

Annual Membership Meeting
Minutes
Sunday, February 7, 2021
Zoom Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 AM by President, Carl Ledendecker

Members present:

Chevy Anz, Norm Barrett, Pat Cannon, Lee Erickson, Emam Fatah, Jonas Holdemann, Phil King, Sharron King, Aleta Ledendecker, Carl Ledendecker, Rita Lund, Alana Merrill, Bob Morris, Nina Petrov, Eliot Specht, and Jenn Taylor

There was a quorum (needed 7).

Minutes of the last meeting

Motion: Accept minutes of the February 2, 2020 annual membership meeting as distributed [Lee/Rita].

Motion accepted unanimously

The **treasurer's report** was filed as presented (Attached).

Committee Reports (attached)

- Program Committee (Aleta)
- Annual Speaker (Aleta)
- SSA Scholarships (Aleta)
- Outreach (Emam) Long discussion ensued including ideas.

Regular RET activities (attached)

- Book Club (Bob)
- Reflections (Bob)
- Adopt-A-Highway (Chevy) Discussion about the safety of servicing Pellissippi Parkway ensued.

Other RET Activities (attached)

- FFTV (Lee)
- Solstice Parties (Carl)
- Pridefest (Aleta)

Comments from out-going President (Carl) (Attached)

Election

- Nomination committee: Aleta, Jenn

Current slate:

President - Jenn Taylor,

VP - (not committed),

Treasurer - Eliot Spect,

Secretary - Aleta Ledendecker,

Directors (7)- Norm Barrett, Lee Erickson, Emam Fatah, Ralph Isler, Carl Ledendecker, Rita Lund, Alana Merrill, and Nina Petrov

- Aleta Ledendecker read the slate.

- Emam volunteered for the position of vice president from the floor.
- **Motion:** Close the nominations [Lee/Chevy]. Passed unanimously.
- **Motion:** Set the number of non-officer directors at 7 [Aleta/Lee]. Passed unanimously.
- **Motion:** Elect the slate of officers and directors by acclamation [Lee/Pat]. Carried unanimously.

Comments from new President Jenn Taylor (attached)

General discussion among members

Outreach ideas from Emam: as a freethinking organization RET should work to promote freethinking even among seculars. Be inclusive and combat flaws of thinking.

Phil: Promoting conversations. Better Angels group of which he is a member does that.

Lee's stream of consciousness musings:

- Objectives. (We are not a retirement hobby group.)
- Our objective, goals should include to get Freethought into the marketplace of ideas.
- Secular Invocations at all government bodies where there are invocations (Prayer)
- Equal time where religion is visible.
 - Newspaper religion section for our meetings
 - Public calendars
 - Regular press releases.
 - Getting interviewed by news media.
 - Letters to the Editor (competition!)
- Family Friendly Activities
- Age calibrated activates every month.
- Social progressive activities
 - Pride Fest
 - BLM

Carl: Offer sessions on basic critical thinking and basic humanism as a way to make it better understood by the public.

Lee: Create a tutorial on Zoom that is recorded.

Pat: People leaving religion don't have a way to conceptualize the world They don't know what questions to ask.

Emam: Binary thinking is a package that we can combat. Challenging ideas and discussing. Foster complex thinking. Have offerings that reach a wide variety of people. Even if they are not secular they may have common ground. Look at the Mission of RET.

Carl: The Board can review by-laws, rules of order, and purposes of RET to incorporate some of these ideas.

Eliot can send out access info to Google Drive to all board members.

Others joined this conversation, but the secretary apologizes for failing to capture all of the discussion.

Melissa Brenneman joined in at 12:23 PM. She suggested "The Evolution of Atheism" by Stephen LaDrew as a good book to read.

Motion to Adjourn at 12:30 PM [Aleta/Emam].

Respectfully submitted by secretary, Aleta Ledendecker

Treasurer's Report (Eliot Specht)

