



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 25

August 2011

Number 8

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

Victory for evolution in Texas

From the National Center for Science Education

<http://ncse.com/news/2011/07/victory-evolution-texas-006802>

Pop the champagne corks. The Texas Board of Education has unanimously come down on the side of evolution. In 14-0* vote, the board today approved scientifically accurate high school biology textbook supplements from established mainstream publishers--and did not approve the creationist-backed supplements from International Databases, LLC.

"This is a huge victory for Texas students and teachers," said Josh Rosenau, NCSE programs and policy director, who testified at the hearings this week. In his testimony, Rosenau urged the board to approve the supplements--recommended by a review panel largely composed of scientists and science educators--without amendments, and to reject International Database's creationist submission. The board did just that, and asked for only minimal changes to the approved supplements.

In hearings yesterday, NCSE members and allies showed up in force. At least four times as many people testified in favor of the supplements as written, versus those opposing the supplements or demanding significant changes.

One hot button: the supplement from Holt McDougal. A creationist member of the review panel released a list of Holt's supposed errors involving evolution and common descent. But in today's hearing, the Texas Education Agency pointed out that the full membership of the review panel had not signed off on the list.

Ultimately, the board approved the Holt supplement, and directed Commissioner of Education Robert Scott to review the list of supposed errors, and to develop amended language for Holt to incorporate. NCSE and Texas education groups are confident Scott's revisions will reflect the current state of evolutionary biology, and not any creationist alternatives.

Dr. Eugenie Scott, NCSE's Executive Director, is celebrating the decision. "These supplements reflect the overwhelming scientific consensus that evolution is the core of modern biology, and is a central and vital concept in any biology class. That

EVENTS CALENDAR

August Program

Saturday, August 20,
at 2:00 p.m.

**Center for Community
Cooperation**
2900 Live Oak St.
Dallas

Derek and Swoopy of the
Skepticality podcast via Skype.

Board Meeting and Social Dinner

Saturday, August 27,
at 7:00 p.m.

NTS social dinners tend to be enlightening with lively discussion on any number of controversial topics. Come out and meet the skeptics. You can join up at the meeting.

Check back on our Web site for
the location of the August dinner.

<http://ntskeptics.org/>

214-335-9248

North Texas Skeptics

Officers

President Jamye Johnston
 Vice President Mike Selby
 Secretary John Brandt
 Treasurer David Price

Staff

Newsletter Editor Keith Blanton
 Web Master John Blanton
 Meetings and Social Director John Brandt

Board of Directors

Roy Auerbach, Erling Beck, John Blanton,
 John Brandt, Prasad Golla, Jamye Johnston,
 Claudia Meek, David Price, Mike Selby

Directors Emeritus: Tony Dousette, Ron Hastings,
 Jack Hittson, Mark Meyer, Curtis Severns,
 John Thomas, Joe Voelkerling, and Mel Zemek

Scientific and Technical Advisors

Joe Barnhart, Professor of Philosophy
 Raymond A. Eve, Professor of Sociology, UT
 Arlington
 Timothy N. Gorski, M.D., Physician
 Ronnie J. Hastings, Ph.D., Science Teacher
 Anthony P. Picchioni, Ph.D., Licensed Professional
 Counselor
 James Rusk, Director, Russell Planetarium
 Lakshman S. Tamil, Ph.D., Engineer
 John Thomas, Attorney



The North Texas Skeptics is a tax-exempt
 501(c)(3) scientific and educational organization.
 All members receive the NTS newsletter and may
 attend NTS functions at which admission is
 charged at no or reduced cost. In addition,
 members will receive mailings on topics of current
 interest or social events.

Our newsletter, *The North Texas Skeptic*, is
 published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics,
 P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794.

Permission to reprint: Articles in *The North Texas
 Skeptic* may be reprinted without further
 permission, provided the *The Skeptic* is credited as
 the source, the mailing address above is listed, and
 a copy of the publication containing the reprint is
 sent to the Editor. Opinions expressed in *The
 Skeptic* are those of the individual authors and do
 not necessarily reflect the views of The North
 Texas Skeptics. Contents and logo © 2011 by
 North Texas Skeptics.

these supplements were adopted unanimously reflects a long overdue change in the board. I commend the board for its refusal to politicize science education."

