

James Randi Educational Foundation (/site/)

News

Pigasus Awards for 2008 Announced

Details

Written by Phil Plait

 Published: 01 April 2009



Every year, on the appropriate date of April 1, the James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF) gives out the Pigasus Awards, a dubious honor to people or organizations that have done their best in the past year to snuff out science and promote irrationality. The award is named after the beloved mascot of the JREF because, after all, when paranormal powers are proven, pigs will fly.

The five categories of the Pigasus Award are:

1. To the Scientist who said or did the silliest thing relating to occult, supernatural, or paranormal subjects in the preceding twelve months.
2. To the Funding Organization that supports the most useless study related to the occult, supernatural, or paranormal during the year.
3. To the Media outlet that reported as fact the most outrageous occult, supernatural, or paranormal claim.
4. To the Performer who fooled the greatest number of people with the least effort in that twelve-month period.
5. For the most persistent refusal to face reality.

This year's (dis)honorees are:

- 1) Dr. Colin Ross, who claims he can shoot electromagnetic radiation from his eyes;
- 2) The Producers of the movie "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed";
- 3) Late night cable TV stations;
- 4) Jenny McCarthy; who has written books and appeared on countless TV shows promoting measles; and
- 5) Kevin Trudeau; who sold quack books even after the government fined him for it.

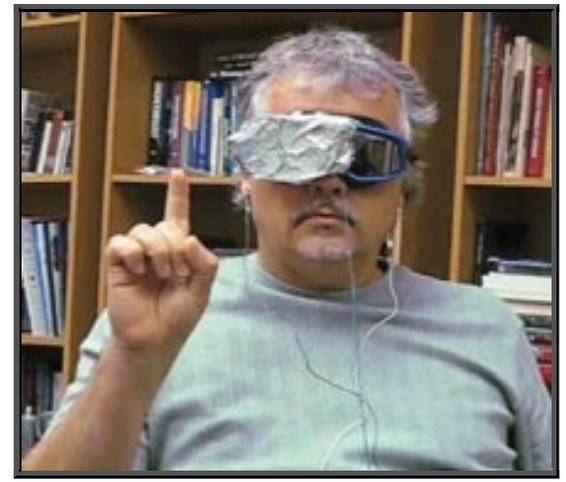
Details of these prestigious fakers are below. They receive no actual trophy, no prize money, no plaque; just the publicity they generally seek, though perhaps not in the way they want it.



1) Dr. Colin Ross is a psychiatrist in Texas. He is a lettered man, having published many articles in peer-reviewed journals, and you might think he would be the last person to earn a Pigasus... until you look a bit deeper.

Dr. Ross claims that he can send electromagnetic beams out of his eyes.

Now, to be fair, this was long thought to be how vision worked... in the Middle Ages. However, we now understand that light emitted or reflected by external objects enters the eye, and that's how we see. But Dr. Ross claims to have reversed this process, and not only can he send EM beams from his eyes, but he has rigged up a system to detect it. He applied for our famous Million Dollar Challenge with this idea, and when we sent it to our team of experts, they objected, saying it was the movements of Dr. Ross's eyes that triggered his system. ~~He has since put his application on hold while he works on this, still claiming, of course, that there is "definitely a beam" emerging from his eyes.~~ [It has come to our attention after posting this originally that Dr. Ross has re-activated his application. -Ed.] Oh, and did we mention he's writing a book on this as well? Or maybe you already guessed that-- but even if you did, you don't win the million.



Links:

Swift article on Dr. Ross ([/site/index.php/swift-blog/211-swift-august-22-2008.html#i4](http://site/index.php/swift-blog/211-swift-august-22-2008.html#i4))

Dallas Observer Article 1

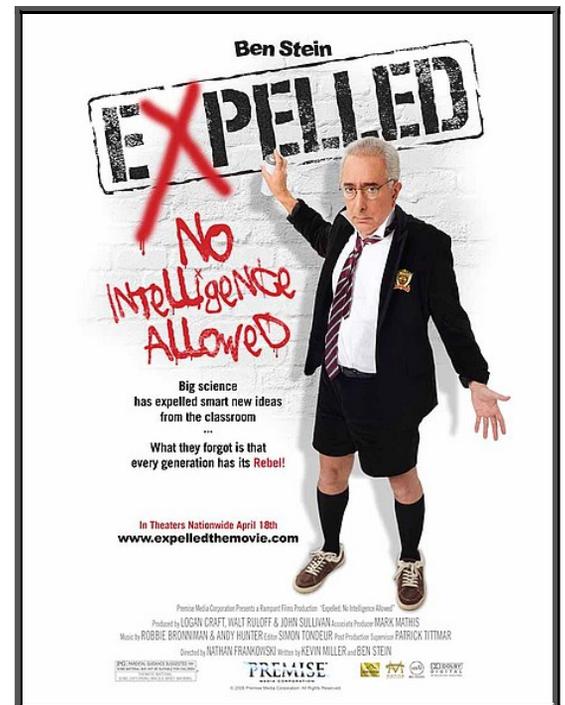
(http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/unfairpark/2008/07/does_colin_ross_also_know_wolv.php)

Dallas Observer Article 2

(http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/unfairpark/2008/08/colin_ross_has_an_eyebeam_of_e.php)

2) The Producers of "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed": Logan Craft, Walter Ruloff, and John Sullivan.