Man makes plans; God laughs

Dan Barker



\$1000
donation:
2108 meals

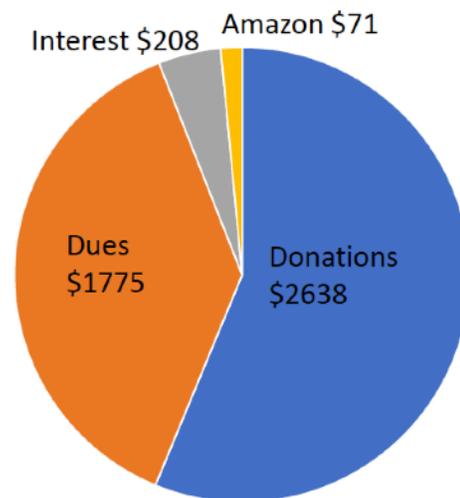
Chris Cameron



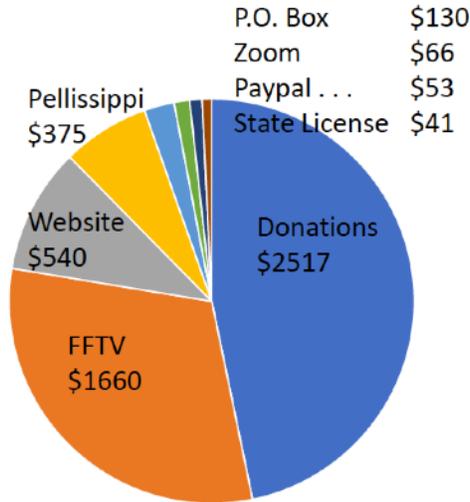
\$1500
donation:
2 student
activists

2020 Income: \$4692

- Most income comes from donations
- \$1660 was earmarked for FFTV



2020 expenses: \$5382



How should RET use our assets?

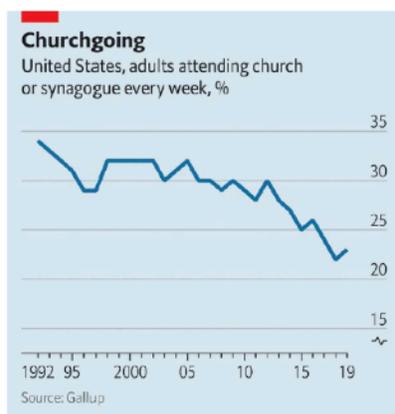
Checking account	\$10,111
CD	\$15,610

	\$25,722

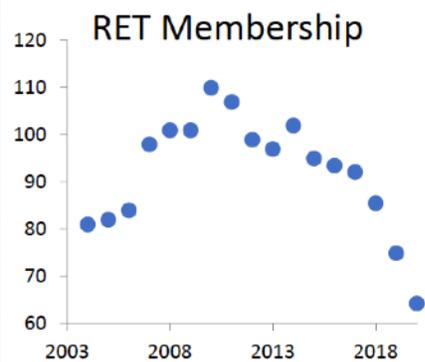
General Fund	\$21,941
Building Fund	\$3,709
Billboard Fund	\$23
LCHS SSA Fund	\$50

Five years of expenses	\$25,722

. . . the beam in our eye



The Economist



Program Committee (Aleta Ledendecker)

Meetings will continue via Zoom for as long as necessary for health concerns. The Zoom platform allows participants who are no longer residents of Knoxville to attend the meetings. There are current and former members from Texas, California, North Carolina, and Canada who regular attend the meetings.

For this reason, even when gathering in person returns to a safe status, we are considering maintaining one meeting each month on the Zoom platform.

Our guest for the third Sunday in February is Jenny Headlee who will be sharing information about her hobby of gardening. Personal hobbies are a great topic for sharing with your fellow RET members. Please consider sharing about your own hobbies. We have openings beginning the first Sunday in April.

Annual Speaker (Aleta)

Dan Barker was originally scheduled to come speak to RET in April of 2020, but that event was canceled due to the pandemic. He will be speaking at a “regular” RET Zoom meeting on Sunday, March 21, at 10:30 AM. The topic is FreeWill Explained. He is especially interested in a level Q & A, so come prepared with questions.

Dan is also eager to return to Knoxville for an in-person presentation when travel and gathering becomes safe again.

SSA Scholarships (Aleta Ledendecker)

This year RET participated in the Secular Student Alliance Scholarship competition. We gave \$1000 to go to a Tennessee student. The board of RET then received the submissions from Tennessee students so we could choose the winner. Two of the submissions were outstanding, so we contacted SSA to see if we could contribute another \$500 to award to a second place winner. Dustin Daniels, who attends Roane State was the first place winner, and Emily Willis, a student at East Tennessee Tech, was the second place winner. Their submissions have been posted in RET Newsletters.

Outreach (Emam Fatah)

The purpose of this committee is to establish an outreach program for Rationalists of East Tennessee. The goal of this outreach program is to grow our community among a wide variety of demographics. Participants in this committee will aid in development and execution of the outreach efforts. Below is an outline of the strategy.

- Objectives
- Message
- Target Groups
- Execution
 - o Message Packaging
 - o Delivery Methods
 - o Activities
 - o Resources
- Timeline
- Outcome Evaluation

Participation by many RET members is encouraged.