* Correction: This story initially reported the vote as 8-0. The board has 15 members, with one (Mary Helen Berlanga) away on vacation.



Glenn Beck finally makes sense

by John Blanton

Not really. I just said that to get you to read this. Alice Beck Kehoe (no relation) tells the story in *Reports of the NCSE*.

Glenn Beck, the Fox Network talk-show personality, recently featured the DVD *The Lost Civilizations of North America* on his show and exclaimed, "I was blown away"—not, apparently, by the Midwest's impressive earthen architecture of Hopewell, Cahokia, and Mississippians documented in the video, but by their apparent affirmation of a Mormon claim that the Lost Tribes of Israel inhabited North America. Beck, brought up Roman Catholic, converted to Mormonism (<http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/1885/>), which teaches that Jesus Christ as well as the biblical "lost tribes of Israel" came to America, and "that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent" as written in the Book of Mormon revealed to Joseph Smith in New York state during the 1820s. The artifacts discovered in the Midwest during the 19th century and the surviving earthworks were all the evidence Beck needed to fulfill this prophecy.

Beck hasn't made sense for several years, and here he seems to have slipped into the same league with Ben Stein, shilling for pseudo science and revisionist history. The producers of this flick have found wealth in the lessons from *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*. In a repeat of history, the producers of *Lost Civilizations* lured real scholars into interviews with the bait that the theme was to be "appreciating First nations' achievements." The Mormon connection did not become apparent until the interviewees saw first cuts of the video. When the deception was revealed, two of the scholars sought legal counsel about judicial relief.

The book of Mormon Evidence Web site lays bare the original intent of the producers.

Take a moment to watch the video trailer and clips from this fundamentally important film to all those interested in learning about all the exciting new evidences for the Book of Mormon as a literal historical record of real people and places. Watch Wednesday's broadcast of **Glenn Beck** on FOX NEWS referencing this documentary film by clicking **HERE**.

Archaeologist Bradley Lepper had some unkind words for Beck and the video. The *Columbus Dispatch* had the story:

But this month, six of the experts interviewed for the film, including an Ohio archaeologist, released a letter that says the documentary advances unsubstantiated claims, uses their words out of context and highlights artifacts that have proved to be fraudulent to advance a "fringe" archaeological belief.

"We want to make it clear that we do not support the theories presented in *The Lost Civilizations of North America DVD*," the letter reads.

Those interested in a factual approach will enjoy Roger Kennedy's *Hidden Cities: The Discovery and Loss of Ancient North American Civilization* and Kehoe's *Controversies in Archaeology*. These books are available from Amazon, and the NTS has the links. See the references.

For another odd-ball trashing of archeological science, you are invited to review the video titled "*NBC's The Mysterious Origins of Man*." It came out about sixteen years ago and featured such luminaries as Charlton Heston and our own Carl Baugh. The Talk Origins site has a review, and also Wikipedia. I have the video, dubbed from tape to DVD, but still readable. Free copies to the first five who send me an e-mail (skeptict75287@yahoo.com) and a postal address in the U.S.

The NCSE is a national treasure for its work to promote and to protect the teaching of science. If you are a fan of science, your membership and financial support will be amply rewarded. Information is on their Web site at <http://ncse.com/join>.



References:

See the full story here:

<http://reports.ncse.com/index.php/rncse/article/view/23/14>

The excerpt from the Book of Mormons Evidence Web site contains the following links of interest:

http://bookofmormonevidence.org/video_gallery.php

http://bookofmormonevidence.org/video_gallery.php

<http://video.foxnews.com/v/4314656/beck-divine-providence-vs-manifest-destiny>

The story in the *Columbus Dispatch* is here:

http://www.dispatch.com/live/content/local_news/stories/2010/12/29/dvd-stirs-up-archaeological-spat.html

Books from Amazon are here:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0140255273/thenorthtexaske>

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1598740628/thenorthtexaske>

Wikipedia has the *Mysterious Origins of Man* here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mysterious_Origins_of_Man

Talk Origins has it here:

<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/mom.html>

You can get the *Expelled* video from Amazon, as well:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B001BYLFFS/thenorthtexaske>

Psychic detective hoax

by John Blanton

But then, I repeat myself.

