

# HUMANIST

Vol. XXXIX No. 5 May 2025 A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society

Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

### Sunday, May 4th, 2025

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

**FORGOTTEN AMERICAN ICONS** 

## MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE AND GROVER CLEVELAND: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY CAN TEACH US

Upstate New York in the mid-19th century was a cauldron bubbling with the lure of fast fortunes, religious zealotry, and battles for civil liberties. This fervor centered on the Erie Canal, which successfully supported scores of villages brimming with opportunity.



Michael Miller

One village, Fayetteville, NY, was home to two future American leaders – Matilda Joslyn Gage and Grover Cleveland. Gage was an only child of freethinking parents, an ardent supporter of universal rights, who Gloria Steinem described as, "the woman who was ahead of the women who were ahead of their times." In contrast, Cleveland was the fifth of nine children of an austere Presbyterian minister. He rose from mayor of Buffalo, to governor of NY, to US president over four years through his honestyand support of individual rights.

How did Upstate New York shape these people and how have they affected who we are?

Michael Miller was born in a New Jersey village similar to Fayetteville. Through small town life, he learned to respect people regardless of their backgrounds and to appreciate the gifts each person brings to the world. Miller developed a love of research during his schooling (Tufts University, B.A.; City College of NY, M.S.; Mt. Sinai, Ph.D.) and academic career (Tulane, Rutgers, Univ. lowa, and SUNY). He applied these skills when he wrote his debut novel, *High Bridge, Matilda and Grover Battle Learned Ignorance*.

The 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, but please bring your own beverage. 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 the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend.

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. 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: <a href="mailto:com">CDHS.Albany@gmail.com</a>. Please send the request several days prior to the meeting.

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, June 1st, 2025, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

## Big Mama Thornton, Little Richard, and the Queer Roots of Rock 'n' Roll

Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton and Richard "Little Richard" Penniman were gendernonconforming black musicians who began their recording careers in the South in the early 1950's. Both demonstrate how queerness was an indelible part of the early rhythm and blues performances that influenced the development of rock 'n' roll. The backlash against queerness during the Cold War and the related focus on respectability during the civil rights movement, however, increasingly affected the ways that black artists could express gender nonconformity. Nevertheless, Thornton and Penniman found ways to subvert normative ideas about gender.



Tyina Steptoe

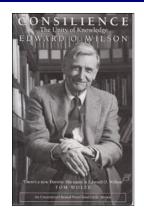
These queer black musicians' gender nonconformity helped establish the rebellious nature of rock 'n' roll, which shows how black southern queer performance influenced the genre in the 1950's and beyond.

Tyina (pronounced Ta-wa-na) Steptoe hails from Houston, Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in History and an M.A. in Afro-American Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She also earned a B.S. in Radio-Television-Film and a B.A. in History from the University of Texas at Austin. Currently, she is an associate professor of history at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Her work focuses on race, gender, and culture in the United States. Her award-winning book, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (University of California Press, 2016), examines how the migration of Creoles of color, ethnic Mexicans, and black East Texans complicated notions of race in Houston between the 1920s and 1960s. Her latest book is *Jim Crow: Voices from a Century of Struggle*. Dr. Steptoe also hosts a weekly radio program called "Soul Stories" on 91.3 KXCI Tucson. The show explores the roots and branches of rhythm and blues music.

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.

CDHS Book Group is reading Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge by Edward Osborne Wilson. 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
Secretary Vacant
Treasurer Roland Tozer
Programs, Publicity Fred Levine
Publications Carol Quantock

Social Activities Candace Fuller
Membership, Telephone Judith Herbert
Meetup Coordinator Fred Levine
Compliance Vacant
Member at Large Vacant

#### **Appointed Positions**

Hospitality Sue Parry
Room Arrangements Frank Robinson
Caring Network Rosina Ansaldo

#### RECAP OF OUR APRIL SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Penny Higgins is a consulting geochemist. That's a mash-up of chemistry and geology: using chemistry to tease out the processes that shape the planet, by studying rocks. Hence her talk's title: Reading the Rock Record — Understanding Our Future.

