



Abhi Janamanchi

Our 2009
Gardner Becket Laureate

Read Jeff Harper's fascinating story on the long road Abhi has traveled to become a sustaining force for civil liberty in the Tampa Bay area. Page 3

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Jim Peterson, Editor



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION



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Wayne Garcia Wins Irene Miller Journalism Award

by *Wendy Risk*

Wayne Garcia was the unanimous choice of the Pinellas County chapter board of the ACLU to receive the 2009 Irene Miller Vigilance in Journalism award. The award recognizes consistent, objective, and comprehensive reporting on the actions of governments, particularly in the Tampa Bay area. Garcia thinks and writes as if the First Amendment counts.

"He's a truth teller," said Ray Arsenault, historian, University of South Florida professor, and chapter first vice president. "Garcia has an intense intellect and an intellectual curiosity that leads him to political dialog that is insightful and inspiring to others. He cuts through the static and focuses on issues that really matter. He is respectful of all who take political dialog seriously. Garcia is a man of remarkable wit who uses it for a deeper, serious purpose: to make people think. In a word, he's refreshing."

The political editor for Tampa's alternative weekly *Creative Loafing*, Garcia is best known for his column *Political Whore*, a forum for Tampa Bay politics. Two of his most well-known columns are "Fix It Now" and "How to Fix Tampa Bay Politics."

Five years ago, *Creative Loafing's* editor, David Warner and Garcia sat down to breakfast. Warner had just hired Garcia, and Garcia had just wrapped up managing a right wing senatorial campaign. Warner asked Garcia to explain how he would fit into the liberal paper.

"I'm a progressive by nature. I guess you could just call me a political whore," Garcia quipped.

"That'd be a funny name for a column," replied Warner. And so the column *Political Whore* was christened.

After working with Garcia for five years, Warner calls him genial and the smartest guy in the room.

The Political Whore, a.k.a. PoHo, was named the Best Media Blog of 2008 by the Florida Netroots Coalition and won the Best Blog Award in the 2009 Sunshine State Awards.

Garcia's family emigrated from Spain, via Cuba, five generations ago. A native of Scotch Plain, N.J. Garcia grew up in an Anglo neighborhood in Ft. Lauderdale and speaks only enough Spanish to order a cup of coffee in a café.

By ninth grade, he had decided to pursue a journalism career. "I liked politics, and I liked writing," he said. Garcia was elected class president his junior year, and student council president his senior year. "Journalism," he said, "seemed like a natural fit."

Throughout his childhood, Garcia had loved Jacques Cousteau television documentaries. An environmentalist, Cousteau studied the oceans and sea life from his ship the Calypso. "It was the coolest show," Garcia said.



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Eternal Vigilance

By Thom Foley, President



It is your duty as a citizen to help shape your government and safeguard our heritage of Freedom.

The Pinellas County chapter board of the Florida ACLU has been especially busy in 2009, dealing with a broad spectrum of civil liberty issues and concerns. Our primary activities – *education, negotiation and litigation* – have produced successes as well as setbacks during this most challenging year.

As in years past, board members were active in diverse educational projects, including staffing information tables at the annual Circus McGurkis and at the St. Petersburg Times Festival of Reading, where our Banned Books booth continues to dramatize continuing attempts to ban books in this country. Our tabling effort and float in this year’s Pride Festival and Parade was particularly successful, with the assistance and participation of both the West Coast Regional office and members of the Miami-based ACLU of Florida’s LGBT project.

In March, Pinellas board members participated in a state-wide phone campaign to help defeat a Gainesville Charter Amendment that would have repealed existing civil rights protections for Gainesville’s LGBT community. Members also attended and spoke at city council meetings throughout Pinellas County to present arguments against proposed government actions that violated the protections of the Bill of Rights. Thus when Kenneth City proposed a building ordinance that would have severely violated citizen’s rights to privacy, or when St. Petersburg proposed donating public property to a private developer in order to restrict the free speech rights of peaceful protestors, chapter board members added their voices to the efforts to defeat, for now, these unconstitutional measures. The Chapter also played a role in assisting the city of Largo to grasp the inappropriateness of hosting a prayer breakfast with city staff and resources.

On the litigation front, the Pinellas Legal panel, under the direction of chair Bruce Howie and with assists from the ACLU regional and state offices, prevailed in court actions involving two well-publicized cases this year. A case involving an effort in Kenneth City to prevent the duly elected Mayor – Teresa Zemaitis – from taking office because she was a publicly employed school teacher, was successfully resolved, as were the efforts of Clearwater bait shop owner Herb Quintero to maintain an artistic mural on the side of his business. After a heavy-handed response to the mural, the city also fined the Quintero’s for covering the mural with a protest banner displaying the full text of the first amendment. Ultimately, civil liberties were protected in both of these cases.



