



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

[www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org)

JANUARY 2017

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## January Program:

**Dr. Marc Rayman:**

### **To Boldly Go...Well, You Know: NASA'S Dawn Mission to the Asteroid Belt**

The ambitious and exciting Dawn mission is one of NASA's most remarkable ventures into the solar system. The spacecraft completed a spectacular exploration of Vesta in 2011-2012 and arrived in orbit around Ceres in 2015. These were among the last uncharted worlds in the inner solar system prior to Dawn. They are the two most massive residents of the main asteroid belt, that vast collection of bodies between Mars and Jupiter.



Dawn is the only spacecraft ever to orbit a dwarf planet and is the only one ever to orbit any two extraterrestrial destinations. It has also maneuvered extensively in orbit to optimize its observations. Such a mission would be impossible without the use of ion propulsion, a technology that has largely been in the domain of science fiction, but which was tested extensively on the Deep Space 1 (DS1) mission, paving the way for Dawn.

Dr. Marc Rayman will give a fascinating and entertaining presentation on the Dawn mission and its use of ion propulsion as well as its two exotic destinations. He also will share the excitement and profundity of controlling a spacecraft in deep space.

Dr. Rayman earned a B.A. in physics from Princeton University. His undergraduate work focused on astrophysics and cosmology. He received an M.S. in physics from the University of Colorado in Boulder, where he conducted investigations in nuclear physics. He then performed research at the Joint Institute for Laboratory Astrophysics (JILA) on experimental tests of special relativity and atomic and laser physics, and received his Ph.D. there. He joined JPL in 1986. Now he is both mission director and chief engineer on a mission that builds on DS1 to explore the two largest uncharted worlds in the inner solar system.

**When:** Saturday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

**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

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

**Optional Buffet Dinner:** Dinner buffet at Vista del Monte. \$25 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Nan Cisney by 12 noon on Thursday, January 19<sup>th</sup>: [cisneyan@gmail.com](mailto:cisneyan@gmail.com)

**For More Info:** Call 805-769-4772 (769-HSSB)

## Activities

Remember to reserve your place for the buffet dinner following the Saturday program on January 21<sup>st</sup>. The menu is not yet available at this time, but will include salad, two entrees, two vegetables, dessert, and red and white wine. Cost is \$25 per person, which includes tax, tip and wine. RSVP to [cisneynan@gmail.com](mailto:cisneynan@gmail.com) no later than 12 noon, Thursday, January 19<sup>th</sup>. You can submit your payment to Nan before 3 p.m. on Saturday, before the program begins. If you are paying by check, make it payable to Humanist Society. **Please note:** It is very important to RSVP for the dinner and then attend it if you have signed up for it; otherwise, HSSB has to pay for no-shows.

### President's Column: A Letter to Rev. William Barber Roger Schlueter

Rev. William Barber is a Christian activist working to overcome social injustice, mostly in the South. He wrote an article on that work that appeared on the internet political blog *ThinkProgress*. In that article, he reacts to the election of Donald Trump by arguing for a "Third Reconstruction" movement that mirrors those that followed the Civil War and the Jim Crow era in the South. I agreed with most of what he wrote but found a major fault with his efforts to move that Third Reconstruction forward. Rather than letting my thoughts remain my own, I wrote the following letter to him.

Dear Rev. Barber,

I am writing regarding your article on *ThinkProgress* dated December 15, 2016 and entitled, "We are witnessing the birth pangs of a Third Reconstruction." Your analysis of the forces that lead to the election of Donald Trump captured the essence of his followers' angst and correctly set his triumph in the context of

American political history.

Your analysis of how progressive/liberal people must act in the face of the forces exposed by Trump was also perceptive, especially the focus on state-level activism. However, I think there is a major element missing from your prescription for action that should - must - be addressed for your coalition-building to be successful in reaching the goals you enunciated. It is that missing element that I will address in the remainder of this letter.

The missing element in your coalition building is what is colloquially called the "nones." This group consists of people who have no interest in formal, organized religion. They may be Humanists (as I am) or Agnostics or people who may, in fact, be Christians but who see little value in the mainstream churches. Whatever label they use, when asked what their religion is the answer is "none."

The reason this cohort is important to your work is demonstrated by demographic data (source: The Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life):

- ❖ The religiously unaffiliated have become one of the most reliably Democratic constituencies in recent elections. This group will include a large percentage of people who view Trump's presidency the same as you did as expressed in your *ThinkProgress* article.
- ❖ Religiously unaffiliated people make up almost a **quarter** of the adult population.
- ❖ The number of "nones" has grown by **over 60%** since 2007 and there is no sign of weakening of this remarkable growth rate.

Clearly this is an important demographic group, one that cannot be ignored if a grass-roots movement is to succeed on the state and national levels.

And yet, Rev. Barber, there is no indication that this cohort has any role to play in your plans. In your “lessons learned” section, you make no reference to including the religiously unaffiliated in your coalition building. Your statement that “...we need to use moral language” is certainly true but you do not appear to recognize that moral verities are just as important to the “nones” as they are to Christians.

You mention the “Moral Revival services” that you have been organizing. One observer stated that “...the movement has taken on the feel of a church revival.” That may appeal to Christians who already support your movement but it will surely turn away religiously unaffiliated people who have specifically rejected overt religious language.

You eloquently state that:

Moral language gives you new metaphors. You can say, I’m against this policy not because it’s a conservative policy or a liberal policy. I’m against this policy because it’s constitutionally inconsistent, it’s morally indefensible, and it’s economically insane.

I want to emphasize that the “nones” find “morally indefensible” policies and practices just as repugnant as Christians do. We look at the iniquities of today’s society and feel the same sense of moral outrage as you. And, equally important, we are just as likely to want to engage with efforts to address such iniquities.

In summary, I urge you to consider incorporating the religiously unaffiliated in your coalition building efforts. We are a large, vibrant community that can make substantial contributions to the goals you are working toward.

## Cards for HSSB Members

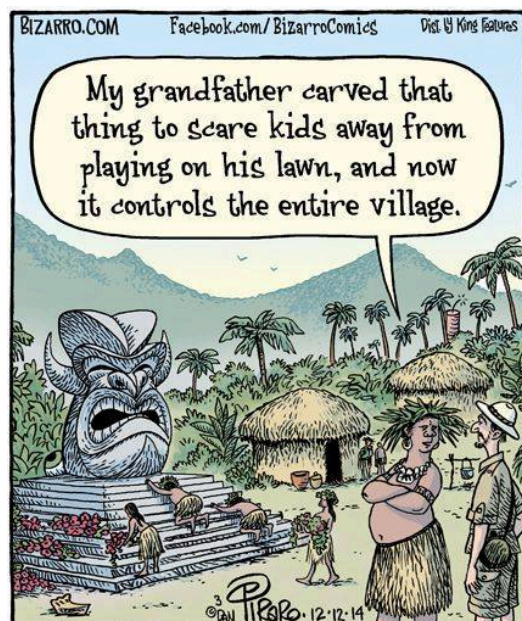
If you know of, or hear of an HSSB member who needs or would appreciate a “get well” card or note, please contact Pat Ward. Pat will let the Board know and a card or letter will be sent from the HSSB board.