Higgins also runs a retirement home for cats, but that didn't enter much, except parenthetically, into her talk, which was related to climate change. She explained the difference between weather and climate — weather determines what you wear on a given day, while climate dictates what you have in your closet.

The biggest climate factor is temperature, of course. But to get a handle on it, how does one measure and compare global temperatures over time? One thing she spoke about in this context was heavier versus lighter Oxygen molecules, the former having more neutrons. Water contains some of both. But the heavier version has a greater tendency to fall as rain. And the difference then shows up in the teeth and bones of animals that drink the water, so studying them provides clues about the climate when they lived.

Her main focus was on the MECO — The Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum, a temperature spike about 40 million years ago. To understand what was going on there, and how it affected mammals, she's been part of a project studying rocks from that time found mostly in a geologic feature located in Utah, the Uinta basin. She stated that she's "so excited to see the data that she's losing her mind." She also called this rock stratum the "Caffeine-Free Diet Pepsi layer." However, it's still not clear what caused the MECO.

What is clear, however, is that climate is now changing in ways that will pose massive problems for future humans. And cats.

A recording of this presentation can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel:

https://youtu.be/YdPZ99mbvTg.

#### Secular Week of Action

#### April 25-May 4, 2025

Secular Week of Action (SWoA) unites compassionate communities to organize service events based on shared values, connect volunteers to impactful projects in their neighborhoods and online, and celebrate what we can achieve together. Support each other in building a more empathetic and just society for all.

SWoA 2025 is Friday, April 25 to Sunday, May 4! For ten days each year—encompassing the National Day of Reason on May 4th and the National Day of Prayer on the first Thursday of May—the secular movement rallies together to organize and join inclusive responses that address social problems and promote the welfare of humankind.

Suggestions for action: plant trees or a community garden, donate blood, assist at food pantries or shelters, volunteer at a library or school.

Join the bunch for lunch! We will gather at Diner Time, 813 Loudon Road, Latham, on May 15 at 12:00 Noon (please note new time!). The date for the June Lunch Bunch get-together is June 19th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: If you know of a great local eatery, please don't be shy; recommend it! 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!

## Volunteers Needed!

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**EC Vacancies:** At present, there are three vacant positions on the EC: Secretary, Compliance Officer, and Memberat-Large. Two of these positions, Secretary and Compliance Officer, require work done on a monthly basis. None of the positions are difficult, but all are necessary for records and reporting purposes. Contact Don Porterfield at <u>★ CDHS.Albany@gmail</u>.com.

PRIDE Festival 2025: We need your participation to make this a successful event for the Pride Center of the 🔀 Capital Region and CDHS! The Pride Committee plans to set up shifts of volunteers to handle an information table: 💆 shifts of two hours' duration with two people per shift is the goal, but it won't hurt to have more CDHS members on hand! please contact Heather at <a href="mailto:hdrinkwater@outlook.com">hdrinkwater@outlook.com</a> to let her know your interest and availability.

## May Social—Culinary Institute of America

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It's time to think about the May social!!

We need to get an idea of how many are interested in going to the CIA (Culinary Institute of America) for our May social. Please read the details we received from the CIA below and let Dee know if you will be attending or have any questions. We need exact numbers as it gets closer to the event. Please do not plan to just show up.

Reservation Name: Dee Fuller

**Restaurant: Caterina** 

Date: Thursday May 8, 2025 (weekends aren't available)

Time: Lunch @ 11:45 AM

Party: 15 Guests

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Private Dining Room - \$400 Food & Beverage Minimum If not met, a miscellaneous charge will be added for the difference.

The Private Dining Room accommodates a maximum of 17 guests.

- \* CIA no longer implements a dress code
- \* The Culinary Institute of America is a cash-free and accepts all major credit cards and debit cards
- \* One Check is Presented-only one form of payment accepted
- \* Upon arrival to campus, follow signs to Restaurants and Visitor Parking located at Anton Plaza
- \* Our students will greet you at the Welcome Center (Main Building/Roth Hall) and be able to assist you with any questions

Please click on the link below to view the lunch/dinner menu.

https://www.ristorantecaterinademedici.com/menus/

https://www.bocuserestaurant.com/menus/

https://www.americanbountyrestaurant.com/menus/

If you would be so kind to let Dee know if there are any dietary restrictions.