In addition to these highlights of the past year, the Pinellas ACLU remains an active participant on the Florida ACLU board, and played a role in the production of a Chapter Resource Manual which has now been distributed to chapter board members throughout the state. Pinellas board members also joined with ACLU state, regional, and other chapters in co-sponsoring a Drug Policy Reform Forum in September, and have assisted in state-wide cost cutting measures by hosting two of this year’s State Board meetings in St. Petersburg.

Your local Pinellas ACLU continues to serve as a local champion of civil liberties and a defender of the freedoms embedded in the Bill of Rights. We conclude our year with our annual meeting and dinner in December, to honor two particularly deserving advocates: Abhi Janamanchi, recipient of the Gardner W. Beckett, Jr. Civil Liberties Award, and Wayne Garcia with the Irene Miller Vigilance in Journalism award. I hope you can attend and help us honor these champions, as well as join me in a salute to the Pinellas ACLU board for all that they do for us all.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

The First Amendment of our US constitution

The Pinellas ACLU is a chapter of:

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Membership, renewals, and special gifts all help to further the cause of liberty in our country. Use any of the contact information above.



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

American Civil Liberties Union

**KEEP AMERICA
SAFE AND FREE**



Gardner W. Becket, Jr. Friend of Civil Liberties Award

The 2009 Gardner W. Becket, Jr. Friend of Civil Liberties Award has been given to **Rev. Abhi Janamanchi**, minister of the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater, in recognition of his tireless efforts on behalf of civil liberties in the Tampa Bay area.

Abhi Janamanchi grew up in India where he was informed on the value of freedom by his family history. His grandfather was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and was involved in India's freedom struggle. His family wore homespun cloth as Gandhi advised, foregoing foreign clothing. His grandfather and other relatives marched and protested for over twenty years. A close friend of the family was tried for slapping a British police officer. This history left Janamanchi with a strong commitment to freedom and civil liberties.

In school he was a student of history. He learned that India had borrowed heavily from the U.S. Constitution in drafting its own, so he studied the U.S. Constitution to see what it had to say.

"What really got my interest," Janamanchi said "was the fact that there was such a huge emphasis on freedom of thought, belief and speech. This helped me gain a deeper appreciation of why these principles were drafted into the Indian constitution, and subsequently finding out the involvement of Unitarians and Universalists in that whole process and recognizing a similar connection with the Brahma Samaj, a Unitarian Hindu group I was a part of, left a great impression. Many of the writers of the Indian constitution were members of the Brahma Samaj."

Janamanchi decided to become a Unitarian Universalist minister and came to the Meadville Lombard Theological School at the University of Chicago to study. He continued, "Seeing how much importance Unitarians and Universalists have given to the bill of rights, given freedom is an important principle for our own religious tradition, and the work that Unitarian Universalism has done to preserve and promote those rights both in civil society and in our congregations, lead me to a deeper appreciation of how it (the Bill of Rights) is a fundamental symbol of the freedoms and culture of the nation. That's the place I try to move from now. Recognizing that it's not just a Bill of Rights, it's also a way of being."

"Historically I am referring to our denomination's work in the social arena. For example, our work in the pre-Civil and post Civil War periods dealing with slavery and oppression, the work UUs have done around women's rights, our involvement in the Civil Rights movement. This work continues now with our ongoing work on GLBT rights, and our lifting up our voices against torture."

When asked to explain what has motivated him to this way of life he said "I can appreciate, based on my own family's involvement in the Indian independence struggle, why it is important to stand up for one's freedom, personal or collective. Having lived in a society that is both free and enslaved, in the sense of the kind of enslavement that happens when you have rigid social systems like the caste system in place. I have witnessed the oppression of people on a day-to-day basis and how that in turn seeks to diminish them, and dehumanize them, and demean them, and yet, how they still respond and break those shackles that are imposed on them. I've seen both the oppressive and liberating aspects of that in India. I continue to see that here, in more subtle ways, how people and government tend to act in ways that oppress people or limit or deny their freedoms. To me being human is to be free, where we are guided in our lives by our conscience. We are responsible to lead our lives in ways that contribute to the common good. Documents like the Bill of Rights provide a good basis for living our lives in that way."

Rev. Janamanchi states that his deep passion involves the separation of church and state. He agrees with Jefferson that the wall needs to be high and strong. "I attribute the vibrancy of religion here in the US," he said, "to the separation of church and state. When I look to countries where there isn't that separation I see religion as a dying enterprise."

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Nominations Committee Report

The Pinellas County Chapter will elect its Board of Directors for 2010 at the Bill of Rights Awards Banquet on December 2, 2009. All current members of the local chapter are eligible to vote. The Nominations Committee is pleased to present these civil libertarians who have agreed to serve you for election or reelection to two-year terms.

Officers:

Thom Foley, President
Ray Arsenault, 1st Vice Chair
Maria Vesperi, 2nd Vice Chair
Paul Pohlman, Secretary

State Board Members: Thom Foley, Ray Arsenault

Board Members, 2-year term:

Sandy Hoover Marianne Huber
Mark Kamleiter Tanna Mancini
Jerry Moore Glenn Paul
Nano Riley Wendy Risk
Sam Schrift Pamella Settlegood
Nigel Watson

Current officers and members serving through 2010:

Adrien Helm, State Board Member,
Bruce Howie, Legal Panel Chair

Jeanne Blue
John Chase
Robert Collette
Karen Doering
Margaret Evans
Jeff Harper
Don Neri
Jim Peterson
Jay Sokolovsky
Zanetta Starks



-- Maria D. Vesperi, Nominations Committee Chair

Janamanchi sees the religious right as the biggest threat to the Bill of Rights. “To me this is a systematic ongoing effort starting in the ‘70s, of people carrying these notions of how we were founded as a Christian nation when we know our founders wanted, if anything, just the opposite. I love to draw attention to the Treaty of Tripoli where a sitting president (John Adams) stated we are not a Christian nation and did it ironically, to the head of an Islamic state (the Pasha of Tripoli).

When Hillsboro County was debating whether or not to have religious holidays in the school year, Janamanchi appeared on media programs saying, “If you are going to open that door you better open it far and wide to allow every form of religious holiday. It’s better not to go that road, better leave it as it is, otherwise tomorrow the Hindus might show up with a long list of holidays that are very meaningful to them.”

Another focus of Janamanchi’s efforts has been promoting the rights of the GLBT community. This has been a large part of his work in Clearwater. He was key in organizing the campaign to protect Susan Stanton when she was fired as City Manager of Largo. He worked with colleagues to organize public rallies; he attended commission meetings to speak on behalf of Stanton and met with individual commissioners.

He also worked to get the Pinellas County Commission to improve its Human Rights Ordinance to include sexual orientation as a protected group. Though disappointed the Commission did not include the gender identity part of the proposal, he feels they did make progress.

Another effort on Rev. Janamanchi’s part was the campaign to defeat Amendment II, the amendment that wrote marriage discrimination into the state constitution. Janamanchi rallied a group of more than thirty inter-faith clergy and their congregations and civic organizations, to come together to oppose amendment two. He organized an extensive telephoning and letter writing campaign to defeat the amendment. Though disappointed by the outcome, he feels this was a worthwhile effort. He stated, “ I believe in marriage equality. I felt Florida already had unjust laws prohibiting same gender marriage. The amendment was redundant and discriminatory. I also felt it went against some fundamental constitutional principles including separation of church and state. I believe civil and religious marriage are different. Religions can and should disagree, but to write one way of recognizing marriage into the state Constitution was not only trampling on the rights of religions that have a different view of marriage it also was confusing civil and religious marriage. Civil marriage needs to be available regardless of sexual orientation.

Looking to the future, Janamanchi sees health care as a basic human right that we need to work for. A country that takes seriously the pursuit of happiness must have access to health care. He thinks we need to reform the way we deal with immigration. The current anti immigrant campaign is racist and colonial and seeks to blame immigrants rather than looking to see what corrections we need to make in our laws.

The major threat to Civil Liberties Janamanchi said, will continue to be the religious right’s efforts to undermine the separation of church and state. He warns, “They have mastered the art of infiltrating local governments and are chipping away at it in a very dispersed and expansive level and are working their way up, all the way to the Supreme Court. We have no clue as to how to counter their efforts. We continue to approach it on a case by case basis which is exactly what they want us to do, because then we are devoting our attention to one case after another while in the meantime they are off to the next chapter. To have sitting supreme court justices make statements as to why they are opposed to the separation of church and state is not only disheartening it is downright scary.”

Abhi Janamanchi is committed to making a better world. The Pinellas Chapter of the ACLU is pleased to honor him for his work to promote and preserve civil liberties.

By *Jeffrey Harper* Sept. 2009



“There’s so much that needs to be done,” Sandy Hoover

by *Wendy Risk*



Sandy Hoover, a fifteen year ACLU veteran, brings experience and intelligence to the Pinellas County chapter. Hoover hails from Kentucky where she was an active member, serving as state board ACLU chair for four years. Her strongest achievements there include expanding reproductive freedom projects and gay-straight alliances in Kentucky public schools.