Pat can be reached at [gojets1969@gmail.com](mailto:gojets1969@gmail.com)

## Wanted: Newsletter Editor! Diane Krohn

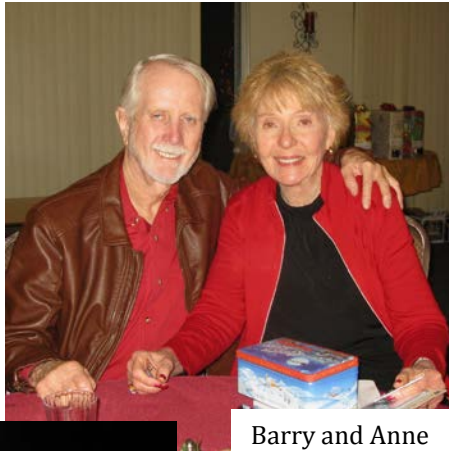
It’s time to get a new editor for *The Secular Circular*. My last newsletter as editor will be June, 2017. Don’t be afraid to consider taking this position – I will be available for assistance during the transition period and several other former editors are available for help and suggestions. Our newsletter is an important communication tool for our community and members. You can help with this by providing useful, thought-provoking and even humorous information for discussion and contemplation.

Interested? Contact me at [djkrohn@cox.net](mailto:djkrohn@cox.net) or talk to me at any HSSB Saturday meeting.



### Winter Solstice Party!

Photographs by Marian Shapiro



Barry and Anne



Ed, Jim and Diane



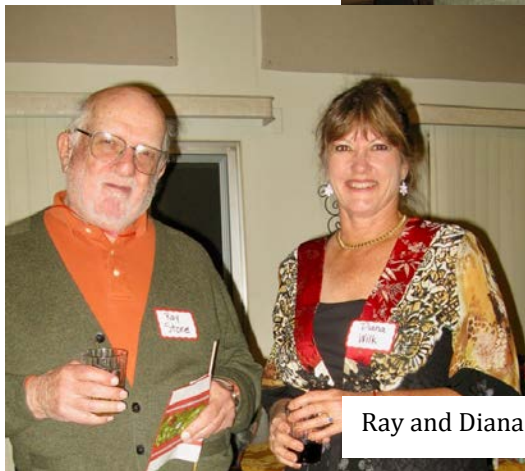
Suzanne, David, and Louise



Ron and Roger



Ray and Louise



Ray and Diana



Judy, Neal, and Wilma

## Speak Out! Roger Schlueter

Our Society has a couple of means to communicate with our membership. The primary one is the monthly *Secular Circular* which is sometimes supplemented with announcements from the podium at our general meetings. However, there is little opportunity for the membership to give feedback or to make general statements that might be of interest to all of us. We would like to emphasize and expand on how you can make your voice be heard.

First, you are welcome to write a Letter to the Editor of the *Secular Circular* if you would like to address an issue that might be of concern to our members. This rarely happens, but I'd like to take this opportunity to invite you to take advantage of our newsletter to express your own views. Know of a meeting that Humanists might be interested in? Write a note to the Editor. Think that an editorial by the President misses a large issue? Write a rebuttal.

Second, we have decided to have a "Speak Out!" opportunity at our general meetings where anyone can talk about any issue that is on her or his mind. There are a couple of rules:

- You have to let the President know ahead of the meeting that you want to speak your mind. I will ask what you want to discuss but I will NOT be censoring topics except that they may not be pornographic or illegal.
- You will be limited to 3-5 minutes. Full stop. No exceptions.

I hope you take advantage of these opportunities to express yourself.

## More From CSICON Las Vegas 2016 Diane Krohn

Wayne Beckman and I attended the CSICON 2016 in Las Vegas, NV, October 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup>. Here are a few more summaries of some of the talks. Several were previously discussed in the November 2016 *Secular Circular*.

### **Paul Offit: God's Own Medicine: The Opioid Epidemic – Failing to Learn from History**

Paul Offit, M.D., frequently talks about alternative medicine and provides skeptical views of "alternative" medical therapies. He is also the co-inventor of a Rotavirus vaccine! How cool is that? Anyway, for this talk, he focused on the history of opium, opiate, and opioid use. The goal in medicine over time has always been to separate pain relief from addiction. Opium, of course, provided pain relief but had that little problem of addiction. So then various opiates were developed, such as morphine and codeine. In 1900, heroin was distributed over-the-counter in the US! By 1910, the dangers of heroin were recognized, and in 1924, Congress made it an illegal drug. But the search for a non-addictive painkiller continued, and opioids (synthetic substances with analgesic properties, such as oxycodone and fentanyl) were developed –with the same drawbacks as opiates. Dr. Offit did not have any solution for the problem; only to recognize that it is a continuing problem: 80% of all the painkillers in the world are used in the US.