It starts out this way:

Texas police probe psychic's mass grave hoax

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20110608/ts_alt_afp/uscrimechildren

– Tue Jun 7, 10:36 pm ET

HARDIN, Texas (AFP) – Texas police were investigating whether a tip-off from a psychic about a mass grave containing dozens of dismembered bodies was in fact a hoax after an intense search found no bodies.

From all that can be gleaned from news reports a woman, claiming to be a psychic, phoned in a tip, forcing authorities to respond. The anonymous caller described the house in sufficient detail that police felt compelled to obtain a warrant to search the property.

Nothing.

Small surprise. Liberty County sheriff's department captain Rex Evans commented, "We searched the premises there is no indication there are any bodies at this residence, property or shed."

"Whoever this person was who gave this tip we'll be in touch with her and we could hold her responsible for giving a false tip and creating this havoc," he said.

The people who live there are long-haul truck drivers who are currently on the road and are baffled by the report, Evans said.

"Finding out that the police are in my yard for dead bodies? That's kinda panicking me," Joe Bankson, 44, told the *Houston Chronicle*.

"I haven't killed anybody," he said. "And I have a lot of friends, but I haven't helped anybody bury any bodies."

Bankson told the KHOU-TV that his daughter's ex-boyfriend got drunk and cut his wrists a couple weeks ago and is now in a psychiatric hospital.

"It took me all day to clean the inside of the house. I'm not sure I got it (the blood) all."

Not as much excitement as having a real psychic alert police to a real crime and real body parts, but it is much closer to real life.



The Skeptical Inquirer

is the official journal of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. Six times per year Skeptical Inquirer publishes critical scientific evaluations of all manner of controversial and extraordinary claims, including but not limited to paranormal and fringe-science matters, and informed discussion of all relevant issues. Price of subscription is 1 year at \$35 (6 issues), 2 years at \$60 (12 issues), or 3 years at \$84 (18 issues).

Send payment to Skeptical Inquirer
PO Box 703
Amherst, New York 14226-0703

Or call toll-free: 1-800-634-1610

What's new

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.bobpark.org/>. Following are some clippings of interest.

Editor's note: This is a special cell phone edition of Bob Park's What's New column.

Et tu Tara? "Piercing the fog around cellphones and cancer."

The WELL blog by Tara Parker-Pope was the top story in Tuesdays *NYT* Health Section. Her story is not wrong, but it's told in the wrong context. Science is a search for cause and effect, not an epidemiologic majority. To settle the question, WHO invited 31 experts to spend a week in Lyon, the culinary capital of France, strategically located between the two best wine regions. Meanwhile, much had been made of a study showing that the brain is "activated" by microwave radiation. Of course, it is. The effect of microwaves on the human brain, as on cold pizza, is to cause chemical bonds to vibrate, which we sense as heat. Unlike cold pizza, however, the human brain resists being heated. Deep within the brain, the hypothalamus, the thing below the thalamus, senses any increase in blood temperature. It calls on blood vessels in the heated area to expand, and increases the heart rate. The fresh blood is a coolant, but incidentally, also increases the rate of metabolism. "Microwaves have activated the brain," the human observers shouted. The shout was heard in Lyon. Amidst the clinking of glasses, the vote of the expert panel tipped from "no effect" to "possibly carcinogenic to humans." What could it matter? No one is going to stop using cell phones anyway. Does anyone care? One enormously powerful group cares, the tort industry.

What next? Should WN drop the cell phone/cancer issue?

Since 1993 (<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN93/wn012993.html>) WN has criticized media coverage of cell-phones and cancer in 76 weekly issues. The media was also criticized in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* (<http://jnci.oxfordjournals.org/content/93/3/166.full>). Mine is a small voice. Tara Parker-Pope would find the number of subscribers to WN amusing, but I kept expecting someone in the media to realize that 5 billion is a very large number. Does it matter that people take unneeded precautions? No, what matters is that they don't understand why it doesn't matter. If one jury in Cupcake, SD, awards monetary damages based on "possibly carcinogenic to humans," there will be a stampede of tort lawyers pushing class-action lawsuits.

