Secretary	Sue Parry
Treasurer	Roland Tozer
Programs, Publicity	Fred Levine
Publications	Carol Quantock
Social Activities	Candace Fuller
Membership, Telephone	Judith Herbert
Meetup Coordinator	Fred Levine
Compliance	Kevin Smith
Member at Large	Sherry Levine

Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Sue Parry
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson
Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

RECAP OF OUR AUGUST SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Scott Forschler has a PhD in philosophy. His talk was titled "Morality Demystified: the Naturalistic Origin and Justification for Ethics." He began by speaking of using a hammer to drive a nail. We don't have to think about where that idea comes from. But where does morality come from?

Some people see a supernatural answer. But that's actually something to which (despite contrary claims) we have no access, thus producing arbitrary moral claims.

The other alternative is to ground morality in natural facts. But Forschler cautioned that this can result in oversimplification, subjectivity, and harm. Yet he proposed we can explain morality in natural terms without sacrificing objectivity.

He differentiated values from beliefs, the latter pertaining to factual matters. But moral values are higher order things, meaning something that is about some other thing, like a book about books. Indeed, he said higher order thinking is what distinguishes human animals from others.

One can ascend a hierarchy of higher order concepts — a feedback loop with increasing moral universalization. And it's that universalization that imbues a moral value with authority. That is, moral precepts are not validated by their source but, rather, as potential objects of higher order valuations. This is what we call our conscience, providing us with a self-approval we can't otherwise get.

In this regard he referenced Kant's "categorical imperative": telling us to do something only if other people doing likewise would work okay. And Forschler cautioned that it's not "if everybody did it," but rather "if anybody else" did it, a more exacting standard. In this context he brought in the Golden Rule, though here too he cautioned that it has some ambiguities. However, he deemed it "self-correcting" if we frame it in terms of how we'd want others to apply it.

This being his take on where morality comes from, he offered logic showing why it can't come from elsewhere. Getting it from a text (e.g., the Bible) begs the question of why one chooses that text, while others might choose different ones, at odds with yours. But if you counter that there's a reason for choosing your text, now the basis for morality is no longer that text itself, but rather your reason for choosing it. And now we're into a recursion — why did you pick that reason?

Forschler said the recursion must terminate on highest order principle, which he identified as egalitarian altruism: valuing everyone's consistent values equally.

A key problem raised by his presentation was the dichotomy between thought and action. Certain actions might be clearly immoral, but is it wrong to think about them? To wish someone dead without trying to cause it? The words "thought police" came up here. There was also much discussion of killing a dictator. Forschler cautioned that the consequences may be even worse; such questions can be complex; context is everything.

He finally suggested that perfection is unattainable, and it may be bad to seek it, as opposed to living with imperfection. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

A recording of this talk can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/OFIYzToa74>.

Notice:

Voting To Open Soon for CDHS Executive Council Position Election

CDHS will be holding an online election in September for the Programs / Publicity position on our Executive Council. We will be using the ElectionBuddy System for this on-line election. Voting will begin on or about September 6, 2024 and continue through September 27, 2024. Members should watch their emails for a message from mail.electionbuddy.com in early September. The email will provide a unique link for each CDHS membership to access their online ballot. Please note that each CDHS membership level (Individual, Family, Sustaining, Patron, or Life) is entitled to one vote. We will report the election results in the October Newsletter and via email. Please contact Don Porterfield at cdhs.albany@gmail.com if you have any questions about this election.

Join the bunch for lunch! We gather at 11:30 on the 3rd Thursday of every month. Our next get-togethers will be on September 19th and October 17th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: We're looking for more suggestions for restaurants for the Lunch Bunch. We'd like to give our local eateries a chance by rotating them every few months and returning to the ones that get enthusiastic thumbs up. Please send ideas to Rosina Ansaldo. Thanks!

Ready for a Photo Op? Or Not...



As your editor, I've been including photos of members, significant others, and guests that have been submitted for publication in articles about past events, socials, and meetings. In order to ensure that anyone who does not want their image reproduced in this newsletter, please reach out to me at cdhs.albany@gmail.com and let me know their wishes. Additionally, if you bring a non-member guest to a CDHS event, please make sure that they are aware that photos will be taken, so they have the option of staying out of range.

— Carol Quantock, Editor

Unique, Lesser Known National Landmarks Offer History, Learning Opportunities

(excerpted from [nationalgeographic.com](https://www.nationalgeographic.com), by Stephanie Pearson, July 24, 2024)

These unique, lesser-known sites preserve more than natural beauty; they pass on important American history.

