

Minutes CESE Annual Meeting, June 21, 2008

Out-going president, Dave Thomas welcomed members at the 12th annual CESE meeting on Saturday, June 21, 2008 at Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico (UNM). CESE was established in 1996 to promote good science education. See:

www.cesame-nm.org

Dave asked the audience to introduce themselves.

Dave then reviewed the previous year's accomplishments. A group effort went into responding to the Mark Mathis' (producer of the creationist film *Expelled*) piece in the West Side Journal that said evolution caused Nazism and atheism. Dave and other CESE members wrote an op-ed countering Mathis' claims and got some clergy to also sign. The film flopped nationally, and it left the theatres in about a month. It was a propaganda piece, not a documentary as promoted. CESE also presents data to education and government officials as attacks on science education continued to mount. CESE also presents awards to science fair winners and helped with grants.

Some CESE members participate in New Mexican's for Science and Reason (NMSR) Science Watch radio show, broadcast weekly on Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m.

Jerry Shelton then presented the treasurer's report:

CESE has a checking account balance of \$548 and four interest-bearing savings accounts.

Because of our 501 (c) 3 status, CESE acts as custodian for some or all of the funds held in three of these accounts. Over the past three years, CESE and NMSR have received generous donations from Marvin Mueller, with the stipulation that roughly two thirds be allocated to NMSR and one-third to CESE. His intent was that NMSR's portion be used primarily, if not totally, for the radio program.

As a result, NMSR's portion of Mueller's first donation of \$20,000, which went into our savings account, has been depleted. The remaining balance of \$7027, which includes accrued interest, all belongs to CESE.

Mueller's second donation of \$30,000 is now reduced to \$11,033, with \$3155 belonging to NMSR and \$7878 to CESE.

His third donation of \$22,000 has grown to \$22,213, with \$15,145 for NMSR and \$7067 for CESE. NMSR's total for both accounts is \$18,300.

In the fourth savings account, CESE is acting as custodian for Eva Thaddeus, who has received two \$5,000 grants from McCune Charitable Foundation to fund her development

of "An interdisciplinary curriculum unit about energy use and the global climate for New Mexican fifth grade students." Her balance is \$6595.

Since members can join CESE as well as pay dues through PayPal, we are carrying an interest-bearing balance with PayPal that is now \$132.

The grand total of all accounts is \$47,548. CESE's portion is \$22,653.

Nancy Shelton is the editor of CESE's Beacon, now being published bimonthly.

Dave then proposed the new slate of officers to the membership:

Lisa Durkin, president
Jesse Johnson, vice-president/ president elect
Marilyn Savitt-Kring, secretary
Jerry Shelton, treasurer
Dave Thomas, past president

Board members at large: Marshall Berman, Steve Brugge, Cindy Chapman, Jack Jekowski, Kim Johnson, Marvin Moss, Becky Reiss, and Jim Stuart.

Marshall moved, and Kim seconded that the slate be accepted. Motion passed.

Dave passed the gavel to Lisa. Lisa thanked board members and interested parties for attending the meeting. She said we exist to ensure that quality science and math education stays in NM, despite current attacks by Intelligent Design supporters. Although their efforts have been failing, they continue to evolve new strategies.

Fundamentalist religion has grappled with science for centuries, and this is their latest stealthy attack. Many religious people are threatened by science because it deals with evidence from the natural world. It is a methodology that includes skepticism and facts; whereas, religion is based on faith and the supernatural. They can and do coexist, and the "Clergy Letter Project" is such an example:

http://www.butler.edu/clergyproject/rel_evolution_sun.htm

Lisa mentioned some of the current anti-science attacks. Some Denver children are being given private museum tours where they learn about creationism, taught by Brian Rooney and Melia Patria. The *Answers in Genesis* museum, "academic freedom bills," a creationist textbook *Explore Evolution*, and a creationist film *Expelled, No Intelligence Allowed* are some examples.

The *Answers in Genesis* museum has been denounced by the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology. They said, "The Creation Museum's fossil exhibit, though artistically impressive, include a vast number of scientific errors, large and small." And that "these errors range from implying that the Earth's sedimentary rocks were deposited

by a single biblical flood, to claiming that humans and dinosaurs lived alongside one another, to denouncing the reality of transitional fossils.”

“Academic freedom” legislation is an example of creationist’s newest strategy. Having failed to incorporate creationism into the science curriculum, it evolved into “creation science,” then “intelligent design.” The latter was ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge in the Dover, PA, public school curriculum in 2005.

The Texas Education Freedom bill looms in that state over science textbooks and science standards. The words “creationism, intelligent design, and creator” have been replaced with such phrases as “teach the strengths and weaknesses, critical thinking skills, logical analysis and open and objective discussion of scientific theories being studied.”