Hoover enjoys working with the Pinellas board. “It’s composed of knowledgeable, caring individuals. Thom Foley, our president, is very good.” Hoover brings to the board a background in education, social justice, and commitment. Hoover also serves as an at-large member of the Florida state ACLU board, where she is a member of the development committee.

“I always wanted to be a teacher,” said Hoover, who retired in 2003 after almost thirty years of teaching high school and university social studies. Born and raised in Louisville, Hoover was an only child. Motivated by a love of paper, pens, chalk, and chalkboard, she spent several summers teaching the other neighborhood children. “When I got into the profession, I discovered stacks of papers to grade were not as exhilarating as I had imagined.” She smiled at the memory. An exceptional teacher, Hoover has won many local, state, and national teaching awards, mentored four student teachers, hosted foreign exchange students, and taught as an exchange teacher in Guatemala.

In her government class, Hoover assigned students to research the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They then presented to attorneys and judges for feedback. “The students learned a lot,” Hoover said. Her class won local and state titles and went to national competitions four years in a row. “The students learned what the Bill of Rights says, what it means, and how it’s applied,” said Hoover, who has earned a B.A. in history and an M.A. in Russian History.

One of her favorite learning experiences was being selected for the Supreme Court Historical Society Summer Institute hosted at Georgetown University Law School campus. The elite program accepts only thirty educators and is funded by the Supreme Court Historical Society. Hoover stayed in the prestigious law school dormitory filled with spacious elevators and wood paneling. “My undergraduate dorm did not look like that!” she said. She and fellow teachers studied Supreme Court cases, sat in the chambers to hear arguments, and tried to predict the judges’ decisions. “It was really work,” she admitted, “but I learned a lot.” She returned home with resource materials to share with her students and workshops to present to local teachers. In her classroom, Friday was always current events day. “Minds opened,” she said. “That’s why education is so important. You get people thinking and away from stereotyping. Conversation helps students grow.” During presidential campaign years, Hoover had students write down the name of their favored candidate, and then assigned each student to research the opposing candidate. “They often protested, but they learned a lot,” she said. Many of her former students entered legal or teaching careers. She was proud when one attended Yale. Four returned to student teach under Hoover.

Hoover met her husband John while working on summer curriculum development. John didn’t attend the workshop, but a friend who did asked if she could share Hoover’s phone number with him. Hoover eventually consented. After John phoned, the women would drill Hoover about her budding relationship.

“I had no chance,” John Hoover teased. “It was four or five women plotting together, advising Sandy what to wear and what to cook for me.” John makes a good partner for Sandy. They share politics and a commitment to social justice. “If he didn’t like animals, or if he was a Republican, he wouldn’t have gotten in the door,” she joked. They own a parrot, a cat, and a dog. “Seriously, my husband is very supportive of what I do.”

Sandy attended college during the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the Nixon administration’s freedom of speech restrictions. They sparked her interest in civil liberties. That interest matured as she taught government and the Constitution. “It was a natural segue to join the ACLU,” she said.

She had also experienced others’ civil liberties issues such as discrimination, in her work holding officer positions in the teachers’ union. In addition, she served on Louisville’s central labor council, which combined plumbing, nursing, and teaching unions. “I heard terrible stories of abuse in treatment, words, and pay.”

Hoover can’t pick one single pet ACLU issue. “I’m interested in everything,” she said. If pressed, she will choose religious freedom, women’s rights, and freedom of speech as top priorities. Besides serving on the Pinellas ACLU board, Hoover volunteers at the local ACLU legal office in Tampa, where she assists the lead attorney. Hoover often handles phone duty. If the ACLU itself can’t assist callers, Hoover tries to direct them to someone who can. “Some of the stories are sad and complicated. There’s so much that needs to be done.”

Hoover recently found a free venue--the University of South Florida here in St. Petersburg--to host the state ACLU board meetings. She confesses to being a type A personality, but with a Southern twist. That makes Hoover a diplomatic listener with a soft personality. If she had to choose three adjectives to describe herself, they would be organized, diligent, and positive. Fellow board member Adrien Helm added, “Competent, determined, inspired, and inspiring.”

Had she not gone into teaching, Hoover might have become an attorney for a nonprofit organization such as the Sierra Club or perhaps an archaeologist. “I like digging and finding. I could never be a doctor,” she admitted. “I would not be comfortable making life and death decisions.”

