



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

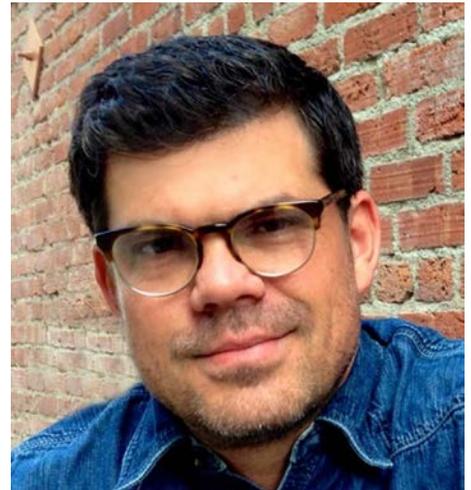
MARCH 2015

March Program:

Ryan Bell "A Year Without God"

For 19 years Ryan Bell was a pastor, most recently the senior pastor of the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church. In March 2013, he resigned his position due to theological and practical differences. As an adjunct professor, he has taught subjects ranging from intercultural communication to bioethics.

Currently he is a researcher, writer and speaker on the topic of religion and irreligion in America. In January 2014, Ryan began a yearlong journey exploring the limits of theism and the atheist landscape in the United States and blogs about that experience on the web at "Year Without God" (at Patheos.com).



He received a Master of Divinity degree from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan and a Doctor of Ministry in Missional Leadership from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

When: Saturday, March 21st, 2015

Where: Patio Room, Vista del Monte (**Park ONLY in spaces marked "VDM".**)

Time: Meet at 2:30pm for socializing and light refreshments provided by HSSB. Program begins at 3:00 pm

Cost: \$2 members/\$5 non-members. Students with ID are free.

Dinner: Vista del Monte. \$22 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Judy Fontana, judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Call 769-HSSB (769-4772)

Welcome to Our New Members!

- Helmar Jenée, Goleta
- Johanna Yinger, Santa Barbara

Activities Judy Fontana

We had a great turn out for the buffet last month, with plenty of scintillating conversation at the tables. Don't miss out this month and make reservations for dinner following the program on March 21st. The menu is not available at this time, but I will let you know when it is. In the meantime, feel free to make reservations. Cost is \$22 per person which includes buffet, tax, tip and wine. RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911.

President's Column: That's the Truth Colin Gordon

The sky is blue, grass is green, the earth is flat. No prizes for getting these quiz questions right: True, True, False. No doubt about the first unless you suffer from color blindness, or the second unless we are in a severe drought, and the third is fairly certain although the Flat Earth Society is still in existence, if not exactly flourishing. Full membership (including a signed certificate, membership card and hand-numbered Flat Earth Society medallion) is available for a small donation.

Mankind has always been in search of The Truth. What, he/she asks, is his purpose in being here on earth, how did it all begin, how will it end and in particular how will he end and what comes after that? How do we know what is right or wrong, good or bad, true or false? Profound questions that thinkers have spent eons trying to answer. Truth implies a degree of certainty that is hard to achieve. Some things

are fairly reliable. It's a safe bet that the sun will rise tomorrow morning at the appointed time, which shows that Newton's laws describe the real world to very high precision. We could say they are true beyond reasonable doubt. But then along comes Einstein and points out that they are only true if you don't go very fast, "fast" in this case being anywhere near the speed of light, which, since it travels at about six hundred million miles an hour, is unlikely in our everyday lives. Not in my old car anyway.

There is surely one place we might look to see the quest for truth in action, the legal system. When a crime is committed, the facts are investigated with scrupulous care, the evidence is presented to a jury of our peers and the trial is a model of careful reasoning. Witnesses are sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the proceedings are conducted with cold formality under an impartial judge and the verdict must be beyond reasonable doubt.

But truth is not to be pinned down so easily. In 1950 in the London suburb of Ladbroke Grove, a young mother and her infant daughter were found murdered. The obvious perpetrator was the husband and he was duly tried and executed (see *Ten Rillington Place* by Ludovic Kennedy). An open-and-shut case. A few years later the truth came out. The neighbor who had been the principal witness for the prosecution was himself a serial killer and was guilty of the murders for which the husband had already paid with his life. It turned out that the investigators had jumped to the obvious conclusion and then had altered or ignored some of the evidence to make it fit their version of what happened. Human fallibility trumped the truth.