Things to do and places to explore while in Hyde Park:

- 1. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum
- 2. Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic site
- 3. Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic site
- 4. Hyde Park Antique Center
- 5. Many more





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## If you can't sing, whistle. But do something.

#### The American resistance to Trumpism is emerging, but it requires full engagement

by Rex Smith, The Upstate American, Substack, April 19, 2025

Let me tell you, first, about Lirt Bolt, which is not the name of a company that manufactures steel fasteners and locks, though that would be a reasonable guess. No, Lirt Bolt was a guy I never knew, but whose simple habit so impressed my father that you're reading about it today, some 90 years later.

Born in Virginia in the 1880s to a family with a dozen children, Lirt lived most of his life in a tiny central Indiana town called Lapel. About a dozen years before I was born, my dad became the young minister of the church in Lapel where Lirt Bolt was a regular Sunday presence.

Decades later, my dad told me about his arrival in Lapel, and why Lirt stood out: Hymns were a major part of the worship service, but Lirt could not sing. Mind you, only about 1.5 percent of the world's population actually can't hear differences in pitch, tone and rhythm, a result of what scientists call congenital amusia. Lirt wasn't in that category, but he insisted that his voice was awful. Stil, he didn't want to miss the joyful experience of joining in the congregation's music-making. So he whistled.

Lirt whistled in church in an era when churchgoers tended to sing the old hymns enthusiastically, if not always melodically. But above all the voices raised in renditions of "Holy, Holy," say, or "Onward, Christian Soldiers," folks in that little Indianachurch could hear Lirt Bolt whistling the tune. He was a good whistler, my dad recalled.

Lirt thus created a real-life parable for everybody who witnessed what he did, underscoring by his example that each person could contribute in their own way to the shared experience of worship. So what if he couldn't sing? Lirt Bolt did his part to make a joyful noise.

It's a story that has lingered in the recesses of my memory, emerging somehow this week as signs emerged of growing resistanæ to the Trump administration's radical wrecking-ball approach to American government and civil society. At a time when we need the strength of millions to counter the malevolence of a powerful leader and his minions, it's appealing to consider the story of a guy who found his own way to participate in something he considered important. It's what we each need as we scout around to find ouranswer to Trumpism.

In his final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky writes, "Everyone is responsible to everyone for everything." The line is engraved in the entry hall of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, a reminder of the moral imperative to care for the beings who share the planet with us.<sup>1</sup>

Donald Trump's harsh rhetoric and the brutal acts that have marked his return to the presidency make this much clear: The notion that we share a responsibility for each other is antithetical to Trumpism. A fundamental selfishness underlies decisions by the earth's richest nation to pull back from projects it had committed to uphold — with a minuscule fraction of its wealth — to help save millions of people from starvation, for example, and to help shield the world from the worst effects of human-caused climate change. There is cruelty in the administration's attacks on transgender youth, a lack of respect for the law in its unconstitutional exercise of executive authority and a sloppy disregard for human consequences in the manipulation of economic policy to match one man's ignorant whims.

Dostoevsky's words on responsibility reflect his religious faith as a devout Russian Orthodox Christian, but all the world's major religions have similar expectations of believers: They demand kindness as a character trait and care for the poor as a priority of society, and they assert that humans deserve justice and fairness. Those imperatives clearly conflict with Trump administration directives, a fact that's sadly irrelevant to a lot of Americans who claim to be people of faith — notably, adherents of evangelical Christianity, which is now less a religious movement than a political cult.

Trump's sanctimony is a fraud, as many nonpartisan believers have noted. Citing scripture, Pope Francis has characterized Trump as "not Christian," and has called his massive plan to deport migrants a "disgrace." But scripture matters less to believers in the Church of Trump than, say, the so-called Law of Responsibility, which states that we are each solely responsible for everything we are, have and achieve. That sense of self-reliance appeals to those who see aid to the poor, support for racial minorities and comfort for immigrants as rewards for laziness, and view U.S. pledges to protect foreign allies as expensive distractions from Trump's declared America First plan.