Active in St. Peter’s Episcopal Cathedral, Hoover is president of the women’s auxiliary,

See Hoover on Page 6



Stetson law student to be honored

The Lambda Legal chapter at Stetson University College of Law is working with Pinellas ACLU to establish an annual prize for student writing about gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender issues and Florida law. The competition is open to all current Stetson law students. Entries will be reviewed by a panel of Stetson professors and an ACLU committee will select the winning essay from among the final three. The \$500 award, raised by student members of Lambda, will be presented at the Pinellas ACLU Bill of Rights Banquet. Pinellas ACLU is pleased to co-sponsor what we hope will be an annual effort to honor students who contribute to the scholarship on civil liberties for Florida's GLBT communities. -- Maria D. Vesperi

(Hoover... Continued from Page 5)

which recently hosted a dinner party at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club for congregants who are over eighty years old. More than seventy people attended. Their banquet room looked out over Tampa Bay, and the youth played classical music. "It turned out nicely," Hoover said. "One of the neatest ladies was ninety-nine." Hoover managed all aspects of the dinner party from invitations to finances to making the table decorations.

Hoover keeps her finger in teaching by tutoring several afternoons a week. "Playing cards and shopping is not me," she confessed. She also works for the supervisor of elections as a trainer and Election Day advisor. "I think voting is extremely important," she said. "People should vote. That goes back to education. I had the word VOTE plastered all over my classroom."

"She's my favorite Supervisor of Elections trainer," said a local precinct clerk. "She's organized, knowledgeable, and committed to the democratic process." Hoover enjoys needlepoint and travel. The couple has visited the Philippines, Japan, Italy, the UK, Canada, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and many Caribbean Islands. Their home is decorated with treasures from these trips. Greece is their next destination.

She loves to read, especially fiction, mysteries, and intrigue. Favorite authors include Elliot Roosevelt, and Jonathan Kellerman.

Pinellas ACLU Legal Panel Report for 2009

by *Bruce G. Howie*

The Pinellas legal panel is a group of volunteer cooperating attorneys who meet each month to receive and discuss cases in the form of written complaints received either directly or through the state ACLU office. These volunteer attorneys investigate and take on cases pro bono based on their own experience and interests. The cases selected by the legal panel are typically cases where the civil or constitutional rights of individuals have been unduly restricted by government action, where a large number of individuals may be affected, where the issues are legal rather than factual, and where the complainant has no other recourse or remedy. In those cases which are not “ACLU cases,” we attempt to put the individual in touch with an attorney or agency that can help.

Here are a few highlights for this year:

We assisted Kenneth City mayoral candidate *Teresa Zemaitis*, who despite winning over 70% of the popular vote was barred by the town charter from serving as mayor because as a county public schoolteacher she was considered a “public employee.” We argued that the ordinance was an unconstitutional restriction upon persons running for public office and a disenfranchisement of the voters who elect them. Although we initially lost in court and prepared to appeal, the Kenneth City council and attorneys worked with us to reach a compromise allowing Ms. Zemaitis to serve as mayor pro tem until the next general election in March 2010 where the town voters will have the opportunity to repeal the charter provision prohibiting public employees (other than town employees) from serving as mayor.

We received the case of The Complete Angler, a bait and tackle shop that was cited by code enforcement for the City of Clearwater because of an outdoor wall mural depicting local species of fish which the City claimed to be a violation of the business sign ordinance. Through ACLU attorneys *Maria Kayanan* and *James Green*, we successfully argued in the Tampa federal court that the mural was artistic expression protected by the First Amendment. The City settled with us, paid damages, and dropped the citations against our client.

! We learned this year that the City of Largo publicizes and sells tickets to the mayor’s annual prayer breakfast in apparent violation of the First Amendment’s establishment clause, and we are preparing to work with claimants on this issue.

We have monitored the ongoing threat of vacating the sidewalk on the north side of Second Avenue North in downtown St. Petersburg to the Baywalk complex. It is our position that the sidewalk is a traditional public forum frequently used by a wide number of interest groups to exercise their First Amendment free speech rights. *Mark Kamleiter*, *Glenn Katon*, and others have spoken forcefully and to great effect on this subject to the city council which in early October voted against vacating the sidewalk, but the issue is not dead yet.

Thanks to the following attorney members of the Legal Panel for their time and efforts: *Marcia Cohen*, *Doreen Doe*, *Karen Doering*, *Rick Escarraz*, *Nancy Gorman*, *Adrien and Ed Helm*, *Diane Hodson*, *Mark Kamleiter*, *Glenn Katon*, and *Bill Penrose*. Thanks and a fond farewell to *Becky Steele* for all of her hard work and support. Also thanks to *Carol Steele*, *Dwight Lawton*, *Ray Arsenault*, *Jeanie Blue*, *Paul Pohlman* and *Thom Foley* who have frequently attended legal panel meetings. Special thanks to the ageless *Jerry Moore*, the memory (if not the conscience) of the legal panel, who reminds us when we forget our meeting schedule.