The development of DNA identification methods has made possible the freeing of 325 wrongfully convicted people, including 18 who spent time on death row. Then there's the case of the D.C. snipers in October 2002. Several

eyewitnesses described the shooter as a white man driving a late-model white van. The murders were actually committed by two black men driving a dark blue Chevrolet. So even eye-witness' cannot be relied upon. The legal system, while probably the best man can devise, cannot always discover the truth.

So where can we look for absolute truth? To science, of course. Our own Manifesto states, "Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge [of the world] as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies." Generally speaking it can be relied upon to produce all of these, but is not without blemishes of its own. We imagine people in white coats, free of preconceived ideas, recording their observations and deducing incontrovertible facts. But scientists are human too. They have ambitions, reputations to safeguard, not to mention families to feed, and even they have been known to stray from the truth. Often a new theory meets strong opposition from the old guard if it disagrees with the established body of science ("settled science" as it is now called). Alfred Wegener, for example, proposed in 1912 his theory of continental drift, that the earth's continents were at one time joined in one great land mass which broke apart and the various parts drifted into their present positions. For five decades its proponents were dismissed contemptuously but his theories eventually gave rise to the modern study of Plate Tectonics, now generally accepted. There are fads and fashions in science too.

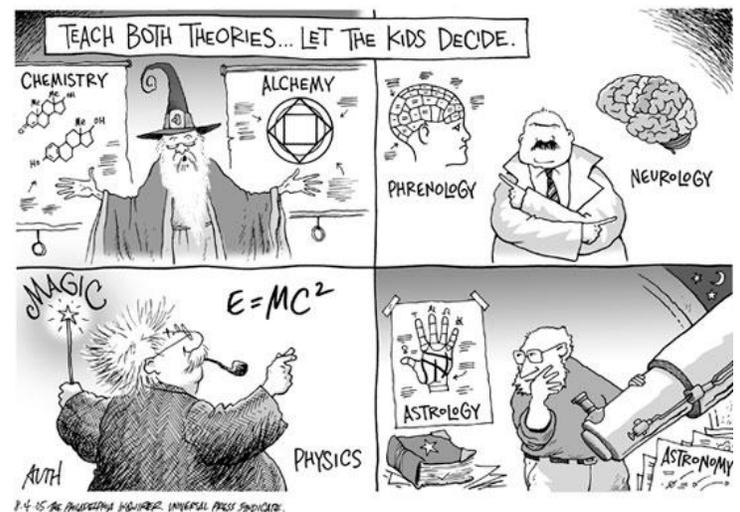
Absolute Truth may be an unattainable ideal but we can aspire to get as close to it as possible, even if it means discarding those myths and legends for which we may have much affection. To quote our manifesto again "Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis."

We leave the last words to Buddha:

"Believe nothing, O monks, merely because you have been told it or because it is traditional, or because you yourselves have imagined it. Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher."

HSSB 20th Anniversary Party

HSSB will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary this year! The event was originally scheduled for May 2015 at Valle Verde for dinner and a special speaker. But due to construction at Valle Verde, we must postpone our celebration until later in the year, perhaps August. Watch for news in the *Secular Circular* as the party details get firmed up.



News About Members

HSSB Member Bob Molinari died on February 28th, at Serenity House. Bob's ready smile and gentle wit will be missed. A service will be held in a few weeks and HSSB members will be notified of the date and time.

**February Speaker:
Jennifer Ouellette:
Me, Myself and Why
Helen Gordon**

Journalist and author Jennifer Ouellette, whose recent book *Me, Myself, and Why* was also the title of her talk, addressed questions of self, perceptions, and souls.

Jennifer had an experience with math phobia, wondered why she thought she was bad at math when in fact she had earned A's in math. This spurred her interest in how we perceive ourselves and eventually how we define the nature of "self." She was adopted, so nature vs. nurture was not a factor in her case.

When seeking information about a potential dating partner, we can consult Facebook, blogs, and Avatars in which we choose how we want to present ourselves to others. Jennifer met her husband online, not through a match-making site, but because they both had blogs that communicated each other's thoughts, and when they met, it was love at first sight.



Left to right: Roger Schleuter, Programs Committee; our speaker Jennifer Ouellette; and Colin Gordon, HSSB President. Photo by Marian Shapiro.