### **Elizabeth Loftus: The Fiction of Memory**

Elizabeth Loftus is a cognitive psychologist and an expert on human memory. She spoke about memory distortion in the context of legal cases. There are several memory paradigms: 1) Misinformation: People are exposed to an event, get the wrong information, and then think that the information they were given is correct; misinformation is everywhere; 2) False memories: False memories can be planted and studies have shown that they can be planted

even in people who have very good memories. We are all susceptible to false memories and misinformation; memory is a fragile thing.

### **Tamar Wilner: Make Your Own Lasso of Truth**

Tamar Wildner is a journalist who investigates how media spreads misinformation. For her talk, the reference to the “Lasso of Truth” is from Wonder Woman’s Lasso of Truth, where Wonder Woman could force bad guys into revealing the truth when captured by the magic lasso. Wilner asked, “How do you determine if something you see in the media is factual or non-factual?” She suggested using the following guidelines:

- Does it make sense? Is it too good to be true? Does it support a specific ideology?
- Is it satire or fake news? (*The Onion*, *The Borowitz Report*, etc.)
- Use fact-checker sites, such as Snopes, PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, etc.
- Photos: What is being pictured? Has it appeared before? When/where was it taken? There are reverse-image search tools, such as RevEye (a service that you pay for), but there are others also.
- Video: Where is it from? When? Missing frames? Too good to be true?
- Social media: On Twitter, for example, check for the bio of the person, number of followers, date joined.

When you’ve done the work and de-bunked the information, lead with the facts and not the myth. Avoid repeating the myth, and if you cite the links, use no-follow links; you can show what the link is, but readers can’t click on it.

*Ed note: Read some of Tamar Wilner’s articles here:*

<http://www.csicop.org/author/tamar-wilner>

### **The Evangelical Scion Who Stopped Believing** **Mark Oppenheimer**

*(Excerpted from The New York Times, December 29, 2016)*

One morning in the summer of 2011 Bart Campolo left his house in Cincinnati for a long bicycle ride. Goateed and bald, but still trim and fit at 48, Campolo was the envy of his generation of evangelical pastors. That morning, Campolo was, as usual, a little self-conscious about his attire. “I feel ridiculous in my spandex,” he says. Years of pickup basketball had wrecked his ankles, leaving regular bicycle treks as his only form of exercise. But he was excited to do 30 or 40 miles through the rolling southern Ohio hills.

Normally his bike rides were his time to think — about his family, his ministry and his increasingly complex relationship with his Christian faith. But he has no memory of his thoughts that day. He left the house, and the next thing he remembers is waking up in the hospital. “And I don’t remember anything else,” he says....

For most of his life, Campolo had gone from success to success. His father, Tony, was one of the most important evangelical Christian preachers of the last 50 years, a prolific author and an erstwhile spiritual adviser to Bill Clinton. The younger Campolo had developed a reputation of his own, running successful inner-city missions in Philadelphia and Ohio and traveling widely as a guest preacher. An extreme extrovert, he was brilliant before a crowd and also at ease in private conversations, connecting with everyone from country-club suburbanites to the destitute souls he often fed in his own house. He was a role model for younger Christians looking to move beyond the culture wars over abortion or homosexuality and get back to Jesus’ original teachings. Now, lying in a hospital bed, he wasn’t sure what he

believed any more. For weeks, he cried constantly. He had lost whole patches of memory. When he finally healed, after about a month, he had a thought about life — or, rather, the afterlife. The thought was: There is no afterlife. “After the bike crash,” Campolo says, “I was like, ‘A, this is it, and B, you don’t know how much of it you’ve got.’”