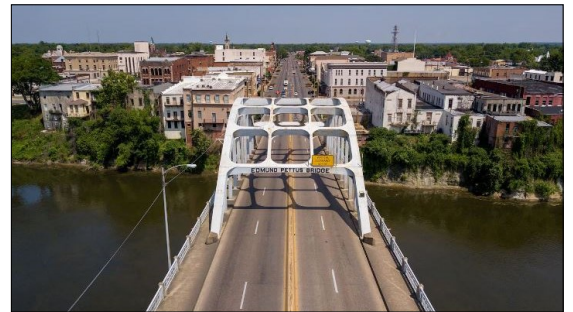
Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, Alabama

This 54-mile-long national historic trail commemorates the route, people, and events surrounding the 1965 Voting Rights March from Selma to Montgomery.

It began on March 7, 1965, in Selma, where 600 nonviolent protesters, led by Hosea Williams, John Lewis, Albert Turner, and Bob Mants, set out for Montgomery to demand their right to vote. When they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, law enforcement officers attacked the marchers with billy clubs, tear gas, and horses. News of this Bloody Sunday, as it became known, transfixed the nation.

On March 9, 1,500 protestors, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., were once again blocked by state troopers. This day became known as "Turnaround Tuesday." On March 21, King, followed by 3,000 others, once again set out from Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church. To ensure a peaceful march, President Lyndon B. Johnson used federal authority to call up the Alabama National Guard, which, along with the FBI and federal marshals, lined U.S. Highway 80.

The march grew to 25,000 strong by the time it ended in Montgomery on March 25, where King delivered his famous "How Long? Not Long" speech at the Alabama State Capitol. The three voting rights marches had profound impact. Five months later, on August 6, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law.



Edmund Pettus Bridge, in Selma, Alabama, is part of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail. On March 7, 1965, protestors for voting rights were brutally attacked on the bridge by law enforcement officers. Photograph by Roy Johnson, Alamy

Stonewall National Monument, New York

In the 1960s, there were very few havens for the LGBTQ+ community in the United States. One exception was New York City's Greenwich Village, also a hub for artists, musicians, writers, and protestors of the Vietnam War.

It was home to the Mafia-run Stonewall Inn, a private bottle club where same-sex couples were allowed to openly dance and drink together (at the time, it was illegal in New York to serve alcohol to members of the LGBTQ+ community). LGBTQ+ rights outside the Stonewall Inn were nonexistent. After a raid on any bar where LGBTQ+ people were suspected to be gathering, police officers would line up patrons outside and force them to present identification. If they were wearing at least three pieces of clothing that didn't match their I.D. gender, the police would arrest them.



The Stonewall Inn was one of the few places in the 1960s that same-sex couples could openly dance and drink together.

Photograph by Florent Pommier, REA, Redux

Anger over the LGBTQ+ community's mistreatment came to a boiling point in the early morning of June 28, 1969, when the police raided the Stonewall Inn and began arresting people. No one really knows how the riot started, but as more people were arrested, the crowd grew. One taxi driver died of a heart attack and many people were beaten, but this resistance, which lasted until July 3, served as a catalyst for the gay rights movement around the world.

In 2016 President Barack Obama declared the iron-gated, flower-filled Christopher Park across the street from the Stonewall Inn part of the national monument, the first National Park Service unit to tell the story of the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. The park's visitors center opened on June 28, timed with the 55th anniversary of the uprising.

September Social to be Held at Opus 40 in Saugerties

Let's take advantage of the good weather September will have to offer and have an outdoor social! Opus 40 (356 George Sickle Road, Saugerties, 12477) is a perfect location to bring a picnic lunch and eat together on the grounds. Everyone should plan to bring their own provisions.

We will meet there at 10:30 AM, when they open, on Saturday, September 21, 2024. Many libraries have passes to Opus 40; however, tickets for seniors are \$12 (adults \$15).

Please go to <https://opus40.org/> for more information.

If you plan to attend or have a question, please email Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by September 18. We look forward to seeing you there.

Opus 40 is a large environmental sculpture in Saugerties, NY, created by sculptor and quarryman Harvey Fite (1903-1976). It comprises a series of drystone ramps, pedestals, and platforms covering 6.5 acres of a bluestone quarry.