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Because Freedom Can't Protect Itself.



JOIN THE ACLU!

Who was Gardner Beckett?

In 1992 the Pinellas ACLU Chapter initiated an annual award to deserving local individuals who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to the values inherent in the Bill of Rights. Two years later the prize was named the *Gardner W. Beckett Jr. Civil Liberties Award*, to honor the memory of one of the Chapter's founders, whose passion for civil liberties and the principles of the Bill of Rights was inspirational and boundless.

Simply put, Gardner was a champion of freedom and civil liberties. In 1970, when police broke up a St. Petersburg anti-war rally under the pretense of enforcing the city's profanity laws – when a UF professor said “goddamn” in a speech against the Vietnam War – Gardner and the newly formed Pinellas ACLU rallied to the defense of free speech. Thus began a long history of civil liberty vigilance under the tutelage of Gardner Beckett. Twice during the ensuing decades Gardner spearheaded local cases from the streets of Pinellas County to the benches of the U.S. Supreme Court – and won both times. In both instances Gardner took what appeared to be cases of simple injustice, and used them to attack general deficiencies in the law of the land. In 1968, when the young activist Joseph Waller (today Omali Yeshitella) was arrested for tearing down a racist mural from a wall in the St. Petersburg City Hall, Gardner was able to use the case to attack the widespread misuse of municipal courts, then prevalent, which favored a nightmarish double jeopardy situation for unpopular defendants. Not long after the Waller case, the Florida Legislature abolished the whole system of municipal courts entirely.

Again, 1986, in a case involving the unjust search of a student's automobile by an assistant principal, Gardner used the case to attack the concept of sovereign immunity – the idea that you can't sue the state in state court but must instead rely on the Federal courts. Gardner held that the Federal courts had become “increasingly expensive, increasingly crowded,” and the trials “increasingly long.” Gardner sought to break down those barriers. All lower courts rejected the suit. Gardner persevered until the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with him – unanimously – that the Florida

(Next Col.)

Supreme Court had improperly protected cities, counties, and school boards who might otherwise be subject to suit.

Gardner was unpretentious, farsighted, eternally vigilant, and had a persistent commitment to justice, equal protection, and due process.

In addition to the presentation of this annual achievement award, the Pinellas Chapter also funds an annual \$250.00 essay prize, in Gardner's name, to a student at Stetson Law University. I bring this up – not only to let any who may be able to contribute to do so – but also to let you know that the proceeds from the raffle at the annual dinner go directly into the Beckett essay prize fund at Stetson. Help us if you can, to honor a truly great civil libertarian, as we annually honor those whose work and values reflect the life's work of Gardner W. Beckett Jr. -- Thom Foley

On the Departure of Becky Steele

Rebecca Harrison Steele was named the director of the west central Florida Office of the ACLU in April of 2004. Since then she has never looked back.

Steele was raised in Tampa and graduated from the University of South Florida with a degree in theatre. After receiving her bachelor's degree, she moved to Pittsburgh to pursue a graduate degree in stage directing at Carnegie-Mellon University. She worked as a stage director in New York for four years and then moved back home to Tampa in 1986. In 1991, she switched careers to law for which she had shown some aptitude. She received her law degree, magna cum laude, from the Stetson University College of Law, and has served as an adjunct professor at the law school. She is a past president of the Board of Directors for WMNF-FM radio, and as president of the Hillsborough Association for Women Lawyers.

Becky's relentless energy motivated a great many projects with substantial positive impact on the condition of civil liberties in the bay area. Thus it is with great regret, leavened by fond memories that we see her leave us, to open another part of her life in a place called Philadelphia. Wherever she goes, she will know that she has many friends here, and can always call Tampa Bay home.

Sandy Hoover. “She was on the go all the time. It's going to be difficult to replace her. She was the glue that holds the office together. I think it's a big loss.”

Thom Foley. “Her effect has been such a joy. Becky brought things together in one fell swoop. Her tenure has been beyond what anybody could have expected. I just hope the ACLU can come up with somebody half as effective. Her impact has been sensational.”

JP & WR

Wayne Garcia, Journalist continued

As a cub reporter, Garcia was assigned to interview the scientist. At the dock, Cousteau invited him onboard the Calypso. Stepping onto the famous vessel was “really, really cool,” Garcia remembered. It was a highlight of his early career.

He went on to write for the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Tampa Tribune*, and the *Gainesville Sun*. In 1995, he became a partner, strategist, and creative director for Repper Garcia & Associates, a political and public affairs consulting firm. Garcia was consultant to more than 100 political campaigns.

