



Vol. XXXIX No. 6
June 2025

HUMANIST Monthly

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

Sunday, June 1st, 2025

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

BIG MAMA THORNTON, LITTLE RICHARD, AND THE QUEER ROOTS OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton and Richard “Little Richard” Penniman were gender-nonconforming 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. 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 Steptoe

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.

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: CDHS.Albany@gmail.com. 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)

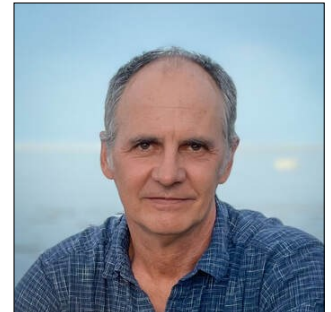
Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

*On Sunday, July 13th, 2025, 12:30 PM (In Person)
and 1:00 PM (Online)*

The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

Sweet and Deadly: How Coca-Cola Spreads Disinformation and Makes Us Sick



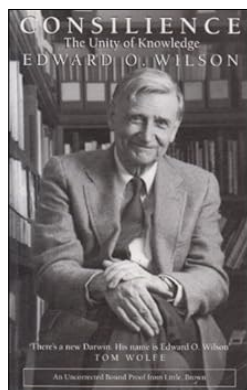
Murray Carpenter

If we knew that Coca-Cola was among the deadliest products in our diet, would we continue drinking it in such great quantities? The Coca-Cola Company has gone to extraordinary lengths to make sure we don't find out. This program will discuss the findings of extensive research and deep investigative reporting, that uncovered the damage Coke does to America's health, and the remarkable campaign of disinformation conducted by the company to keep consumers in the dark.

Murray Carpenter is the author of *Sweet and Deadly: How Coca-Cola Spreads Disinformation and Makes Us Sick* (MIT Press, March 2025), and *Caffeinated: How Our Daily Habit Helps, Hurts and Hooks Us* (Penguin USA, 2014). As a journalist focusing on science, health, climate, and environmental stories, he has reported for *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Wired*, *National Geographic*, NPR, and Maine Public Radio. His work has taken him across the United States, and to Guantanamo, the Colombian llanos, and a factory town in China. He holds a BA in psychology from the University of Colorado and an MS in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana, and lives in Belfast, Maine.

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 JUNE SPEAKER'S TALK

by Frank Robinson

Michael Miller is an author that was born in a New Jersey village similar to Fayetteville, NY, where both Matilda Joslyn Gage and Grover Cleveland lived for portions of their lives.

Fayetteville is east of Syracuse, NY near the route of the Erie Canal, which connected the Great Lakes to New York City. After its construction in the early 19th Century, the Erie Canal quickly began an economic hub of the country by facilitating the movement of goods, people, and ideas, which contributed to the growth of cities like Chicago, Toledo, Cleveland, and Buffalo. The area surrounding the Erie Canal came to be known as the Burned Over District due to the birth and spread of various religions, free thinking, and humanist groups as well as abolitionists that operated the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape to freedom in the north and Canada.

Matilda Joslyn Gage spent much of her life in Fayetteville. As a child she was influenced by her father Hezekiah, who was a physician and political activist. Joslyn was expected to become the first female physician in the country but was rejected from medical school due to her gender. However she went on to become a prominent figure in the fight for women's rights and education. Joslyn attended the first women's suffrage convention in Seneca Falls in 1848 where her speech and involvement was well-received. Some of the other things that Joslyn is noted for include: support for universal rights, including those for blacks, indigenous people, and women; her representation of Susan B. Anthony in court after Anthony was arrested for voting; and Gage's strong opposition to the patriarchal structure of the Church and her belief in the importance of women uniting against it.

Michael also noted that Joslyn's son-in-law, L. Frank Baum, wrote the Wizard of Oz, which includes a strong female character that was inspired by Matilda.