How do we find out what a new acquaintance is really like? What can tests tell us? The Meyers-Briggs personality test originated when Jung and Freud dissolved their friendship. They just didn't get along. A young student named Isabel Myers-Briggs developed a test of 48 categories that supposedly measured personality, but the problem is that personalities evolve and change. Taking the test in her 20's, then again in her 40's, Jennifer changed her "type" from introvert to extrovert.

A brain scan can show which parts of brain are most active at a given moment. But development of self is a dynamic process, constantly changing.

Genetic tests: As an adopted person, Jennifer wanted to know what a genetic analysis would reveal about her heredity. She learned she had a tendency toward alcoholism, but that was a surprise, since she doesn't drink. Are alcoholics made or born? Genetics is not deterministic. Many factors contribute. A gene can be one factor, but not the only one, in determining whether one will become addicted.

Where behavior meets identity, it's tricky to examine sexual orientation. We often confuse gender expression with sexual orientation. Biological sex – what our chromosomes determine.

Gender identity -- how we think of ourselves
Gender expression -- (like the tomboy Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or a straight guy who liked feminine attire) Sexual orientation – to whom are we attracted? Opposite sex or same sex?

Self is the sum total of all that a man can call his. When we peel back the layers of onion, we are trying to find that core of self, the essence of who we are.

Jennifer tried once to experiment with "acid" (LSD), but her perceptions became distorted; her hand seemed to melt into the desk; it

dissolved the boundaries between self and other. Psychedelics work in the brain by enlarging the perception of the world. LSD messes with boundaries. It doesn't dissolve the ego—there is still an "I" with thoughts and feelings even when perceptions are expanding.

The brain is a network of networks. At higher levels of consciousness, it is like a hub that connects other parts as an airline hub forms a center of connections. Consciousness is a process of emerging. Billions of parts are communicating with each other, neurons connecting, impulses transmitting. All these molecules interacting lead eventually to consciousness.

Jennifer lost her brother on Christmas Day. When that process of consciousness disappears, it is difficult to accept the loss. That is why many people cling to the idea of an afterlife, which can be comforting. But there will always be a hole that is the shape of her brother. She is sticking to her bleak approach – that her brother is gone, but he lives on in the stories that she tells about him. We are the stories that we tell. "If you really want to know who I am, let me tell you a story."

Note to HSSB members and other interested readers: You can listen to Jennifer's talk on our website:

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/6734-audio-of-feb-2015-jennifer-ouellette-talking-about-who-we-are>



A Tweet Noted in the Blogosphere:

Sara @pikelet "They're not anecdotes, that's small batch artisanal data."

Pi Day in March

We have a rare day in March, a once-in-a-century occurrence: pi day! On 3/14/15 at 9:26:53 a.m. (and p.m. if you don't use military time), the date and time will reflect the first 10 digits of the mathematical constant pi (π), 3.141592653.

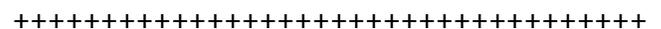
Celebrate by using π in a mathematical situation, such as calculating the surface area of a cylinder (way fun); or for those of you that are less inclined to be excited by math, have a big piece of pie with ice cream. You could even calculate the surface area of your piece of pie by using π !

Why Do Women Vote Republican? Amanda Marcotte

(Excerpted from XXfactor, February 25, 2015)

A new poll from Public Policy Polling is making headlines this week because it reveals that 57 percent of Republican primary voters want to make Christianity the national religion, even though doing so would require removing the First Amendment from the Constitution. Even more interestingly, the data shows a stark gender divide among Republicans polled on this question: 66 percent of Republican women versus 49 percent of Republican men would like to see America become more theocratic...

See the rest of the article here:
http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/02/25/republican_women_are_more_religious_and_theocratic_than_republican_men_new.html



"Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end."
- Leonard Nimoy (1931-2015) as Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*

Meet Your Board Members! (Part of a continuing series)

Ron Kronenberg, Treasurer:

(Note: This biography was written in 2005 and has been updated a bit. Ron was Treasurer in 2005 and is now again, 10 years later! - Ed.)

Ron is the Treasurer of the HSSB, and he says that he hasn't lost any of the money yet!