"Expelled" was a movie destined for this award. Its premise was to show that Intelligent Design -- a rebranding of young Earth creationism in an attempt to circumvent multiple court decisions not to teach religion in public schools -- is a viable alternative to evolution, and that ID is being actively censored in academia. Hosted by Ben Stein, the movie was an atrocious web of distortions, ridiculous accusations, bad logic, and out-and-out falsehoods. They interviewed several notable academicians, including Richard Dawkins, PZ Myers, and Genie Scott under false pretenses so that they could get quotations used out of context, and then spun it all into a movie so truly awful that The Onion's famed AV Club said it was "odious" and one of the worst movies of 2008. Roger Ebert penned a tour-de-force debunking of the movie for his Chicago Sun-Times column as well, a must-read evisceration that slam dunks "Expelled" into the dust bin of Hollywood.



So, to the producers of "Expelled" goes the Pigasus, and a little free advice: next time, invest in a project that has a more grounded basis in reality. Perhaps unicorns, fairies, or Atlantis.

Links:

IMDB listing for "Expelled" (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1091617/>)

Roger Ebert's review (http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2008/12/win_ben_steins_mind.html)

The Onion's AV Club Review (<http://www.avclub.com/articles/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed,2990/>)

3) If you watch TV late at night, you're no stranger to woowoo infomercials, which pitch everything from psychic hotlines to pills which will increase, um, various parts of your body (also, see #5 below). This has been true for years, but recently things took an odd turn. You may be familiar with Enzyte, the "male enhancement" "supplement", shilled by Berkeley Premium Nutraceuticals, which used the irritating "Smiling Bob" commercials. In September 2008, the company's CEO and founder, Steve Warshak, and his mother, Harriet Warsjhak, were found guilty of conspiracy to commit all kinds of fraud. They were thrown in jail, had to forfeit half a billion dollars in assets, and went bankrupt.



Case closed, right? Wrong. The Smiling Bob Enzyte commercials are still running. If you watch Comedy Central, for example, they shows these ads nearly every commercial break.

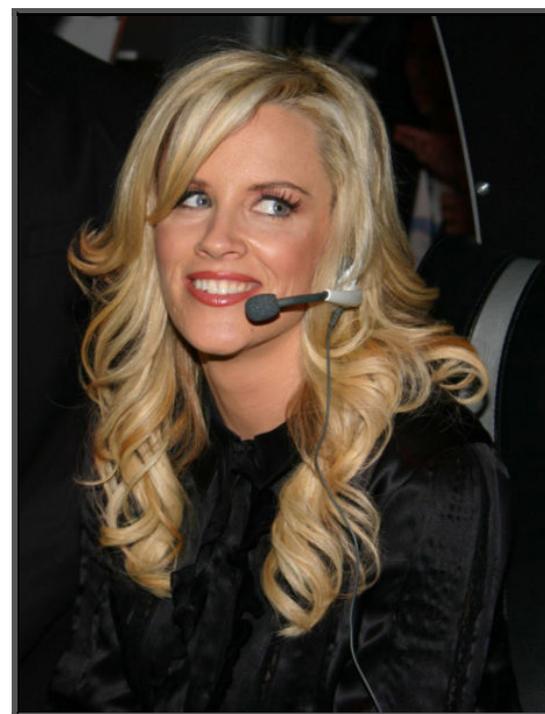
Maybe they should win an award for talking to the dead. So, for years of promulgating pseudoscientific piffle, the Pigasus goes to the TV cable industry.

Links:

Wikipedia entry for Enzyte (/site/ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enzyte>)

We note the Enzyte website no longer exists, and redirects to another "male enhancement" product.

4) Jenny McCarthy is well known as a model and actor, but in recent days she's getting far more publicity for her stance that vaccines cause autism. She has a son who may be autistic, and of course we are sympathetic to her plight. But that can only go so far when Ms. McCarthy appears on endless chat shows, is interviewed in magazine articles, and even writes books encouraging people not to vaccinate their children.



Numerous, well-done studies have shown conclusively that there is no causal link between vaccines and the onset of autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) - the claim that they are connected is spurious, based on anecdotes and the fact that vaccines are given to children around the same time that ASD symptoms begin to appear.

The antivaccination movement has been directly linked with outbreaks of various vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, and there have been numerous illnesses and even deaths associated with these outbreaks. The facts are in, and have been for quite some time: vaccines are an overwhelming modern medical success story, having eradicated such scourges as smallpox, and hugely lowering rates of other diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, influenza, and diptheria. The evidence is also overwhelmingly against any link between vaccines and autism as well.

Yet all that evidence has been overturned in the public's mind with ease and alacrity by Ms. McCarthy, so she wins the Pigasus award for her contribution to the country's ill-health.

NOTE: At The Amaz!ng Meeting 7 in Las Vegas on July 9, we will be sponsoring a vaccination clinic to help the children in the area get the shots they need to stay healthy. Las Vegas has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the US, and this clinic is critically needed. To find out more, please go to our events page (/site/index.php/component/content/article/37-static/449-the-amazing-meeting-7-events.html.).

Links:

Dr. David Gorski's review of the antivax movement (<http://www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/?p=384>)

Dr. Steven Novellas' antivax review (<http://www.theness.com/neurologicablog/?p=444>)
(<http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/badastronomy/2008/10/20/but-how-do-we-recover-from-jenny-mccarthy/>)

Phil Plait's review of Jenny McCarthy (<http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/badastronomy/2008/10/20/but-how-do-we-recover-from-jenny-mccarthy/>)

5) If you watch late-night cable TV, you could hardly have missed our final Pigasus awardee, Kevin Trudeau. He hit the airwaves in the 1990s shilling his book "Natural Cures 'They' Don't Want You to Know About", where he claimed eating coral calcium cured cancer. