

First Freedom News

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2010 First Freedom Awards Dinner

Held January 14, 2010 at the Richmond Marriot

Three renowned advocates of religious freedom were honored at the First Freedom Awards Dinner, held at the downtown Richmond Marriott. In commemoration of National Religious Freedom Day (January 16th), the First Freedom Center annually recognizes an international, national and Virginia award recipient. This year's recipients were:

- President Abdurrahman Wahid (September 1940–December 2009). President Wahid passed away just weeks before the Dinner. He was the first democratically elected president of Indonesia and a proponent of secular democracy and moderate Islam.
- Felice D. Gaer is the director of the American Jewish Committee's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights and a leading member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.
- Professor Melissa Rogers is the director of the Wake Forest School of Divinity Center for Religion and Public Affairs and an expert on church and state issues.



Nearly 300 people looked on as Melissa Rogers gave her acceptance speech



Rod and Michele Smolla enjoyed a conversation with Glade Knight



Betty and Tommy Baer with Karla and Randy Bell

→ See pages 6-7 for more on this event

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Mike and Sandy Waters

Welcome New Board Chair Rod Smolla



→ See page 2 for a full introduction

The First Freedom Center Welcomes New Board Chair, Rodney A. Smolla

“The ideal of religious liberty is one of America’s great contributions to the world. The First Freedom Center should be a beacon for religious freedom, marking the central role that Richmond and the Commonwealth of Virginia played in forging this ideal, and advancing the ongoing effort to enshrine that ideal as a living reality worldwide. I am honored to assume the role of Chair, as we continue to move the noble mission of the First Freedom Center forward.”

-Rodney A. Smolla, Chair



Rodney A. Smolla, Dean and Roy L. Steinheimer Professor of Law at Washington and Lee University, became the new Chair of the First Freedom Center Board of Trustees on October 14, 2009. Rod succeeds Tommy P. Baer, who will continue to serve the Board as its Honorary Chair. Prior to his appointment at Washington and Lee, Rod served as Dean and Allen Professor at the University of Richmond T.C. Williams School of Law. Before that, he was the Arthur Hanson Professor and Director of the Institute of Bill of Rights Law at The College of William and Mary Marshall-Wythe School of Law. He received his undergraduate degree from Yale University and his law degree from Duke Law School, where he graduated first in his class.

has authored many books and is a frequent magazine and newspaper contributor

and media commentator. He has participated as counsel or co-counsel in litigation matters in state and federal courts throughout the nation, and is a frequent advocate, having presented oral argument in numerous state and Federal courts, including the Supreme Court of the United States.

Rod serves on numerous boards, including Media General Corporation, the American Arbitration Association, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government, and the Board of Governors of the Virginia Bar Association.

Rod has recently been named the 11th President of

Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. Rod will continue to serve as Chair of the First Freedom Center, while at the same time expanding the national presence and reach of the Center’s mission and programs. He has served on the Board of Trustees for the First Freedom Center since 2006.



A widely respected First Amendment scholar, Rod

“Dean Smolla is an education innovator and a big-picture thinker. He steps into the position as Chair just as the Center is about to enter a new era. Inspired by the vision of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the Center’s programs focus on how this inalienable right to religious liberty and freedom of conscience continue to be a vital component of today’s global reality.”

-Tommy P. Baer, Honorary Chair

Thank You to Tommy P. Baer for Ten Years of Leadership



Tommy with Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Congressman Bobby Scott



Tommy with Representative Chet Edwards, 2006 National First Freedom Award Winner



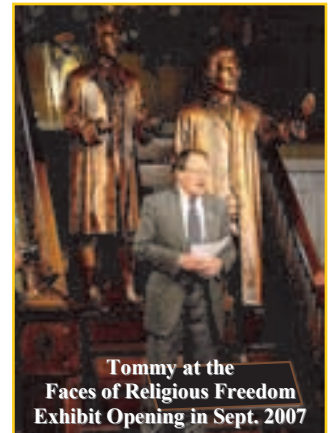
2005 International First Freedom Award Winner Archbishop Elias Chacour and Tommy

“The journey toward achieving freedom of religion for all may never end, but the First Freedom Center has created a public awareness of this cherished concept enunciated so magnificently by Thomas Jefferson in his Statute for Religious Freedom, as well as the need to promote, protect and preserve this fundamental right.”