Book Club (Bob Morris)

The pandemic drove most of RET to the virtual world and the Book Club was no exception. Thus far, it has been working well; one big advantage is that we now get participation from old members in far off places. This has added some solidarity to the group as well as new viewpoints. One drawback has been fewer participants. I would guess that we have lost about 15% or so in attendance.

The book selection for this year drew fewer entries than usual, but we ended up with a good selection. Overall, the book club is going strong, albeit a little smaller. One item lurking on the horizon is what to do when the pandemic is over. We were having problems looking for a meeting place prior to the pandemic, so that issue is still with us. One solution is to stay virtual, but we need to find a way to grow membership so we can stay vital.

My goal for the upcoming year is to continue at our monthly pace and provide stimulating discussions for all who attend whether one has read the book or not.

Reflections (Bob Morris)

Reflections has continued in the virtual world along with the other RET programs. The number of people attending is down a bit, but we now have old members and friends from far off lands. They bring some new ideas and viewpoints to the conversations which are insightful and entertaining. Of course, we all miss the food, but we do the best we can. Once this pandemic is over, we will have a decision to make – do we stay virtual or go back to the living room or perhaps a bit of both. Unlike more local activities, Reflections is a natural for the virtual world as the different viewpoints are very welcome and a close physical presence is not needed.

It is likely that the RET board will have to decide how much of RET is virtual and how much is local in the coming months. This will be an interesting discussion.

My goal for the upcoming year is to continue at our monthly pace and provide some camaraderie and stimulating discussions for all who attend. It is one of the few times we can just chat about what is of concern to us and what we think of it.

Adopt-A-Highway (Chevy Anz)

Our scheduled January pick-up was a balmy success. Using our regular established quarterly schedule, April would have been our next event.

The Covid lockdown began in March, and I was willing to schedule our pickup, as social distancing would be simple along the Roadside, but TDOT emailed me that events were officially to be cancelled until further notice.

Under these guidelines, we skipped April and July events.

October saw an official resumption of Adopt-a-Highway pickups, and we scheduled our event for November. It was insanely cold. Construction on the new Hardin Valley interchange improvements has restricted about a third of our available area, so we were able to complete our route with just 6 volunteers.

January had us back on our quarterly schedule and the weather was good but very windy. A freak hit and run accident demolished Bob Morris's car which was well pulled off the shoulder onto the grass. Fortunately, no one was near the vehicles at the time of the collision. Police were at the scene quickly.

Our next event will be April.

An official at TDOT has suggested that RET consider a new location since Pellissippi is so dangerous.

FFTV (Lee Erickson)

In February of 2020 we had the last Freethought Forum TV program on the community access cable television system CTVKNOX.

The Executive Producer Sam Goeltz made the argument that we had achieved what we could with the diminishing viewership of cable television and the Atheist Society of Knoxville informed us that they would no longer be funding their half of the show going forward.

We started the show, if memory serves me correctly, in August of 2010 and for over 9 years we NEVER missed a show excepting studio closing for weather and when we were preempted by other programs such as government meetings. In the finale years calls into our live show diminished and after we moved to Wednesday evenings it was less fun and a bit of a burden for hosts to appear because there was not the reward of going to the ASK meetup after the show as we had done for so many years on Tuesdays.

Our last show was a mass de baptism and was a lot of fun.as we even remotely debaptized as far away as Tuscola Il which we can assure you had as much impact as the original baptism did excepting that the participate was willing and remembered this event.

In mid to late February Members of ASK and The Satanic Ministry wanted to setup a studio where live internet stream programs could be made and created a youtube channel United Freethinkers Coalition of Knoxville. The RET board declined to participate in this activity. Less than about three to five live shows were streamed before COVID closed the studio. Since that time a very few of us have made zoom recordings for after the fact upload to the United Freethinkers Coalition of Knoxville youtube channel but participation has been very very low. It is mostly just two persons. Since March few or no other content has been generated by ASK members or Sunday Assembly or The Satanic Ministry. Just the last two weeks or so some members of ASK have decided on a podcast details of which were not shared with me.

In East Tennessee, Freethought no longer has this kind of voice to compete with the church messages. This is a lost opportunity. However unlike churches, who some times stream their regular services live, RET programs must not reveal member identities.

Their remains an opportunity if willing RET members who are comfortably revealing their identity would participate in weekly zoom programs which could have public invitations and could afterwards be uploaded to a RET youtube channel (which would have to be created.) I would like to think this will happen but this will only happen if members commit to participating.