Grover Cleveland, who spent part of his childhood in Fayetteville, went on to become the 22nd and 24th President of the United States. Grover was influenced by his father's Presbyterian philosophy. Cleveland moved to Buffalo, became an apprentice lawyer, and eventually became the sheriff, then Mayor before becoming Governor of New York and eventually the President. He was the only Democrat elected to the Presidency between Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson. Cleveland was known for his honesty, work ethic, and belief in the people. He vetoed many bills, established the Department of Labor, supported pension rights for veterans of the Civil War, and fought against the robber barons. He also navigated diplomatic lines to keep Hawaii independent. Cleveland's humility was evident in his simple tombstone, which only listed his name, birth and death dates.

Matilda Joslyn Gage and Grover Cleveland were both were influential figures in their respective fields. Gage was a free thinker, advocated universal rights, and was a leader in the women's movement. Cleveland was a devout Presbyterian and later became a president. Their only known meeting occurred at the Executive Mansion, when Cleveland hosted leaders of the Women's Suffrage movement, including Gage.

Recap prepared by Don Porterfield with assistance of Zoom's AI Companion.

A recording of this presentation is available at:

https://youtu.be/qP-JQ4_ePEI.



Join the bunch for lunch! We will gather at Diner Time, 813 Loudon Road, Latham, on June 19th at 12:00 Noon. The date for the July Lunch Bunch get-together is July 17th.

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 restaurants 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!

EC Still Seeking Volunteers

EC Vacancies: CDHS is still seeking volunteers to fill the three vacant positions on the Executive Committee: Secretary, Compliance Officer, and Member-at-Large. Two of these positions, Secretary and Compliance Officer, require a minimal amount of 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 CDHS.Albany@gmail.com.

CAPITAL PRIDE PARADE & FESTIVAL - SUNDAY JUNE 8, 2025

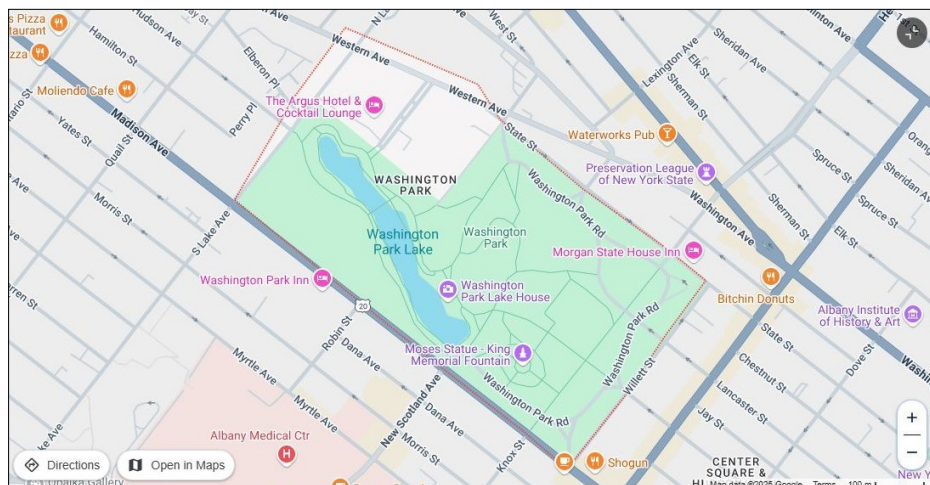
The Pride Center of the Capital Region is excited to announce the 2025 Capital PRIDE Parade and Festival featuring international pop artists DEV and Mila Jam on Sunday June 8, 2025 in Albany's historic Washington Park. The Capital Pride Parade Kicks Off at 11:30 AM, starting down State Street onto Lark Street and then Madison Avenue.

Capital PRIDE and the Capital Pride Parade and Festival benefit the critical programs and services of the Pride Center of the Capital Region. Please join us in 2025 by attending the Pride parade and the Capital PRIDE Festival!

As a sponsor of this event, CDHS will have a table set up for people to stop and find out about Humanism. CDHS volunteers will have brochures and giveaway items for visitors. The primary goal is to promote Humanism and its ten commitments; however, we hope to attract new members to our organization and get the word out about CDHS.