Fite, then a professor of sculpture and theater at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, purchased the disused quarry site in 1938, expecting to use it as a source of raw stone for his representational sculpture. Instead, inspired by a season of work restoring Mayan ruins in Honduras, he began creating a space to display the large carved statues he was beginning to create out of native bluestone. Using the



rubble that had been left behind as the area was quarried, he built terraces, ramps and walkways to lead to the individual works, doing all the work by hand, and using the traditional hand tools that had been used by the local quarrymen before him. As the rampwork of his open-air gallery expanded, Fite realized that the 1.5-ton (1.36 metric ton) statue, *Flame*, which had occupied the central pedestal, had become too small for the scale to which his work had grown, and he replaced it with a 9.5-ton bluestone pillar he had found in a nearby streambed, intent on carving it in place as his tallest bluestone sculpture to date. Fite erected the focal monolith in 1964, 25 years after he had begun work on his quarry gallery. It is on the Registry of Historic Places.

August Social Recap

Thirteen CDHS members and friends attended the August Social, where members and guests had a delicious lunch at Mrs. K's Kitchen, followed by a tour of the Dr. Best House and Medical Museum, both in Middleburgh. Everyone enjoyed the meal and the amazing museum exhibits. The museum is filled with late 19th and early 20th century artifacts, with special emphasis on medical equipment that was the state of the art at the time.

Sincere thanks go out to Dee Fuller for arranging all our socials and making them such a success.



Delaware on verge of passing "death with dignity" law thanks to humanist lawmaker

The bill is the result of a nearly ten-year push from retiring State Rep. Paul S. Baumbach from Friendly Atheist, August 19, 2024

After a nearly ten-year fight, an openly humanist member of the Delaware State House is on the verge of having his monumental "death with dignity" bill become law. But there is one more obstacle standing in the way.

HB 140 would allow terminally ill people to end life on their own terms, subject to approval from medical professionals. It was sponsored by State Rep. Paul S. Baumbach of Newark, a Democrat who has served in office since 2012 and recently announced his retirement. Baumbach is also a self-described "Unitarian Universalist humanist," according to his 2022 endorsement from the Center for Freethought Equality.

This kind of bill tends to divide people between those with compassion... and those who make excuses (usually religious ones) for why people should be forced to prolong their suffering. The Delaware bill would only apply to people who have less than six months to live, are capable of making an informed decision, and are acting voluntarily. Two doctors would also have to sign off on all of that.

Baumbach said the bill includes a number of safeguards, including ensuring patients are self-administering the medication, moral objection opt-outs for medical providers, waiting periods and mandatory mental health evaluations.

Baumbach made it clear that no medical professional who opposes this procedure would have to participate in it, while putting those sensible guardrails in place so that patients wouldn't be coerced into making a permanent decision against their will.

In order to go through with it, assuming all the other boxes are checked, the patient would to make two oral requests for the lethal medicine, then a written request, then get that written request signed by two witnesses, then wait at least 48 hours before the attending physician can prescribe the drugs. In other words, there are lots of hurdles along the way. This is meant to be a last resort for patients with no other options available to them, not a first resort for the desperate.

It's the humane approach for people whose only path forward involves unimaginable suffering.

Right now, only 10 states have similar end-of-life laws, yet a recent Gallup poll found that a convincing majority of Americans support these interventions regardless of the terminology used to describe them:

Yet plenty of religious conservatives oppose it. They argue that taking your own life, no matter the reason, is an affront to God and that you must let nature run its course—even when you're terminally ill, in constant pain, and have no hope for recovery. They think the God who inflicted that pain upon you should be allowed to torture you as long as He wants. The Diocese of Wilmington, on the side of prolonging the suffering, issued a statement saying "there is no justification to take an innocent life."

That position could not be more cruel.

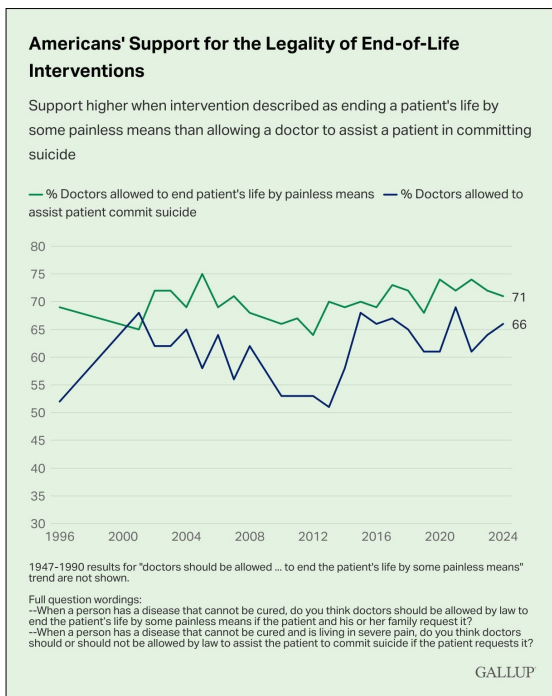
We're not talking about people who are having fits of depression or who want to end their lives on a whim. We're talking about patients whose lives aren't going to get any better. There's no cure for what ails them. Doctors can attest to that. Those patients should have the right to end life on their own terms, having said their goodbyes, without anyone getting punished for it.

