



A spring respite

Come springtime in Farmington and folks start heading out for a serene spot next to the river in the city park. Enjoying this day's bit of warmth are (from left) Laura and Nancy Wagner. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

Waiters angered at jokes refuse to serve atheists

By CRAIG PIECHURA

The American Atheists convention at the Southfield-Sheraton on Easter weekend generated a god-awful amount of publicity.

At the center of the storm was an alleged refusal by hotel employees to serve food to conventioners Friday evening, while a dinner speaker told anti-religious jokes.

Lloyd Thoren, member of the American Atheists national board and owner of the American Atheist Museum in Petersburg, Indiana, remembers one of the jokes was a "dandy."

"Do you know why God doesn't answer your prayers?" said Thoren, retelling the joke told by Bob Brooks of Madison Heights. "The reason is because he can't hear. The Big Bang (a theory of evolution) blew out his hearing."

"Our members got a big bang out of that one even though I can't tell a joke right."

Hotel management and the head of catering say there was no snub by employees, explaining that the atheists misinterpreted routine hotel policy.

Hotel general manager Klaus Peters said Monday that hotel employees were merely following normal procedure by waiting until a speaker is finished before serving food.

"Usually when there's a dinner speaker we ask the staff to clear the room," Peters said. "We usually do that on any banquet unless we get specific instructions to serve them during the speech," Peters said.

HENRY SCHMUCK, of Westland, assistant director of the Detroit Chapter of the Society of Separationists, also known as the American Atheists, said the hotel caterer was asked to serve meals during the speech.

Schmuck said that message was re-

layed Friday afternoon at the same time the caterer was informed that 50 more persons than originally planned would be eating Friday night. About 300 people attended the convention headed by the society's founder, Madalyn Murray O'Hair.

Schmuck gave his version of the dinner incident.

"The man speaking was telling religious jokes like you might read in Playboy or Hustler magazine," Schmuck said. "The waiters objected to it, and said they would refuse to serve as long as the speaker was speaking."

"You know we have the constitutional right of free speech in the U.S. and so we said, 'No, continue to serve.' They said they would serve as long as the management ordered them to serve. The night manager just turned away and refused to discuss it with us. Then they came up with this deal that they're not supposed to serve after the speaker begins speaking."

"It was a standoff," said Schmuck. "We ate no meals there, and we're told we'd have to pay for it."

Schmuck expects a legal fight over the atheists' lodging bill.

Peters said 25 persons remained to eat Friday night and that the group ate no catered meals the rest of the weekend. The group will only be billed for the Friday meal, Peters said.

Nick Ristich, director of catering at the hotel, said while there was confusion Friday night over when guests would be served, hotel employees "were ready, willing and able to serve."

"OUT OF courtesy to the person speaking, our people did not enter the room," Ristich said. "They took offense to it. There was a lot of confusion. The whole thing was more or less blown out of proportion."

Ristich denied that employees engaged in a boycott because the group was atheist, stating that such banquets

are hotel employees' "bread and butter — a payday is a payday."

Schmuck and Thoren are convinced atheists were discriminated against. Both are asking that firings or other harsh disciplinary action be brought against hotel employees.

"Let's assume the shoe was on the other foot," Thoren said, "and all the waiters were atheists and you had a Catholic priest up there making jokes about atheists. I doubt if the Catholics would have been as patient, kind and courteous as we were. You see it all depends on who's out is being gored."

On Easter Sunday, a notoriously slow news day, atheists attending the convention again attracted the press by piling up their Gideon's Bibles in the hotel lobby.

Hotel employees later returned the bibles to the drawers. But not all atheists at the convention supported the publicity stunt.

Conventioner Wendy Loten of Willowdale, Ont., wrote the management a note praising the conduct of the hotel staff and apologizing for the behavior of some of her fellow atheists.

"I would have liked to have seen both sides deal with the issue on a less emotional basis," Ms. Loten said Tuesday. "I thought the focus of the convention got lost for a while. Calmness is usually more effective."

But on Tuesday, Schmuck was riding high on a crest of unprecedented publicity about atheism and the Society of Separationists.