We hope you'll be able to come to downtown Albany and join in the fun and excitement of this annual event. Walk around, enjoy the parade, stop at our table and take in the sights and sounds. We look forward to seeing you there.

Link: <https://www.518capitalpride.com/>



NYS Assembly Passes Medical Aid in Dying Act

On April 29, the New York State Assembly passed the Medical Aid in Dying Act (A136)—marking the farthest this legislation has ever advanced in the state! This is a historic milestone for the Death with Dignity movement and a moment of real hope for terminally ill New Yorkers who want greater control over how they die.

By a vote of 81 to 67, 81 courageous legislators chose to put the rights of terminally ill New Yorkers first. Now, the bill moves to the Senate Health Committee, where it will be scheduled for a public hearing. This momentum is significant, but we must keep the pressure on!

What can you do next? Write to the Senate Committee on Health and tell them New Yorkers want Death with Dignity. **NOW IS THE TIME.** Your voice and your words have the power to move legislation. The Senate Committee on Health needs to hear from YOU and your community, in order to bring this peaceful end-of-life option to New York!

What can you do next? [Write to the Senate Committee on Health and tell them New Yorkers want Death with Dignity.](#) **NOW IS THE TIME.** Your voice and your words have the power to move legislation. The Senate Committee on Health needs to hear from YOU and your community, in order to bring this peaceful end-of-life option to New York!

Bye-bye, Elon

by Joyce Vance, in *Substack*, May 30, 2025

It was predictable. From the moment Elon Musk was portrayed as Donald Trump's co-president, with his son wiping boogers on the Resolute Desk during a presentation, Musk was going to have to go. Trump can't share the spotlight like that. And it comes as little surprise that Musk is leaving Washington when, along the way, his reported \$20 million attempt to influence Wisconsin's Supreme Court election significantly backfired; he was such a turnoff to Wisconsin voters that Democrat Susan Crawford won with 54% of the vote.

There are still lingering questions, like what exactly did Musk, via DOGE, walk out the door with? This is one of the most disturbing unanswered questions so far in this administration. Musk invested \$250 million in the election. You can be sure he didn't walk away empty-handed.

Musk has tried to pass his departure off as something that was always planned, retweeting a post that said, "In the coming days, legacy media will try to convince you that President Trump and Elon Musk are no longer friends and that's why Musk left. What they won't tell you is that Elon was a Special Government Employee, limited to 130 days of service and that term ends tomorrow." While that's true, when has this administration ever played by the rules when it wanted something? Musk could have stayed in place for a long time, perhaps years, as the issue was litigated in the courts. But he's gone now.

There has been speculation about Musk's departure coming on the heels of his criticism of Trump's budget bill, but Trump, for his part, posted, "I am having a Press Conference tomorrow at 1:30 P.M. EST, with Elon Musk, at the Oval Office. This will be his last day, but not really, because he will, always, be with us, helping all the way. Elon is terrific!" Coming from a president who has never hesitated to fire someone who has fallen out of favor in a tweet, this at least suggests a healthy appreciation of the power and resources Musk has at his disposal. But Trump will undoubtedly be happier not to share the media's attention with someone who was portrayed as his equal.

Among the unanswered questions here is whether and what personal data that was in the possession of agencies DOGE infiltrated Musk will continue to have access to. That data could potentially be used for a number of different purposes, but one that comes to mind is using that data to secretly microtarget voters.

In 2024, Musk reportedly funded an ad campaign that targeted "Jewish and Arab voters in battleground states with contradictory advertisements about Kamala Harris's position on Israel." Government agencies like Social Security hold a great deal of sensitive information about individuals that could be used to assess approaches that would influence them. The problem is that there has never been transparency with the public, despite all of the claims, about precisely what DOGE was doing and what information it accessed and retained. The Center for American Progress reported that, "DOGE has persistently pursued unrestricted access to this sensitive and carefully protected data. SSA staff who stood up for Americans' private information have left the agency in response to DOGE's pressures, been physically removed, or been replaced by formerly suspended employees who helped DOGE."