Though Marty, his wife, had long entertained doubts about Christianity, Campolo had always done his job and, in his words, “brought her back.” But the truth was, he had been breaking up with God for a long time. “When I took off on the bicycle that day,” Campolo says, “the supernaturalism in my faith was dialed so far down you could barely notice it.” It had been years since he made God or Jesus or the resurrection the centerpiece of the frequent fellowship dinners he and Marty hosted. Talk instead was always about love and friendship. In 2004, he performed a wedding for two close lesbian friends, and in 2006, he began teaching that everybody could be saved, that nobody would go to hell. To evangelicals, he already sounded more like a Unitarian Universalist than like any of them.

Now, after his near-death experience, his wife told him — more bluntly than she ever had — what she thought was going on. “You know,” Marty said, “I think you ought to stop being a professional Christian, since you don’t believe in God, and you don’t believe in heaven, and you don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead three days after dying — and neither do I.” He knew that she was right, and he began telling friends that he was a “post-Christian.” They treated him like an obviously gay man coming out of the closet. “People were like, ‘Yeah, we’ve known this a long time,’” he says. “‘Why did it take you so long to figure it out?’”

For Campolo, admitting that he had totally lost his faith was oddly comforting — he could stop living a lie — but also confusing. He loved talking to people, caring for them, helping

them. He loved everything about Christian ministry except the Christianity. Now that he had crossed the bridge to apostasy, he needed a new vocation...

*Read the rest of the article here:*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/magazine/the-evangelical-scion-who-stopped-believing.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

### 36 Questions I’d Like to Ask God Hemant Mehta

- Why do you allow suffering?
- If you know our fate, then why should we bother with prayer? It’s like praying for a movie to have a different ending, even though it’s already been written. Seems kinda pointless.
- Seriously, a talking snake?
- What am I gonna do in heaven? Because an eternity of doing the same thing over and over again doesn’t sound like a lot of fun. And I’m pretty sure the things a lot of people wanna do over and over again are probably the sort of things you don’t allow in heaven in the first place.
- How can you offer unconditional love AND threaten people with eternal damnation? Those two things don’t seem to go together.
- Why are your commandments so misguided? I mean, there’s just no sense of priority there. You ban worshiping false idols and taking your name in vain, but not slavery or rape.
- If you really wanted our sins to be forgiven, why did you have to kill your son to do it? That’s like, what the Mafia would do...

View all of the questions here:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2017/01/01/36-questions-id-like-to-ask-god/>

## Make America Kind Again Clay Farris Naff

*(Excerpted from TheHumanist.com, December 22, 2016)*

Did you see Donald Trump's victory coming? I sure as hell didn't. That Hillary Clinton would lose to a guy who says things like "My words are the best" seemed so improbable that last summer an artist friend and I wrote a comic fantasy about a Trump presidency.

Election night found me pulling my hair, biting the sofa cushions, and yelling at my long-suffering wife, "How can this be real?"

Of course, I'm no political pundit. But in trying to make sense of an event in which nearly 62 million Americans voted for a crude, narcissistic swindler with fascistic pretensions, I do have one advantage that you may not: I live in Nebraska, where in Grant County Trump took 93 percent of the votes (a figure topped by only two small counties in Texas.) I've also had the opportunity recently to speak to a distinguished political scientist and have some recommendations to offer.

For starters, if you want to understand what happened on November 8, you have to put aside the Nazi-saluting, gun-toting brawler at the Trump rally—not because he's unreal or irrelevant, but because he's atypical. There aren't 62 million of him—not yet, anyway. Instead, you have to contemplate Karen.

Karen is a white, skilled, middle-class woman. A divorced mom and casual churchgoer, she makes her living as an office manager in a small business. Putting politics aside, which she does most of the time, Karen is a good woman. She works hard at her job, has a marketing business on the side, takes care of her kids, and volunteers her time to help others. Her volunteer work helps people of color, immigrants, and the down-and-out find better lives.