- Tommy P. Baer

In October 2009, Tommy P. Baer announced that he would pass the gavel on to Rod Smolla as Chair of the First Freedom Center Board of Trustees. During Tommy’s 10-year tenure, the First Freedom Center, which began as a volunteer organization in 1984, has accomplished many milestones, including:

- Completing the acquisition of the historic site at 14th and Cary Streets, where the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom* was passed into law;
- The rehabilitation of derelict buildings at 14th and Main Streets that serve as the First Freedom Center’s offices;
- The First Freedom Center’s first permanent and virtual exhibit, and on-going educational programs (DVDs, teacher’s manuals, teacher training, student competition, children’s website, First Freedom Awards, and news clippings);
- A successful First Freedom Center comprehensive campaign;
- A nationally recognized staff, Board and expert advisors.



Tommy at the Faces of Religious Freedom Exhibit Opening in Sept. 2007

We are profoundly grateful to Tommy Baer for his tireless and dedicated service throughout these years, and we are gratified that he will continue to serve the Center and further its mission in his new capacity as Honorary Chair. Thank you, Tommy Baer!

**- First Freedom Center
Board and Staff**



Tommy with then-Lt. Gov. Tim Kaine, poster finalist Eileen Wilson, Dr. Belle Wheelan, and Steve Elliot in Dec. 2002



Charles Peters, Mark Sisisky, Tommy, and Buford Scott



Tommy with 2008 Virginia First Freedom Award Winner Charles Haynes and Bob Seiple

Chair's Corner

Dear Friends of the First Freedom Center:

I write to you as the new Chair of the First Freedom Center Board. It is an honor to follow in the footsteps of our immediate-past chair, Tommy Baer, whom I applaud for his many years of leadership, service, and dedication to the ideal of religious liberty.

Richmond is famous as the city of monuments. From its inception, the First Freedom Center has existed to celebrate and to perpetuate what may be Richmond's and Virginia's single most monumental contribution to human liberty: our historic commitment to religious liberty as a fundamental and universal human right.

At our annual awards banquet in January, I invited the audience to consider "a tale of two General Assemblies." The first tale culminates in the ringing words of the Virginia General Assembly, as it enacted into law the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom on January 16, 1786:

Be it enacted by General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of Religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.

The second tale culminates in the words of the General Assembly of the United Nations, as it adopted Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 18, 1948:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

We are at a moment of historic transition at the First Freedom Center, a time of renewal and rededication. Our Board is in the process of designing a new strategic plan, as we advance our educational mission and look for creative ways to project our message to a wide national and international audience. To all of our friends, I challenge you to join with us in rededicating ourselves to the ideal of making Richmond, and Virginia, a beacon to the world, proclaiming religious freedom as a human right that should be embraced and enforced by all societies as a basic condition of our shared humanity.



Rod Smolla
Chair



New Trustee: Dr. Everett “Ben” Howerton, Jr.

Dr. Ben Howerton spent thirty years as an academic and executive educator at the local, state and university levels. He is professor emeritus and former Director of Leadership and Policy Studies at The George Washington University with a specialty in law and public policy. Early in his career, he served as a member of the faculty at the University of Virginia, as well as chief executive with the Virginia School Boards Association.

Dr. Howerton has served on both governors and congressional commissions directed at elevating standards for educational personnel and expanded use of technology. Under the auspices of USAID, he was a consultant and strategic



Dr. Ben Howerton joined the First Freedom Center's Board of Trustees in January, 2010

facilitator to Afghanistan and ministries in Central America, South America and Germany.

