

# FREELY SPEAKING

Space Coast Freethought Association

December 2008

## Upcoming Events

### Sunday, December 7

#### SCFA Monthly Meeting

Location: Melbourne Public Library, 540 E. Fee Ave. Melbourne. We will be having a multi-cultural holiday celebration.

### Sunday, December 14

#### SCFA Adopt-A-Road

10:00am at Palm Bay Rd. & Stack shopping center.

### Sunday, January 6

#### SCFA Monthly Meeting

Location: Melbourne Public Library, 540 E. Fee Ave. Melbourne.

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### Want to keep informed of SCFA events?

Join [atheists.meetup.com/569/](http://atheists.meetup.com/569/)

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### Chanukkah (Jewish), December 21-29

According to tradition, at the time when the Jews were being persecuted by the Greeks they had regained control of their temple. During the temple's rededication, there was little oil left, which was needed so the menorah could burn every night. There was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply.



The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. It is traditional to eat fried foods because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Gift-giving is not a traditional part of the holiday. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Chanukkah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is "gelt," small amounts of money. Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel. During the time of the Greek oppression, those who wanted to study Torah would conceal their activity by playing gambling games with a top (a common and legal activity) whenever an official or inspector was within sight.

## Winter Holidays around the World



### Dong Zhi (Chinese), December 21

The second most important Chinese holiday, Dong Zhi is the day when sunshine is weakest and daylight shortest. The coming of winter is celebrated by families and is traditionally the time when farmers and fishermen gather food in preparation for the coming cold season. People also dress up and visit family to exchange gifts and eat, drink, and celebrate. Tangyuan, glutinous balls of rice flour, are usually made and eaten.



This celebration can be traced to the Chinese belief in *yin* and *yang*, which represent balance and harmony in life. It is believed that the *yin* qualities of darkness and cold are at their most powerful at this time, but it is also the turning point, giving way to the light and warmth of *yang*. For this reason, the Dong Zhi Festival is a time for optimism.



### Shab-e Yalda (Persian), December 21

Shab-e Yalda refers to the birth of the sun. The ceremony is traced to the concept of Light and Good against Darkness and Evil in the ancient Iranian religion. This night with Evil at its zenith is considered unlucky. From this day forward, Light triumphs.



In the evening of bonfires are lit outside, while inside family and friends gather in a night-long vigil around the *korsi*, a low, square table covered with a thick cloth overhanging on all sides. The oldest member of the family says prayers, then cuts the watermelon and gives everyone a share. The cutting symbolizes the removal of sickness and pain from the family. Into the night of festivities the family keeps the fires burning and lights glowing to help the sun in its battle against darkness. They recite poetry and play music, tell jokes and stories, until the sun, triumphantly reappears in the morning.



## Church-State Update

*A Report on Church-State Legal Issues Affecting Brevard County Citizens*

### National

#### New Capitol Visitor Center made more "godly" (12/3)

'Protests by conservative lawmakers led architects to promise to add "In God We Trust" as the national motto and to engrave the Pledge of Allegiance in the new \$621 million Capitol Visitor Center.'

– [pewforum.org](http://pewforum.org)

#### Supreme Court hears religious monuments case (11/12)

'A small Utah religious sect told the U.S. Supreme Court on Nov. 12 that it should be allowed to erect a monument to its core beliefs alongside an existing Ten Commandments monument in a city park. Pamela Harris, a lawyer for Summum...said the exclusion of its tenets by officials in Pleasant Grove City, Utah, is unfair. "That's a violation of the core free speech principle that the government may not favor one message over another in a public forum," she said...The justices...asked questions that led to an additional range of hypothetical situations. [and] grappled with arguments over whether the monuments in question are "government speech," "private speech" or a mixture of both.'

– [pewforum.org](http://pewforum.org)

### Florida

#### Amendment 2 passed (11/7)

'This amendment protects marriage as the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife and provides that no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized.'



### Makar Sankranti (Indian), January 14

Makar Sankranti (Hindu new year) marks the end of a long winter with the return of the Sun to the Northern Hemisphere. Makara means 'Capricorn' and Sankranti is the day when the sun passes from one sign of the zodiac to the next.



People of different provinces all celebrate this holiday in different ways. Some take dips in rivers and worship the Sun God especially in the holy Ganges river. Others give gifts, visit their families, and celebrate with food. Kite festivals are also very popular.

### SCFA Board of Directors

Doug Cramer, president  
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### Space Coast Freethought Association

(SCFA) is a nonprofit community of reason-based individuals organized to facilitate social interaction, promote the non-theistic, rationalist viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse, reinforce the First Amendment guarantee of separation between government and religion through education and activism, and work in coalition with like-minded organizations where joint action is needed to achieve these goals.



### What is Boxing Day?

Boxing Day is a public holiday on December 26 in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as well as many other members of the Commonwealth of Nations and Greece. It is based on the tradition of giving gifts to the less fortunate members of society. It is also one of the biggest sales day for retailers.

Boxing Day is a traditional celebration dating back to the Middle Ages, of which the primary practice is the giving of gifts to employees or to people in a lower social class.

A Christmas box is, in English tradition, a clay box. Apprentices, masters, visitors, customers, and others would put donations of money into the box, like a piggy bank, and after Christmas the box would be shattered and all the contents shared among the workers of the shop. Thus, masters and customers could donate bonuses to the workers anonymously, and the employees could average their wages. The habit of breaking the Christmas box lent its name to Boxing Day.