At *Creative Loafing*, Garcia has focused on people who have no voice. Speaking for the disenfranchised, he believes, is one role of journalism. An equal opportunity muckraker, Garcia exposes follies of both the Democrats and the Republicans.

“I’m just a big believer in the freedom of speech,” Garcia said. He also maintains that journalism should be a marketplace of ideas. To promote that, the newspaper’s website now welcomes bloggers.

This last summer, a group named Save the Tortillas raised funds for a local tortilla manufacturer facing bankruptcy. On *Political Whore’s* website, a blogger criticized the fundraiser for supporting an unhealthy cause, accusing it of encouraging obesity. “It was a fairly incendiary piece,” Garcia admits.

Reaction was swift. Garcia received about a dozen phone calls and emails from supporters of Save the Tortillas. Some were livid, demanding Garcia remove the blogger’s post. “I had lively exchanges with folks,” Garcia said. However, he did not deep six the blog. “I am a utilitarian. This was a question of freedom of speech. Without robust speech and questioning, we won’t get what’s best for our community. If it breaks down, then we, as journalists, are not doing our job.”

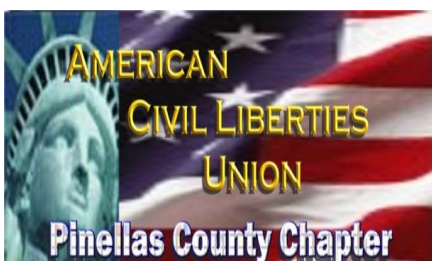
Garcia has enjoyed writing about the local issues and people that he finds fascinating, such as Mark Sharpe, a Hillsborough County commissioner. He is impressed with the intelligence and commitment of many public servants.

The response to his “Fix It Now” column was “overwhelming.” Garcia responded by putting together a PowerPoint presentation and going on the road, lecturing on how to improve the community, as he puts it, à la Al Gore. That came to a halt when the slowing economy forced newsroom cuts and limited Garcia’s speaking time.

A democracy is only as strong as its citizens, according to Garcia. “It boils down to personal responsibility. We have to have eternal vigilance and participate in the necessary public conversations to elect politicians because ultimately the buck stops with us, the electors.”

Garcia spares no punches. “I play to win, and I play hard,” he said. Yet he makes no enemies. “The other side often then tries to hire me.”

(Next Col)



A Floridian at heart, Garcia loves Florida’s natural beauty but not its politics. “I have lived the vast majority of my life here, yet I find myself extremely dismayed that Florida, has, over the past century, become an ‘easy’ place to move. By that, I mean we seem to attract the lowest common denominator. There has not been civic maturity in Florida. The status quo is not going to work for another twenty to fifty years in this state.

“The Recession gives us the opportunity for a do-over. We citizens can make Florida sustainable and tolerant, a state that embraces diversity. It is disappointing to me that we haven’t seen it yet. I hope that changes.”

Garcia has taught journalism at the University of Florida, the University of Tampa and the University of South Florida-St. Petersburg. He holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Florida. In August, he received a master’s degree in mass communication from the University of South Florida.

He was immediately recruited to teach at the University of Florida as the Freedom Forum Visiting Professional at the College of Journalism and Communications. He will be teaching, aptly, investigative journalism.

By chance, his older son, Brian also started at the University of Florida this fall. They probably won’t be doing lunch every day. “My job at UF is to stay out of his way,” Garcia said with a smile.

Does he dream of writing a book? “Every day,” he said. Topic? Florida politics. Or perhaps fiction. “I’d like to write the great American novel. Who knows? Maybe that’ll be my third act.”

As a college professor, Garcia is looking forward to more family, reading, and gardening time. He may even get out his Fender Stratocaster guitar, which he has neglected since college.

Garcia is married to Laura, an occupational therapist who runs a neurological rehabilitation unit in a local hospital with a home health care company. Laura also chairs the state board of occupational therapy practice, part of the Florida Department of Health. Laura was appointed by governors Jeb Bush and Charlie Crist, both Republicans.

The couple also has a younger son, Nicholas, a high school freshman. Brian completed his Eagle Scout project, and Nick will begin his next spring. Garcia has been a cub scout, an assistant Scoutmaster, and a Scoutmaster. Their family always includes two female Humane Society dogs, currently, Sheba and Shadow.

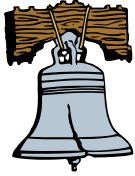
After going through bankruptcy, *Creative Loafing* is under new ownership. Editor Warner said that Garcia is leaving big shoes to fill, and he hopes that Garcia will find time to contribute an occasional column.