Cell phones: the credibility of science is based on openness.

Let's be open with the public. A Working Group of 31 scientists from 14 countries met at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France, from May 24–31 to assess the potential carcinogenic hazards from exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic fields. The Working Group conducted no further study, and gathered no additional evidence. Nevertheless, based on an increased risk for glioma, a usually fatal brain cancer, they voted to classify radiofrequency electromagnetic fields as, "possibly carcinogenic to humans." Let's do a little epidemiology of our own. There are 5 billion cell phones distributed among the 7 billion people on Earth. But, as the New York Times reported this morning, brain cancer rates in the US have been declining for two decades. Does this tell us that cell phones prevent brain cancer? Alas, no. The increase in cell phone use only started one decade ago. It tells us is that epidemiology alone is a lousy guide for making policy. There is far too much "noise" in the data. So far, only photons more energetic than visible light have been shown to create mutant strands of DNA. "Maybe it's a multi-photon process," I'm told. A two-photon process is possible, even a three-photon process, but it would take 1 million microwave photons working in tandem to overcome the work function. So find a mechanism. But please don't inflict more case-control epidemiology on a paranoid public.

Bad diagnosis: the high cost of ignorance.

Why would it be such a big deal to use earphones? No big deal. I already use an amplifier in each ear so I can hear the birds outside my office. Let me ask why would it be such a big deal to let people know how electromagnetic radiation causes cancer? Bullshit is dangerous. In 1998 in London, Andrew Wakefield a British gastroenterologist warned that the MMR vaccine causes autism. In the following months the papers daily carried stories of the tragedy of autism and the heroic doctor who had found the cause. In the months following, MMR vaccinations of children dropped from 90% to 70%. In 2006, the first child in more than a decade died of measles in London. In the first four months of 2011, the HPA reported 334 cases of measles, a 10 fold increase over the same period a year earlier. In France, 7000 cases have been reported this year. Autism was unaffected.

WHO's on first? With apologies to Bud Abbot and Lou Costello.

My science-reporter friend, Naif, called this week about cell phones. Here's how it went. Naif: "Who said there's no evidence that radiation from cell phones causes brain cancer?" BP: "WHO did, but that was about a year ago." Naif: "That's what I asked, who did? The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) says cell phone radiation may be carcinogenic." BP: "IARC is WHO." Naif: "Why ask me? I don't know who. Besides, shouldn't that be whom?" BP: Last year they said that no adverse health

effects have been established for mobile phone use." Naif: "That's still true, but who said it?" BP: "I told you; WHO said it after a \$14 million epidemiological study of cell phone use in 13 countries." Naif: "Then who is IARC? BP: "Strictly speaking IARC is part of WHO." Naif: "I don't know who it's part of. That's why I asked."

*Bob Park can be reached via email at
whatsnew@bobpark.org*

Challenge activity

by John Blanton

Last month I mentioned some correspondence with Wieslaw Miernik. Mr. Miernik is in Poland, but the magic of the Internet makes it possible to communicate on an almost instantaneous basis without making use of psychic powers.

Anyhow, Mr. Miernik described a Buddha pendant that will surely grant the wearer great benefit through some sort of psychic power. You can read all about it in the July issue. See the link below.

Mr. Miernik has followed up on our earlier communication, and has sent samples of the Buddha pendant. David Price picked up the package at the NTS Post Office box and took some photos. See the photo of the pendant and the mysterious box. I will tell you more about the pendant and the box after we get a chance to investigate.

In the mean time, Mr. Miernik has sent further correspondence.

Full information

In 1970 an anonymous psychic using telepathy suggested that I should steal a little and set fire, and I will be playfully reproached for it. She told me to buy something in Gdańsk. I listened to her, and after five years of waiting there appeared some words which reproached me for theft and arson. It was an attack of an extrasensory force, which was stopped by a magical pendant with Buddha that I bought in Gdańsk in 1980. The attack was completely stopped only after I had worn the magical pendant for a year. I discovered the pendant also because psychotropic drugs were poisoning me when I wanted to cure my neurosis with them. This poisoning made me listen to the psychic.