Despite a decision by a federal judge that required DOGE to stand down and turn in information, there have been lingering concerns about compliance. As a result of this incursion, as a federal court opinion summarized, "SSA provided members of the SSA DOGE Team with unbridled access to the personal and private data of millions of Americans [despite having] never identified or articulated even a single reason for which the DOGE Team needs unlimited access to SSA's entire record systems." That should be enough to give us pause.

All questions here—and little if anything in the way of answers. But it's important to put those markers down and make sure we don't forget them as Musk eases his way off the public stage. What does "gone" mean here? Is his access to government information cut off? Will the young, inexperienced group he put together really shut down his access as they continue to work?

This week on its website, DOGE is giving top billing to its important work...finding unused government credit cards and shutting them down.

They've also been busy canceling what they say are unnecessary contracts, which run into the billions of dollars. We will only find out whether they were truly unnecessary as we head into a future where contracts and projects that experts working in executive branch agencies deemed necessary have been curtailed or canceled. Like the report today that HHS has canceled a contract with Moderna to develop, test, and license vaccines for flu strains that could trigger future pandemics, including the dangerous H5N1 bird flu virus. Let's hope we don't ever need that one.

So, bye Elon. But like Trump, I have a feeling it's not really goodbye.

We're in this together,
Joyce

Call to Action — No Kings Day June 14, 2025

On June 14—Flag Day—Donald Trump wants tanks in the street and a made-for-TV display of dominance for his birthday. A spectacle meant to look like strength. But real power isn't staged in Washington. It rises up everywhere else.

No Kings is a nationwide day of defiance. From city blocks to small towns, from courthouse steps to community parks, we're taking action to reject authoritarianism—and show the world what democracy really looks like.

We're not gathering to feed his ego. We're building a movement that leaves him behind.

The flag doesn't belong to Donald Trump. It belongs to us. We're not watching history happen. We're making it.

On June 14th, we're showing up everywhere he isn't—to say no thrones, no crowns, no kings.

For more information about or to sign up at a No Kings protest near you, visit: <https://www.nokings.org/#about> or <https://indivisible.org/>.

Update: Oklahoma Parents Fight Back

By Judd Legum, *Popular Information*, Substack, May 29, 2025

Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters installed a new social studies curriculum that will require all of the state's public school students to be taught conspiracy theories about the 2020 election and the tenets of Christian nationalism. Walters said the new curriculum will allow "students to think for themselves" and "not be spoon-fed left-wing propaganda."

Now, a group of Oklahoma parents is fighting back.

A group called "We're Oklahoma Education," or WOKE, is distributing a form letter that allows parents to opt-out of aspects of the new curriculum, including lessons on "discrepancies in 2020 elections results" and "Judeo-Christian concepts of ethics and government as the basis for American civilization." The letter also allows parents to opt their children out of instruction created by right-wing groups, such as PragerU and Hillsdale College. Parents can also request that their child not have "[a]ny interaction with State Superintendent Ryan Walters in any capacity, including viewing any video or audio recording of Mr. Walters."

WOKE Director Erica Watkins says the group created the opt-out form because they consider some lessons in the new curriculum "propaganda" that is not "appropriate to be taught in school."

Ironically, WOKE is taking advantage of a law passed by the Republican-controlled Oklahoma legislature in 2024. The law allows "parents who object to any learning material or activity on the basis that it is harmful" to "withdraw their children from the activity or from the class or program in which the material is used." The letter warns schools that if the opt-out requests are "not honored, or if our child experiences discrimination or any mistreatment, we will pursue any and all legal, equitable, and injunctive remedies available to us at law and equity."

WOKE's concerns are echoed by the Oklahoma Council for Social Studies (OCSS), which opposes the new standards: "OCSS cannot fully support the standards in their current form," the group said. "Many of the late additions include historically inaccurate content and do not align with the inclusive, evidence-based approach that is essential to high-quality social studies instruction."