Still, the bill's path to becoming a law was never going to be a simple one. Baumbach had been proposing this legislation since 2015 but it never even came up for a floor vote until this year.

It passed in the House on a 21-16 vote back in April (the bare minimum for passage given four absences), but in June, the bill hit a logjam in the Senate. Every Republican and three Democrats voted against it, resulting in a 9-9 tie. Even one of the Democrats who co-sponsored the bill "tearfully declined" to vote on it. But because of a strategic move, the bill was allowed to be reconsidered the following week... and that's when it finally passed on an 11-10 vote. (The no votes came from every Republican and four Democrats, but there were enough Democrats to pass it.)

The bill now awaits the signature of Democratic Gov. John Carney. But even that presents one more hurdle because no one seems to know what he'll do.

Compassion & Choices, a group that's been advocating for this legislation, is urging Carney to sign the bill immediately.



“I urge Gov. Carney to honor the courageous advocacy of Ron Silverio, Heather Block, and the existing pleas of terminally ill constituents like Judy Govatos and Diane Kraus who simply desire this time-tested option so that they can die peacefully on their own terms,” said Kim Callinan, president and CEO of Compassion & Choices Action Network, which led the campaign to pass the bill. “Even if this is not an end-of-life care option that Gov. Carney would choose for himself, the data shows that as drafted, this bill harms nobody; I hope he will respect the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Delaware voters and physicians who support this legislation and allow the Delaware End of Life Option Act to become law.”

So why hasn't the bill been signed given that it passed the previous legislative hurdle in late June?

Technically speaking, Carney has 10 days to sign or veto the bill once it arrives at his desk. If he does nothing, it becomes law automatically. If Carney vetoes it, though, the Democrats do not appear to have the numbers to override his wishes.

Reports from early July suggested it was unclear if the legislation had officially come across his desk. Was this some weird technical glitch or was someone just delaying a decision?

Baumbach's office told me last week that the bill is currently sitting in the office of the chief clerk of the State House and that the governor's office “has not yet requested it.” The ten-day clock only begins after that request comes in.

What if he never requests it, though? Delaware House rules say that all passed legislation must go to the governor 14 days before the November election.

All of that's to say: The governor's going to have to make a decision eventually. It's up to him whether to do it now... or wait it out another three months. Given that Carney is term-limited and not up for re-election—he's now running for mayor of Wilmington—there's no good political reason for him to avoid doing the right thing here. It's not like signing the bill would seriously hurt his mayoral election chances.

Let's hope he signs it. If and when that happens, it'll be the result of a years-long campaign by a secular politician who had one final chance to pass this legislation before leaving office. Baumbach did as much as he could do. Because of his fight, people who are struggling to survive against their will may finally be able to find peace on their own terms.

Refreshments Volunteers Needed for 2025

Sue Parry reports that for the remainder of 2024, volunteers have signed up to bring refreshments to monthly meetings. Unless otherwise announced, meetings are held on the second Sunday of each month. Light snacks/finger foods such as chips and dips, cookies, cheese and crackers, etc. are what works the best. Refreshments volunteers are not responsible for beverages, as members will bring their own. Please see below for more details:

- Volunteers for 2024: **September 15: Rosina Ansaldo; October 13: Risa and Laird Scranton; November 10: Olga and Don Porterfield; and December 8: Carol Quantock.**
- Venue: Pinnacle Living at Forts Ferry, 45 Forts Ferry Road, Latham, NY 12110 in the Library/Lounge.
- Setup time: arrive between 12:00 noon—12:15 PM to set up food table; plates, utensils, etc. are located in the CDHS cart.
- Plan on 20-25 in-person attendees, but choose food that you'd be willing to take home if there are leftovers, but usually there are people who are interested in taking leftovers.

To volunteer or for more information, please contact Sue Parry at sueparryharmony@gmail.com.

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

(518) 533-2666 E-mail us at cdhs.albany@gmail.com

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

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote 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.



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MEMBER SUPPORT FORM

Name(s) _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City ++ State ++ Zip _____

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 ____/____/____
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- | | | |
|--|---|-------|
| [] 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

[] Please send me additional information