Dr. Howerton is the former President of Virginia Information and Educational Utility, as well as the former President and Chief Executive Officer of Synergy Group, Inc. Additionally, he is an administrative law arbiter and grievance mediator. Dr. Howerton is a member of numerous Boards, including the Science Museum of Virginia and the National Advisory Council for The George Washington University. He is a native Virginian and resides in Richmond with his wife, Margaret Freeman Howerton.

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2010 First Freedom



Emilie Taylor (who accepted the International First Freedom Award on behalf of President Wahid), Felice Gaer (National Award Winner), Rod Smolla, and Melissa Rogers (Virginia Award Winner)

On Thursday, January 14, 2010 nearly 300 people attended the First Freedom Center's annual First Freedom Awards Dinner at the Richmond Marriott to honor three extraordinary advocates of religious freedom. All proceeds from the event support the Center's educational programs that promote the knowledge, respect, and understanding of religious freedom.



Laura Lee Garrett and Beverley Lacy



June and Bob Bluford with Tommy and Betty Baer



Imam Amonette, Isabelle Kinnard Richman, and Glade Knight



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m Awards Dinner



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Glade Knight and Chris Lansing



Charles Peters, Meg Riner, and Cherry Peters



Nelson Knight with Sandy and Mike Waters

Children's Holiday Website Updates

Area Educators Invited to Serve on Advisory Committee to Evaluate Forthcoming Children's Holiday Website



On October 7, 2009, 16 teachers and coordinators met to review the First Freedom Center's forthcoming Children's Holiday Website. Also attending were religion experts Dr. Imad Damaj (President, Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs), Dr. Mark Wood (Chair, VCU Religious Studies), Dr. Dan Smith (VCU Religious Studies) and reading specialist Dr. Vicky Alley (Assistant Head, St. Christopher's School). Vicky is the daughter-in-law of the esteemed 2006 Virginia First Freedom Award winner, Dr. Robert Alley.

School teachers and faith groups may turn to the website to assist their third, fourth, and fifth-grade level students in learn-

ing about world religions. The holidays and holy days of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism will be objectively and engagingly presented through text, stories, and games intended to teach children about world religions. Students will come to a better understanding of their rights to and responsibilities for religious freedom as young Americans, while appreciating and respecting the diversity around them.

The creation of a children's website was made possible with generous support from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation and The Lanza Family Foundation.

Local Brownies Preview Children's Holiday Website

Brownies from Troop 136 met on Feb 13, 2010 at the First Freedom Center to preview the Children's Holiday Website. The website's developers, Dr. Karen Richardson and Mr. Bob Richardson were also on hand to assist and answer questions. Dr. Isabelle Kinnard Richman, the Center's Vice President for Education, introduced the website to the Brownies, who then had a chance to explore it on their own in small groups. The Brownies had a great time experiencing the variety of learning activities and games available on the website, which is expected to be publically unveiled this summer.

After their preview, the Brownies shared their opinions about the Children's Holiday Website. Some popular aspects included a read-along story of Purim, puzzles and a word search. Before leaving, the Brownies also had a chance to view the Center's Faces of Religious Freedom Exhibit.



Adult Group Visits Religious Freedom Exhibit



The First Freedom Center welcomed adults from the Greater Richmond ARC on February 23, 2010. The Greater Richmond ARC (formerly known as the Richmond Association for Mentally Retarded Children) is a not-for-profit service provider that offers a “continuum of programs and services for individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities.” ARC “serves more than 1200 individuals and their families each year through a variety of programs and services,” including recreational visits like the one taken to the Center.

Visitors listened to the Center’s Outreach Programs Coordinator, Sandra Poulsen, as she explained the importance of religious liberty and the contributions made to it by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. She also emphasized the historic significance of the corner of 14th and Cary Streets as the site where the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was enacted into law in 1786. The group then had a chance to examine the exhibit and ask questions.



The Greater Richmond ARC Website:
<http://www.richmondarc.org>



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The guarantee of religious freedom first achieved legal and constitutional recognition through the work of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Mason. Their joint efforts produced the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, a groundbreaking law passed in 1786 by the Virginia General Assembly. The Statute was the precursor to the religion clauses found in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

