

Colorado Secular Organizations

A Study of Selected Successful Local Groups and How They Do It

by

Tom Kellogg

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This is a continuation of the series *The Roots of Building a Secular Community*

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Part 1 - My Journey to Secular Groups

This is a research study that features selected successful secular groups in Colorado, some that I am directly connected with. I delve into the inner workings of how the groups do it. The goal here is to highlight successful groups and showcase them to show working models for others to learn from. Colorado has a very thriving and diverse secular community that is growing fast.

Every group out there is unique, and has struggled along the way. Many completely failed, but the ones that survive and finally flourish have something special going on. It is a strong foundation that was built to last. However, what it really comes down to are the people with a vision and passion to make it work. They share a common goal - to live in a beautiful secular community. So, how do these groups build something that attracts and keeps members? What does the organizational structure and event planning look like? What is the glue that holds it all together?

First, I want to paint a picture to give some historical background. Every person's journey into the secular world is different. Here is a brief story of my journey, and how I got involved with local groups, and learned how to do community building, which I'm still learning. Eventually, this led me to involvement in some national organizations as well.

I grew up in Boulder, Colorado, in a non-religious family, although until less than 10 years ago, I had no idea that there was a secular world growing around me. I never went to church, and even though it was strange, did not pay much attention to it. I knew that gods didn't exist, but considered myself agnostic.

An Introduction to the Organizations in this Study



In the summer of 2008, while at the Boulder Creek Festival, I was brave enough to nervously walk up to **the Boulder Atheists** booth. Who were these atheists? There were two people running the booth. Marvin Straus (who later became my mentor) talked about how atheists are decent and positive contributors of society, respectful of other beliefs. Larry (still a great friend) on the other hand, talked about how the Bible is bullshit, and teaching it to children is child abuse. He said that churches should pay their share of taxes or just go away. Suddenly, I was looking into a mirror and these folks were kindred spirits. The next year I was in the booth, and within a few years after that became the President of the Boulder Atheists for a term. Virgil Anderson is the current President, and Russ Holsclaw, a long-time board member is the Secretary/Treasurer. The group was founded in 2001.

My life had changed forever and I was saved. A new wonderful world opened up to me. Intuitively, one of my very first observations was a huge need for secular community and immediately got to work on helping to build it. The Boulder Atheists were one of the very first open atheist groups in Colorado when it started in 2001.



Marvin Straus is the Co- Founder of the Boulder Atheists and one of the main Founders of **COCORE (Colorado Coalition of Reason)** in 2002. It was the very first CoR group in the country, and became a model for UnitedCoR. There are now CoR groups all over the country, each one run differently. COCORE is an umbrella organization where leaders of each member group can communicate directly with each other. It has helped to co-host and connect multi-group events. Also, each group can display the COCORE banner and use it as a way to help promote events and programs. Marvin eventually handed COCORE over to me and there are now 25 Colorado secular groups represented. The main computer tool is an email Google Group with several leaders or representatives from each group. Emails sent to the group by a member of the group go to all other members.



Colorado Springs, the Bible Belt of Colorado has several great secular organizations, but one group stands out from the rest, **Pikes Peak Atheists and Pikes Peak Atheist Families**, founded in 2011. Crystal Starkey, one of the main organizers and founders, was interviewed for this unique story, which is truly amazing. It demonstrates how passion can turn into endless energy.



Richard Berg, a prominent secular leader in Colorado, is the current President of **Humanists of Colorado** in Denver. It is older than the Boulder Atheists and probably the oldest secular group in Colorado, and is an official chapter of the American Humanist Association. Eventually, I joined HOC. Richard was also one of the original founders of the Denver Secular Hub, along with Kimberly Saviano, Dave Fangrow and others.



In 2013, **the Denver Secular Hub** opened, founded by members of Humanists of Colorado and other individuals. The Hub has become an amazing resource for the secular community and hosts some of the local Denver group's events, and has many of its own events with something for everyone. I regularly attend events there. It is a true grass roots organization that has grown into a mecca with a totally unique success story that is a role model to follow. This is why I am excited to write about the Denver Secular Hub.



In 2014, **the Jefferson Humanists** launched, and I am now a part of this great organization. It was founded by Chuck Mowry, who has a professional background in organizational planning and management. He created a base foundation like nothing I have ever seen. The group is extremely well organized, and is growing fast for a new group. The Jefferson Humanists are an official chapter of the American Humanist Association.



Secular Celebrants essentially perform the same functions as clergy without any attachment to god or religion, and are a key part of the secular community. Non-believing people don't go to church and often don't want any kind of religious ceremonies. Tim and Jennifer Bailey, both certified celebrants who live in Denver, have carved out a part time business as a husband and wife team, performing weddings and other times of change events.



Camp Quest Colorado was founded in 2013 by Tom Kellogg. Camp Quest is the only nationwide camp system that is geared toward secular kids. CQCO has found a home at the Keystone Science School, with a one week sleep away adventure each summer for kids 8 to 17.



The Denver Sunday Assembly launched in 2014. It was started by members of the Denver Secular Hub and other secular folks, including myself. It has recently re-grouped with new energy, and is growing fast. The monthly shows are a fast-paced celebration of life, void of religion, with live music from Pale Blue, speakers, commentary, poetry, audience participation and more. Nick Carpenter is the director.