One of the honored sages in Jewish history, Rabbi Tarfon, who lived 19 centuries ago, explained the imperative to action that arises from Jewish law. "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world," he wrote, "but you are not free to desist from it, either."<sup>2</sup>

To many of us, the task of bettering the world seems further from our grasp now than at any point in our lifetimes. Every day's news carries more reports of outrages committed at Trump's decree: people being investigated, threatened and deported because of something they said or believe; federal programs aimed at improving Americans' health and safety being abandoned; efforts to assure that justice is applied evenly regardless of race, sex or national origin being virtually criminalized; families' financial ecurity being nearly wiped out due to the president's sophomoric approach to the economy.

We're buffeted by this onslaught of immoral acts, and it all threatens to overwhelm us. We are in only the opening weeks of the Trump administration, after all; there's plenty of time for things to get worse before we'll have much of a chance to make them get better.

(continued on page 6)

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Yet there are plenty of people who are even now taking on the task of resisting Trump, reflecting Rabbi Tarfon's view: while it's not our job to fix everything, we must do what we can to make a difference. Like Lirt Bolt, the non-singer who found his own way to make music, we need to each undertake the work of citizenship that is within our reach.

A lot of us are groping for a response that might be equal to the breadth of Trump's assault. David Brooks, the eminent New York Times columnist who has rather outgrown his conservatism in the Trump era, this week opined that what we need is "a comprehensive national civic uprising" in "one coordinated mass movement" that can counter the president.

"Trump is about power," he wrote. "The only way he's going to be stopped is if he's confronted by some movement that possesses rival power." And to create that, Brooks suggests, we need "one coordinating body that does the work of coalition building."

Fine. And where might that coordination begin? Brooks offered no ideas.

I think it can only emerge organically, from the seeds planted by individuals. Consider some of the ways that ordinary Americans are already doing what they can to make a difference.

Earlier this month, more than 3 million Americans showed up at rallies in more than 1,300 communities across the country to sound off against the Trump administration. The success of those demonstrations has inspired organizers, so this weekend there aremore events planned in what's called the 50501 movement — which stands for "50 states, 50 protests, 1 movement." Simply showing up is, in these instances, an act of patriotism.

Meanwhile, some heroes are finally emerging from Trump's demand for money and submission from the legal establishment, and responding to his effort to humiliate and reshape higher education. A few big law firms are resisting the bullying that has prompted some firms to promise Trump hundreds of millions of dollars of free legal work. And Harvard has set a standard for resistance in the face of Trump's threats to ruin higher education, fraudulently touted under the guise of combatting anti-Semitism.

Some noted conservatives are speaking out against Trumpism, and a number of judges are standing up to insist on the rule of bw even as Trump seems eager to provoke a constitutional crisis by ignoring their rulings.

Finally, let's not overlook what we might call the spiritual leaders of the resistance, including Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, who had the audacity during a prayer service in January to implore the president to be merciful, and Cory Booker, whose 25-hour speech on the first day of this month turned the Senate floor into an unlikely scene of moral resolve.

These visible players draw news coverage, and they can inspire others to stand up for the principles of our democracy that Trump has put at risk. But the groundswell that Brooks suggests we need awaits the action of millions of people— and that's where we all come in

We need to bear in mind the words of Edward Everett Hale, the influential 19th-century writer and clergyman, a potent advocate of the anti-slavery cause, who urged his countrymen to join in the campaign. "I am only one, but I am one," he wrote. "I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." 4

When we stand up for not-for-profit organizations doing good work in our communities — with financial support or volunteer hours — we are bucking the destructiveness of Trumpism. Increasingly, the well-being of Americans is being protected not by their government, but by the likes of the ACLU, Planned Parenthood, Earthjustice, and Habitat for Humanity. Here's how we make a difference: Find at least one group making a difference on an issue you care about, and do what you can to help.