Ron was born in Chicago to parents who were Jewish and from Poland and Russia. While he was in high school, Ron went to Israel for 6 months with a rather radical Zionist-Marxist Jewish youth group. He paid for the trip in a very capitalistic way -with money he'd saved from his paper route for the Chicago Sun-Times. Because Israel was a new country at this time, it didn't have an abundance of food. Ron remembers being impressed that there was a shortage of food, and the experience gave him a different outlook on the world.



Wilma and Ron

When Ron returned to the US, he attended Wayne State University in Detroit. He was married at 19, and had 3 children by the time he was 25. All the time he was in college, he also worked full-time as a welfare investigator for the city of Detroit. He graduated from

college and taught at a variety of schools, including a community college, and he also became the principal at a secular Jewish school. In 1967, he took a sabbatical and, with his family, lived on a kibbutz in Israel for a year. Ron feels that this was a great experience for his children. Ron and his family were involved with CORE and the civil rights movement in the 1960's and had marched with Martin Luther King. They were also in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention, but because of the children, left before things got rough.

Ron was divorced from his first wife in 1974, and he met Wilma the day his divorce became final. He was ice skating, knocked her down, and then helped her up. After Ron and Wilma retired, they enjoyed traveling and camping around the country, starting with a trip to the Florida Keys and ending in Santa Barbara. Ron had two aunts living in Santa Barbara at this time, so he and Wilma came to Santa Barbara to help his aunts, and ended up living here.

Ron's path to Humanism came from a Marxist-socialist view of the world, and his early travel experiences. He had attended a few HSSB meetings many years ago, but felt that the atmosphere was too anti-religious. He became friends with Dick Cousineau and Judy Freeman Cousineau through the Unitarian Society, and re-joined the HSSB because of his friendship with Dick and Judy. Ron has been president of our society several times and likes the fact that the HSSB programs and speakers are becoming more expansive in a variety of topics. He would like to see the HSSB develop more into a community, because he feels that what people can get from religion is the social interaction, rather than the theology.

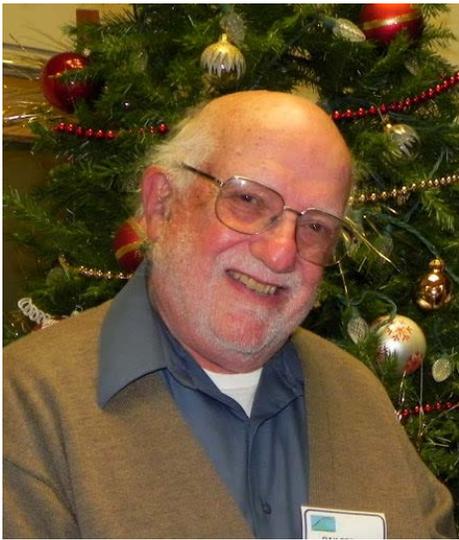
"The Bible is a book that has been read more, and examined less, than any book that ever existed."

- Thomas Paine

Thanks to Ray Stone

Ray Stone initiated and coordinated the January 31st memorial gathering for Dick Cousineau. The HSSB Board and many members of HSSB appreciated Ray's efforts to organize this excellent gathering as a way to remember HSSB co-founder Dick Cousineau.

Thank you, Ray!



The February Issue of *Pique* also included this note about Dick:

DICK COUSINEAU --1934-2014

We extend our sympathy to the family and the many, many friends all over America of Richard Cousineau, a founder of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara (CA), a prolific writer on science and reason for many local and national publications, and a long-time subscriber to this publication, as well as a generous contributor to SHSNY.

HSSB Movie Night

We invite you to join us for movie night every month on the Friday before the last Sunday.

Enjoy a pot-luck supper and conversation beginning at 5:00 p.m., or just come for the

movie at around 6:30 p.m. There will be salad and spaghetti, or soup and salad. Bring something ready to share. Everyone will be welcomed. We will be in Goleta at Madeline's house at **5:00 p.m. on March 27th**. RSVP for the address: 806-681-1105, or mmoreaux@dock.net

The March movie will be *Dogma*, a 1999 comedy that views Catholicism irreverently. The film stars Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, and Linda Fiorentino.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120655/>

On movie night, we also collect paperback books for donation to the jail's recreational library. The books should be paperback, in good condition from well-known publishers. They should have no previous owner's names or notes written inside the books. Small markings could be erased or blacked out. There should be no underlines or page notes. No pornography or anything racially provocative. The inmates can borrow 2-4 books a week from the sheriff's recreational library. They like to read novels, westerns and murder mysteries, etc.