Thanks to the pendant I am a wizard. The dimension in which I can work magic and where the attack on me

takes place is probably not the same dimension in which normal people live, because these people don't react to these actions. They react to Polish words placed by the extrasensory force in songs, usually foreign-language ones, concerning the presented facts.



The mysterious box and the Buddha pendant.

Photo by David Price

The pendant with Buddha has a healing power, which becomes apparent after a year of wearing in the form of dreams. I chose people who didn't have dreams, and I gave them a pendant with Buddha to wear. The people who tested the pendant confirmed that thanks to it they had more dreams than before. They confirmed it by signing a statement.

Plus more.

We will see about that. Stay connected while the full story unravels.

All correspondence related to the NTS Paranormal Challenge will be posted on our Web site and (possibly) published in our newsletter. See the Challenge page at the link below.



References:

You can read the July issue here:
<http://ntskeptics.org/2011/2011july/july2011.htm#challenge>

The NTS Paranormal Challenge page is here:
<http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/challenge.htm>

Applause for the Texas victory

From the National Center for Science Education

July 26th, 2011 Texas

This is a follow-on to the Texas Board of Education story. Material is collected from the NCSE Web site and the NCSE weekly newsletter.

In the wake of the Texas state board of education's July 22, 2011, vote to approve scientifically accurate supplementary materials and to reject creationist-inflected materials, newspapers around the state are rejoicing.

The *Austin American-Statesman* (July 25, 2011) was relieved by the absence of "the Bible-thumping rhetoric that has become a board trademark." "We might miss the fireworks," the editorial concluded, "but we'll gladly trade the show for balanced policymaking that will enable Texas students to compete in an increasingly complicated and increasingly global economy."

The *Beaumont Enterprise* (July 25, 2011) wrote, "Once again, public school students and taxpayers in Texas dodged a bullet," adding, "The recurring battles over evolution ... are something Texans can avoid. The State Board of Education should remember the final word in its title and promote classroom standards that give our children the best chance to compete and win in the 21st century."

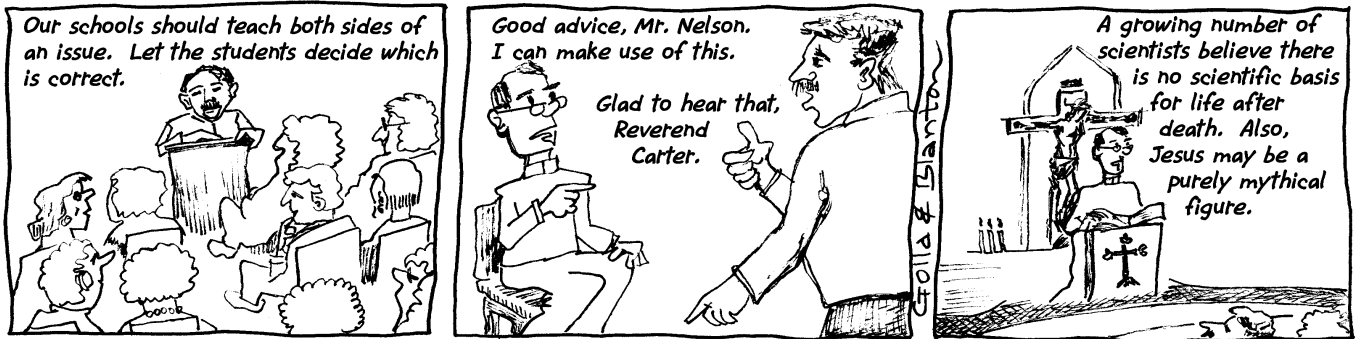
The *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* (July 26, 2011), urged Texans to remember July 22, 2011, as "the day the State Board of Education decided not to impede the teaching of a theory that predates the Civil War. Thus, on that day, science education leapt forward and a slight but tectonic shift in the board may have occurred. We're talking, of course, about evolution and the endless attempts by its religiously motivated disbelievers to monkey with it."