If insufficient RET members commit then I and Charles the Heretic will probably continue on such as we find energy to do so in our little echo chamber we call freethinkers hosts, but we are not likely to change the world.

After elections today will be membership discussion of the direction of RET so I will end my report saying that if members of RET want to create visibility they should ask the board to create a video publicity committee and they should serve on that committee and participate in videos.

Last word from Charles the Heretic from Tuscola IL,

"... if we're to have a say in what is going on in the Republic of the United States of America we need to be more visible. ..."

Solstice Parties (Carl Ledendecker)

The Winter Solstice party was held via Zoom with limited attendance. It was an enjoyable social event none-the-less. A dance breakout room was available with music, but attendees stayed in the conversation room until requested to try joining a different room.

It is unlikely that a physical Summer Solstice Party will be possible. It would not be socially inclusive to limit it to people who had received vaccines. A Zoom party might be planned.

PrideFest (Aleta Ledendecker)

Pridefest for 2020 was canceled due to the pandemic. As of

1/20/21 the Pridefest website states: "At this time, we are working with city and state officials to settle details about Pridefest. Due to the ongoing pandemic and uncertainty of events, we are not accepting registrations for vendors right now. We are prepared to handle Pridefest, whether it is an in-person or digital event. **Public health is our number one concern.**

In the event that Pridefest is postponed physically or we choose to move to an online platform, we will make an announcement on our social platforms and release an update on our website.

We advise against making non-refundable commitments until we have more information."

RET and other local secular groups will make a decision as to participation later, but with the slow roll-out of vaccines, it seems unlikely that we will have tabling volunteers for an in-person event.

Out-going president's remarks (Carl Ledendecker)

My first comment as outgoing president is: It is about time.

Beyond that all I can say about this past year in RET is that it has ZOOMed by.

On the bright side, that has allowed people from far away to attend. It has been good to see those old friends, some of whom have get up very early to attend. Also there has been no need to lug the coffee machine and supplies, signs and literature to meetings but I do miss the goodies and three dimensional personal contact.

I would like to thank the board for their work and support, Bob Morris for organizing and hosting two (like 50%) of our events. Sharron King for the newsletter. Rita Lund for calling everyone she could about this meeting. Norm for his creative Zoom backgrounds, all those have attended and supported RET and Jen Taylor for stepping up.

Let us not forget those who are no longer with us and be thankful that they did not have to worry about whether they would end up in the Good Place or the bad place pretending to be the Good Place.

This year will be another one of transitions, changes and surprises. Fortunately it will be one with younger leadership, yea.

One thing will remain the same, the big problem of religious mentality. The American right has become one with that mentality. There is Christian Nationalism/aggression, a willingness (even an obsession) to believe the absurd whether it be virgin birth or Jewish space lasers and a Democratic lust for cannibalism and child abuse, a need for authoritarian leaders and saviors of the crucified or orange kind, a lack of critical thinking and even basic scientific, historical and civic knowledge, a certainty that truth equals dogma and/or whatever the current “savior” says it is, simplistic thinking, a need to feel oppressed coupled with the desire to suppress the “others”, a lust for power via any means conceivable, and a relativistic morality used to justify all of the above.

Working to deal with that should keep us busy for the next year.

New President’s Comments (Jenn Taylor)

I am filled with gratitude to have been elected to President of this wonderful organization.

When I relocated to Knoxville some years ago, all alone, the first thing that I did was make a point to visit all of the freethought groups that I could find in the area, and I even tried my hand at starting a couple more. However, the Rationalists of East Tennessee is the one group that had my attention the most. I learned so much about the culture of the South, engaged in many cerebral conversations, attended some great events, and have met some very welcoming people.

It is my honor to pick up the torch, and continue in the RET tradition, and hopefully initiate a few new traditions... The questions that come to mind are related to what our organization could look like during this pandemic? How do we get there? And How do we sustain momentum? During this challenging time, It is my hope that we can build connection, and engage our community more.

Over the next few weeks I would like to explore how we can safely meet again (perhaps in small groups within open outdoor spaces once the weather improves), how we can reach members that may want to learn about how to use some of the technology that we have within our reach such as Zoom, and help those that are in need whether it be tangibly, or just as a listening ear.

Time and time again I have conversed with friends about building a secular community that is welcoming to a diverse spectrum of people with varying ideas. I look at our organization, and I have always thought of RET as a great platform that can do more. Many of our members have a wealth of knowledge, and experience. As President, I would like explore what our membership body needs in order to encourage both participation, and continued membership. Please feel free to reach out. I welcome your feedback. Thank you so much everyone. I wish you health, and safety. Take care.