Islam and the West at War Roger Cohen

(Excerpted from *The New York Times*, February 16, 2015)

After a Danish movie director at a seminar on "Art, Blasphemy and Freedom of Expression" and a Danish Jew guarding a synagogue were shot dead in Copenhagen, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the prime minister of Denmark, uttered a familiar trope:

"We are not in the middle of a battle between Islam and the West. It's not a battle between Muslims and non-Muslims. It's a battle between values based on the freedom of the individual and a dark ideology."

This statement — with its echoes of President Obama’s vague references to “violent extremists” uncoupled from the fundamentalist Islam to which said throat-cutting extremists pledge allegiance — scarcely stands up to scrutiny. It is empty talk.

Across a wide swath of territory, in Iraq, in Syria, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Yemen, the West has been or is at war, or near-war, with the Muslim world, in a failed bid to eradicate a metastasizing Islamist movement of murderous hatred toward Western civilization.

To call this movement, whose most potent recent manifestation is the Islamic State, a “dark ideology” is like calling Nazism a reaction to German humiliation in World War I: true but wholly inadequate. There is little point in Western politicians rehearsing lines about there being no battle between Islam and the West, when in all the above-mentioned countries tens of millions of Muslims, with much carnage as evidence, believe the contrary...

Read the rest of the article here:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/17/opinion/roger-cohen-islam-and-the-west-at-war.html?rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Froger-cohen&r=0>



Much to the terrorists' surprise, the virgins waiting for them in paradise weren't what they expected!

Oliver Sacks, On Learning He Has Terminal Cancer

Oliver Sacks, professor of neurology at New York University School of Medicine, and author of several books, was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. This excerpt is from *The New York Times*, February 19, 2015:

“There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate — the genetic and neural fate — of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death.

I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers...

Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.”

Humanist and Freethought Books at the Library

A reminder to all members of HSSB: there is a shelf of atheist/humanist/freethought books, donated by HSSB to the Santa Barbara Public Library. The books are gift-plated with the following text: “A Gift of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara.”

Book titles include:

The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief - Tom Flynn
Darwin's Dangerous Idea - Daniel Dennett
Losing Faith in Faith - Dan Barker

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- March 15: Douglas Hill: *Pyramid Schemes, Multi-Level Marketing, and Ponzi Schemes*. Center for Inquiry West, Costa Mesa.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/no_lecture_at_cfila_03_15_15/
- March 29: Dr. Susan Pinker: *The Village Effect: How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and Smarter*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- April 19: Dr. Phil Zuckerman: *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- May 29-31: *In the Year 2525: Big Science, Big History, and the Far Future of Humanity*. A conference at Cal Tech, with speakers Jared Diamond, Donald Prothero, Lawrence Kraus, many more.
<http://www.skeptic.com/lectures/conferences/in-the-year-2525/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- April 2-5: American Atheists 2015 National Convention. Speakers include Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Susan Blackmore, Matt Dillahunty, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Eddie Tabash, Dave Silverman, many others. Memphis, TN.
<http://atheists.org/convention2015>
- May 7-10: American Humanists Association 74th Annual Conference. Denver, CO.
<http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>

HSSB Contact Information

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colin3@juno.com

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urbanfollies@gmail.com

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seelberg@cox.net

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Anne Rojas

David Echols

Roger Schlueter

Judy Fontana

Pat Ward

Diane Krohn

Mary Wilk

Newsletter Editor:

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djkrohn@cox.net

Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

HSSB meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. Students are free with a Student ID.

Annual HSSB membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a Society Supporter. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link
<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>

See us on Facebook



HSSB Calendar

Tuesday March 17: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday March 21: Monthly Meeting: Ryan Bell will speak on A Year Without God; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.

Friday March 27: HSSB Movie Night: We will be watching *Dogma*. Meet at 5:00 p.m. at Madeline's house. Bring a potluck dish to share and a couple of paperback books for donations to the jail. Call Madeline for information and directions: 805-681-1105.

Sunday March 29: (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

Tuesday April 14: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday April 18: Monthly Meeting: Anne Reid, the new executive director of the National Center for Science Education will update us on NCSE activities; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
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