Yet Karen supported Trump. When I told her that I voted for Clinton, she raised an eyebrow and said, "Really? How could you?" That's when I knew that, although we reside in the same state, we live in mirror-image worlds.

How can we understand Karen and millions like her? We have to delve deep into human nature and its civilizational flaws. This election was fought as much on the prehistoric plains of the Serengeti as it was in debate halls of Hofstra and Washington Universities. Our instincts evolved to cope with intense in-group competition for status, and even more intense intergroup competition as small bands of hunter-gathers clashed over territory, mates, and resources.

Political scientist John Hibbing has pioneered research connecting the deep roots of human nature with the noxious weeds of contemporary politics. "From an evolutionary point of view, people tend to see the world from an in-group, out-group perspective," he said in an interview for this article. "This makes immigration, defense, and 'law & order' kinds of things the bedrock principle of politics."

..."For most of human history, the main threat has been from other human beings," Hibbing explains, "and so we worry about the tribe over the hill or in-group violators." The stronger those atavistic feelings are, the more a person tends towards conservatism.

Peaceful immigration, or for that matter the granting of civil rights to an internal minority, especially a sexual minority, can also bring up an instinctively hostile reaction...And when such threats are evoked—by circumstance, propaganda, or both—"threat-sensitive individuals are attracted to candidates like Trump."

Read the entire article here:  
<https://thehumanist.com/magazine/january-february-2017/features/make-america-kind>



**Non-HSSB Events of Interest**

**Upcoming Events in California:**

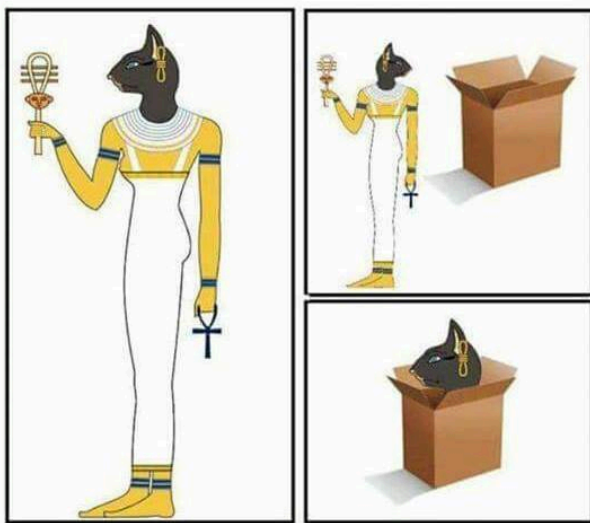
- January 13-15, 2017: Logical LA: Changing the World Through Skepticism and Critical Thinking. Speakers include Sean Carroll, Donald Prothero, Eugenie Scott, Dan Barker, and many others. Los Angeles. <http://logically.com/blog1/>

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“Faith is a fine invention  
When gentlemen can see,  
But microscopes are prudent  
In an emergency.”

— *Emily Dickinson*

# How To Distract An Egyptian God



**HSSB Contact Information**

**Officers:**

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[urbanfollies@gmail.com](mailto:urbanfollies@gmail.com)  
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**Board Members at Large:**

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David Echols	Pat Ward
Colin Gordon	Mary Wilk

**Newsletter Editor:**

Diane Krohn  
[djkrohn@cox.net](mailto: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](http://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 805-967-3045 or [mwilk@cox.net](mailto: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





Humanist Society of  
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PO Box 30232  
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

### **HSSB Calendar**

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

**Saturday January 21: Monthly Meeting:** Marc Rayman, Dawn chief engineer at JPL, will be speaking about the distant dwarf planet Dawn; 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. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.

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

**Saturday February 18: Monthly Meeting:** To be announced; 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. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.