And the *San Antonio Express-News* (July 27, 2011), headlining its editorial "This time, SBOE gets science right," expressed its pleasure that "the board largely stuck to scientific matters in its adoption of supplemental science instructional materials," while deploring the board's decision in 2009 to sabotage the state science standards in such a way as to "ensure that students in Texas public schools will receive an inferior science education."

What's next in Texas? The fight over evolution may resume when the adoption process for textbooks resumes in a few years — but Senate Bill 6, recently signed into law by Governor Rick Perry, largely erodes the state board of education's authority over textbooks.

Revised on July 27, 2011, to add the fifth paragraph.

Skeptic Ink – by Prasad Golla and John Blanton. © 2011. Free, non-commercial reuse permitted.



An NCSE report from earlier this year highlighted attempts to downplay the validity of modern theories of evolution and to promote Intelligent Design.

Creationist materials submitted in Texas

From the National Center for Science Education

April 26th, 2011

Materials "laced with creationist arguments" have been submitted for approval by the Texas state board of education charged the Texas Freedom Network and the National Center for Science Education in a joint press release issued on April 25, 2011. As the press release explains, "The Texas Education Agency has made available on its website science instructional materials — all of them web-based — that publishers and other vendors have proposed for high school biology classes across the state. Materials approved by the state board in July could be in Texas science classrooms for nearly a decade. An initial review by NCSE and TFN has revealed that materials from at least one vendor, ... International Databases Inc., promote anti-evolution arguments made by proponents of intelligent design/creationism."

...

"Two years ago State Board of Education members thumbed their noses at the science community and approved new curriculum standards that opened the door to creationism and junk science," said TFN President Kathy Miller. "Now they are getting exactly what they wanted — the chance to make Texas the poster child for the creationist movement. The state board would be aiding and abetting wholesale academic fraud and dumbing down the education of millions of Texas kids if it doesn't reject these materials." All of the materials submitted for approval will be examined in June 2011 by teams of reviewers appointed by the Texas Education Agency; the Texas state board of education is scheduled to hold a public hearing and final vote on the materials in July 2011; public schools could then decide to purchase approved materials for classroom use in the 2011-2012 school year.

The following is from the NCSE weekly newsletter Evolution Education Update for 29 July 2011. This provides valuable links to news reports and to online material related to the Texas SBOE story:

For the editorials, visit:

<http://www.statesman.com/opinion/a-no-fuss-education-meeting-were-on-board-1654375.html>

<http://www.beaumontenterprise.com/opinions/editorials/article/EDITORIAL-State-battles-over-science-texts-1543426.php>

<http://www.caller.com/news/2011/jul/26/new-age-of-reason-on-education-board/>

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/article/This-time-SBOE-gets-science-right-1600863.php>

For the text of Texas's SB 6 as enrolled, visit:

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlodocs/821/billtext/html/SB00006F.htm>

For the Associated Press's report (via the *Austin American-Statesman*), visit:

<http://www.statesman.com/news/nation/texas-ed-board-compromises-on-evolution-materials-1634523.html>

And for NCSE's previous coverage of events in Texas, visit:

<http://ncse.com/news/texas>

The NCSE's report from April is located here.

<http://ncse.com/news/2011/04/creationist-materials-submitted-texas-006645/>



North Texas Skeptics
P. O. Box 111794
Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794

FIRST CLASS

Address Correction Requested

.....
Application for Membership

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Email address _____
Home phone _____ Work phone _____
Occupation _____
Special expertise and/or interests _____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Membership Agreement

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature _____ Date _____

The North Texas Skeptics, P. O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794 (214) 335-9248

Indicate your choice:

Member: A voting member and print newsletter recipient. Family privileges included. Annual \$50.00

Member: Email version only. Same as above, but newsletter is delivered by email. Annual \$30.00

Newsletter recipient: No membership privileges. Annual subscription for print edition is \$25.00

Non-member: Who chooses to receive just the email version. Annual subscription \$10.00

Introduce a friend to *The North Texas Skeptic*: Let us send a FREE three-month gift subscription of *The Skeptic* to this individual (or institution).

Enclosed is a tax-deductible donation to The North Texas Skeptics in the amount of \$ _____

www.ntskeptics.org