Too, we need to support the organizations contributing to our quality of life that are now at risk due to federal budget slashing. Arts groups, humanities councils, social service charities and schools all are facing unprecedented financial pressure. In many cases, it will take a resurgence of small-scale donors to save these services.

One more place to turn: We must step up to combat Trump's ongoing assault on journalism. Local news organizations that care about our communities are reeling from financial losses caused by the digital revolution, and also from Trump's assault on the very idea of independent journalism. If you aren't a subscriber to the truth-tellers in your community, you should become one today.

And, of course, we must continue to apply pressure to our elected representatives, to insist that they stand up to Trump's ego-fueled grab for power.

Of course, even if we do all of these things, Trumpism isn't going to crumple anytime soon. But in whatever way we can, we can each make a difference in the resistance. If we can't donate, we can volunteer; if we can't do direct action, we can be advocates.

It's the lesson of old Lirt Bolt, who whistled because he couldn't sing: He could still be a part of the music. Likewise, we all must be a part of the effort, and make sure that we, too, are heard.

Editor's note: I emailed Rex Smith, former Editor-in-Chief of the Albany <u>Times Union</u>, asking his permission to reprint this Substack article in its entirety for this issue of The Humanist. Within an hour I received a warmly written reply from Mr. Smith, recounting that his father, a Presbyterian minister, enjoyed reading The Humanist, and that he, Rex, had received a certificate of appreciation from CDHS some years ago. It is indeed an honor to be able to share this inspiring article with you.—CQ

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://www.glad.org/every-one-us-can-something/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://coffeeshoprabbi.com/2015/02/10/meet-rabbi-tarfon/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/17/opinion/trump-harvard-law-firms.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward Everett Hale

### **April Social—National Bottle Museum**

Join our adventurous group on April 26th at 10:15 AM when we will explore the collection at the National Bottle Museum! Who knew?!

This display features pre-machine-made bottles from each state, as well as Puerto Rico. Bottles were chosen by collectors across the United States, who voted on which bottle they would like to

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represent their state. There is a \$5 admission charge, \$4 for seniors. After the museum, we will gather again at Henry's Tavern, 19 Front Street,

Ballston Spa, for lunch (https://henrysirishtavern.com/menu/).

Location: National Bottle Museum, 76 Milton Avenue, Ballston Spa, NY 12020; 518-885-7589.

Website: https://nationalbottlemuseum.org/

RSVP to Dee Fuller - candacelf13@gmail.com by Wednesday, April 23rd.



### **Center for Freethought Equality Sponsors Symposium**

Join Rep. Jared Huffman, Fish Stark, and more leaders for a virtual symposium exploring the impact of Healthcare Sharing Ministries (HCSMs) and the federal and state legislative efforts to increase transparency and provide consumer protection against deceptive practices. We will bring together federal and state legislators, state regulators, health care researchers, and litigation experts to educate attendees about healthcare sharing ministries and discuss actions that policymakers at both the state and federal level can explore to provide more transparency over health care sharing ministries industry.

Symposium: *Keeping Track of Healthcare Sharing Ministries* Thursday, May 1, 2025 from 9:00 AM to 12:45 PM ET RSVP here for your online participation

You can see more information about the agenda and speakers here.

#### **Action Needed on HCSM Bill**

Tell your elected officials at the state legislature to support a bill establishing transparency requirements for deceptive religious organizations masquerading as health insurance (<a href="https://americanhumanist.org/actionhq/?vvsrc=%2fCampaigns%2f124635%2fRespond">https://americanhumanist.org/actionhq/?vvsrc=%2fCampaigns%2f124635%2fRespond</a>).

Health care sharing ministries are tax-exempt religious organizations that pretend to offer products better than real health insurance, with promises of low costs and caring for the "whole person". These ministries have zero obligation to reimburse any medical expenses. The impact is families surprised with steep medical debt, confusing limitations, and curt responses to their pleasfor help. One enrollee in a health care sharing ministry was told "we'll pray for you" when he called his plan about an unpaid \$60,000 billafter a stroke. They target vulnerable people in search of inexpensive care including pregnant women, even when their plans don't cover basic maternity care. Read about A5438 here.

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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 toattend 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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