Garcia loves the Tampa Bay area and continues to live here. He has served three years as chairman of the Clearwater Jazz Holiday and its Foundation.

Past recipients of the Irene Miller award include Don Addis, Otis Anthony, Martin Dyckman, Kathy Fountain, Jean Heller, Anne Lindberg, Rob Lorei, Barbara Morgan, Daniel Ruth, and Howard Troxler.



--Wendy Risk



The Pinellas County Chapter The American Civil Liberties Union



Cordially invites you to join us in celebration of the lives of two great advocates for civil liberty,

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi & Wayne Garcia

at our 19th Annual *Bill of Rights Awards Banquet*

This year, in The *Mirage Room* at **Tucson's**
13563 Icot Blvd. just off Ulmerton Rd. In Clearwater.
Thursday, Dec. 3rd 2009

|| *Our Program* ||

RECEPTION & CASH BAR 6:15 - 8:15 PM
DINNER 7:15
BOARD ELECTIONS 7:45
AWARD PRESENTATIONS 8:00
ADJOURNMENT 9:15

Please RSVP* by November 30th 2009.

\$35 each person at the door, \$30.00 prepaid
(\$20 if limited income).

Place your reservation by:

- **CHECK:** Mail it with this filled-out coupon to:
ACLU Dinner, P. O. Box 12372 St. Petersburg, FL 33733
- **PHONE:** Call (727) 347-4266 (Leave message)
- **E-MAIL:** mbuu@earthlink.net (Reserve & pay at door*)

Menu Selections

Salade Du Jour

Entrée (Choose one below per guest.)

Baked Mahi-Mahi **Fish** with Santa Fe rice & vegetables.

Prime **Rib** with Baked Potato and vegetables

Earp Bros. Miner **Chicken** w/ garlic mashed potatoes & veg.

Vegetarian: Seasonal vegetables / Pasta Primavera

With Coffee, hot & iced tea and rolls.

And for dessert:

Chocolate Cobbler

*Your RSVP is a commitment on which our costs are based. Payment is therefore required for every reservation regardless of attendance. Freedom has a price, and we try to make every dollar count.

Make your check out to: **ACLU Annual Dinner**

\$35.00* each at the door, **\$30** if paid in advance before November 30, 2009,

*or if limited income: \$20 with reservation.

Please Print!

(circle one for each name)

NAME _____	Fish Rib Chicken Vegetarian
NAME _____	Fish Rib Chicken Vegetarian
NAME _____	Fish Rib Chicken Vegetarian
NAME _____	Fish Rib Chicken Vegetarian

PHONE _____ E-MAIL _____ TOTAL \$ _____

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Miami, FL 33137



Board Member, Jerry Abraham Moore enlightens the crowds at Circus McGurkis every year.

Know your Pinellas County Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union

Our Chapter has been in existence since 1968. In the years since then, we have vigorously defended the Bill of Rights freedoms guaranteed to all Americans in our constitution.

With leadership provided by Ray and Margo Yazell, Irene Miller, Gardner Beckett, and Perkins Shelton, we campaigned to end Florida's corrupt municipal courts system, and ended the practice of sending citizens to jail without benefit of attorney.

When the Martin Luther King parade was threatened by a city's demand that liability insurance be required before permits were issued, the ACLU successfully defended every citizen organization's right to use public facilities without overly burdensome financial requirements. The chapter has been instrumental in issues of bail reform, the misuse of curfews, the placement of

magistrates in jails to facilitate the speedy release of detainees, and increasing the use of citations in lieu of incarceration. The civilian review of police policies and practices is also an important element of vigilance.

The coming of the Tampa Bay Regional ACLU office, now ably led by Rebecca Steele, has given a new hope for the preservation and extension of our liberties.

We seek every opportunity to reach out to the people of our community; to awaken within them an appreciation of our constitution and the freedoms it provides.

We participate in a variety of public forums, such as Circus McGurkis, the Times' Reading Festival, Banned Books Week and many other venues to acquaint citizens with current issues and concerns that

challenge their liberty.

Freedom is a constant struggle. A well educated citizenry armed with an understanding of our constitution, is the only reliable safeguard against the daily tyrannies of opportunists and fear mongers who would have the people surrender their liberties for the doubtful value of strict security.

As a chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, we are committed to a staunch defense of the uniquely American traditions of free thought, religion, speech and assembly. Because the integrity of our electoral process is essential to a democratic government at all levels, from local to national, your ACLU is ready to defend this, and all elements of our national patrimony.

Jim Peterson

A Celebration of Freedom

Your invitation to the annual ACLU Bill of Rights Dinner is on the other side of this page.

PINELLAS COUNTY CHAPTER, THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION OF FLORIDA

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