Other states, such as Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, have introduced so called “academic freedom bills.” They require that classrooms be open to “views about the scientific strengths and weaknesses of Darwinian theory,” according to a petition from the Discovery Institute (DI), the center of the intelligent design (ID) movement.

Explore Evolution (EE), written by several creationists including, DI director Stephen C. Meyer, has been reviewed by biologist and CESE board member Rebecca Reiss, Ph.D., at NM Tech. She said this book is based on simplistic thinking, deliberate errors, faulty logic, and misinterpretations of the scientific literature. Taking EE seriously insures that students will not succeed in college-level science courses. For those students that have a basic understanding of the scientific method, this book provides no real scientific content.

In the film, *Expelled, No Intelligence Allowed*, Ben Stein claims ID proponents have been unfairly treated, that science is atheism, and that Darwin caused the Holocaust. When produced Mark Mathis was asked why they didn’t interview evolutionary biologist Ken Miller, a practicing Catholic, Mathis replied that Miller, “would have confused the film unnecessarily.”

Regarding creationist activities in New Mexico, Mike Edenburn sent a letter to teachers, offering a DVD “Investigating Evolution: A Six Part Educational Series,” which is designed to supplement traditional biology courses. He quoted the state’s science standards (11.2.9) that say “critically analyze the data and observations supporting the conclusion that the species living on Earth today are related by descent from the ancestral one-celled organisms.” He also quoted the Santorum amendment from the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It says, “. . . where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society.”

Edenburn also quoted a discredited Zogby poll to support his position. A representative of the American Institute of Physics concluded that this poll was worthless, due to the low response rate -- there is no evidence that the data correspond to the groups to whom

they are attributed, and the questions are ambiguous. This position had been researched and published by CESE member, Marshall Berman.

The conclusions stated by Idnet-NM are not supported by the poll. It is highly biased and presents a false picture of the viewpoint of the National Labs and university scientists. However, their disingenuous tactics are often very effective.

The NM Educational Freedom Legislation was defeated in February, 2007, due to the support and testimony from CESE and others. However, Edenburn promises to reintroduce this legislation in the 2009 session, so “students will be assured that their religious freedom will be protected.”

We will need your help.

Meanwhile, U.S. students continue to perform poorly on standardized tests; fewer students pursue science careers, and many continue to accept the creation story in Genesis as science.

A new study by Michael B. Berkman, Julianna Sandell Pacheco, and Eric Plutzer's "Evolution and Creationism in America's Classrooms: A National Portrait," published on May 20, 2008, in PLoS Biology, present more disturbing data. Twenty-five percent of biology teachers devoted at least one or two classroom hours to creationism/Intelligent Design (ID). Of the 25% who devoted time to ID, nearly half agreed that they teach creationism as a "valid scientific alternative to Darwinian explanations for the origin of species."

These authors concluded that these findings suggest that victory in the courts is not enough for the scientific community to ensure that evolution is included and taught properly in high school science courses. They suggested that all teachers complete an evolutionary biology course and that this would have a “substantial impact on the emphasis on evolution and its centrality in high school biology courses.”

CESE’s goals include continuing to monitor the Discovery Institute (DI) and other creationist activities -- grapple with manufactured controversies created by political and religious agendas -- continue to promote quality science and math education for the public, educators and administrators -- meet with legislators, boards, and the Public Education Department (PED), and to alert our members to take appropriate action.

Lisa then asked the audience for questions and thanked everyone again for attending.

After Lisa’s address, Dave Thomas demonstrated a rope magic trick.

Next on the agenda was a one-man stage performance by the Darwin actor, storyteller and science teacher, Brian “Fox” Ellis of Fox Tales International (www.foxtalesint.com). The program was entitled "Charles Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle."

We were asked to imagine that we were among Darwin's friends at the London Royal Geological Society. We listened to him relate humorous stories of his training as a naturalist, adventures aboard the ship HMS Beagle, and his discovery of all the strange animals on the Galapagos Islands. He shared many fossils, insects, plants, and animal skins with the audience.

Ellis brought Darwin to life. He portrayed a very human side of this scientist, who has been so often denigrated by religious fundamentalists. And he talked enthusiastically about how all this evidence led to the revolutionary field of biological evolution.

He will return in November 2008 for the NM Academy of Science (NMAS) conference and has a few days available for school visits. Please drop him a line if you are interested in hosting a performance.

foxtales@foxtalesint.com

Following Ellis' presentation, the meeting was adjourned for snacks and socializing.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Savitt-Kring
CESE, secretary
<http://www.cesame-nm.org>
Albuquerque, NM