"When this first happened (at the dinner), I was fed off," Schmuck said. "But as long as (the press) spell our name right and give the address we couldn't be happier. Actually, we couldn't afford to buy all the publicity we've been getting."

Hotel manager Peters said the group is welcome back at the Sheraton-Southfield "as long as they conduct themselves in an orderly manner."

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With an entry of 631 teams, the Greater Detroit Bowling Association will open its annual tournament Saturday at Hartfield Lanes in Berkley. If past events are a basis by which to judge, the competition will be keener than ever.

Commonly known as the men's city tournament, the annual blasting at the pins is the oldest event in the area and is now looked upon as one of the most prestigious. While the regular league teams are competing at Hartfield Lanes, the 170 senior teams will be starting battling it out at Shore Crest Lanes. The main event is scheduled at 5:30 p.m. and the public is invited.

AT ITS ANNUAL convention last week, the American Bowling Congress delegates voted to change its sanctioning system. It will affect every male bowler in the area. The delegates voted to approve sanctions individually instead of team sanctions starting in 1981.

It was the Detroit delegation that offered the change and fought successfully for its approval.

MICHIGAN WAS HIGHLY honored in national bowling circles last week.

Raymond V. Arnold of Jackson was elevated to the presidency of the American Bowling Congress at the annual convention in Louisville. At the same time, Ed Browalski of the Polish Daily News was honored by the writers.

After serving in the line offices for several years, he was elevated to the presidency. So Michigan now boasts the

top men on the lanes and in the press section. It is the first time this has happened.

WESTLAND BOWL staked a strong claim to being the "hottest" house in the area last week when five series that broke the 700 barrier were bowled in the classic.

With the wild firing Bob Golke Jr. set the pace with a 768 on games of 244, 216 and 218. Right behind him came Ken Kosciak with 738, Bob Schmidt with 729, Bob Albright with 706 and Tom Gredell with 700.

On the ladies side, Aleta Rzecki showed the way with 581 and Geri Beattie followed with a 553.

CORA FEIBIG moved in to the spotlight last Monday night at Luxury Lanes when she paced the Bowlerettes with a 704 series. She put together games of 212, 269 and 223. It was her second 700 series of the year. She previously rolled with a 709.

MARGE KROPACEK, the Canton housewife, who captains the Livonia Trophy sales team, had reason to be proud this week. Her team rolled a 2897 series in a special event at Lansing and beat Penny Behr's Bonanza team by 21 pins.

A NEW NAME moved in to the winner's circle in the ladies classic at Garden Lanes when Dora Bramlett took honors for the week with a 608 series.

Her closest rivals were Mae Lackey

with 594 and Rita Spaulding with 581. To complete the top six, Lee Hirsch posted 572, Jan Wright 569 and Mary Mohacsi 560.

In the St. Linus League, Frank Ceganowski set the pace with 613 and beat out Dave Bauer by 15 pins, while Tony Sima landed third with 595.

In the TGIF loop, Mark Putnam had a 289 in 649 and Dave Bushey topped the county loop with 624.

ALTHOUGH SHE DIDN'T win a game, Peg Euseber took top honors in the Livonia Ladies classic with 558-60-643. In the individual games, Georgina Kirwan won the first with 200-38-238, Pat Reid took the second with 200-27-226 and Dot Fulton captured the third with 186-31-217.

HERE'S AN UNUSUAL feat: Bowling on the same team in the trio league at Woodland Lanes, Debbie Mc Intyre, Sue Wiziak and Margaret Spigarelli each turned in the same score — 136. It was the most unusual triplicate of the season.

IN OTHER GOOD performances, Kay Knox paced the doubles at Merri-Bowl with 595 and beat Mary Mohacsi by eight pins. Dennis Drabicki set the pace in the Canton C classic at Super Bowl with 658. He opened with a 279 game. Brad Carpenter was next with 648. In the Super Bowl junior house league, Bob Cole was top man with 670, 13 pins more than Bob Reynolds. In the Las Vegas League, Len Mizerowski showed the way with a 258 in 626.

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