In response, Walters said that it was "concerning that parents would opt their kids out of understanding American history." Walters also said that the waiver created by WOKE was "absolutely not enforceable" in part because it was created by "a hyperpartisan organization." Walters claimed that a "parent would need to provide his or her own form, or, in some cases, the individual school district might have a form that they use." Nothing in the law prevents parents from using a form created by a third party.

Other parents sue to block new curriculum

Another group of parents, grandparents, and teachers is suing Walters and the Oklahoma Board of Education to invalidate the new social studies curriculum.

The lawsuit, filed earlier this month in Oklahoma court, centers around the approval process. Walters did not send the new standards, which are over 400 pages, to the members of the board until 4 p.m. the day before the board's 9:30 a.m. meeting. While a previous draft of the standards had been shared with the board, the new version included several revisions by Walters, including the addition of the lesson promoting conspiracy theories about the 2020 election.

The email sent the day before the meeting "subtly indicate[d]" that updates had been made, but did "not provide any specifics." During the meeting, Walters did not mention the specific changes. At the February meeting, Ryan Deatherage, a board member, asked to delay the vote so they had time to read the full standards, but Walters "pressure[d]" the board to vote that day, indicating a legislative time crunch," according to 2 News. In reality, the board had until April to approve the standards.

The plaintiffs, represented by Former Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter, argue that the new curriculum is invalid because the "Oklahoma State Department of Education failed to follow its own rules for transparency." They are seeking an injunction to block implementation of the new curriculum while the court considers the case. Walters has responded by filing a motion to dismiss. An Oklahoma court considered both motions at a hearing on Wednesday, but has not issued any decisions.

June Social— June Farms, of Course!

Looking for something fun to do outdoors in June? Join us at June Farms in West Sand Lake. The plan is to gather there on Saturday, 6/21/25 at 11:00 AM by the General Store, where you pay a \$10/person admission. Parking is free. It's easy walking around the farm, but golf carts are available if you prefer. There may be a fee for the cart.

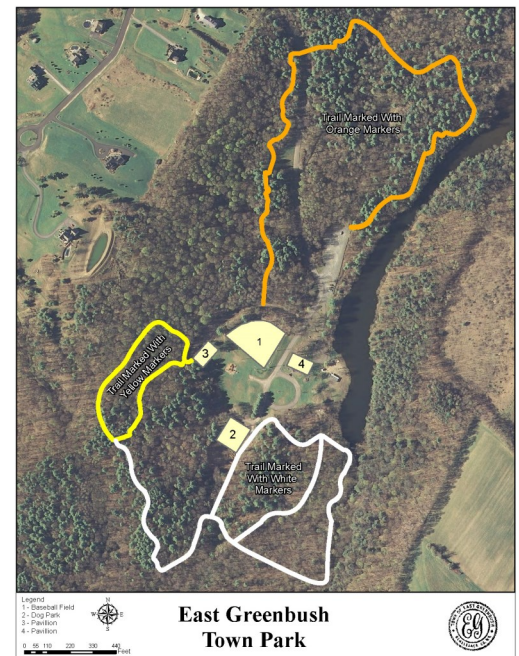
They specialize in heritage cows, pigs, horses, etc. And there are several statues scattered over the land. It's a very peaceful and interesting place to be.

After we finish looking at the sights, we will make the short jaunt to the East Greenbush Town Park for a brown bag lunch. Those who wish may enjoy more walking around the trails in the park. We hope you will attend both the farm and the picnic or at least one.

Address: June Farms: 275 Parker Road, West Sand Lake, NY 12196; <https://junefarms.com/>

East Greenbush Town Park: 99 Town Park Road, East Greenbush, NY 12061; https://www.eastgreenbush.org/departments/community_recreation/park_information.php

RSVP directly to Dee Fuller at candacelf13@gmail.com by June 19th.



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.



CDHS

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Name(s) _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City / State / ZIP Code _____

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 ____/____/____

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership | \$ 50 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership | \$ 80 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member | \$100 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$150 | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member | one-time contribution of \$1000 or more | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional tax-deductible donation | \$ _____ | _____ |

Please make checks payable to CDHS

☐ Please send me additional information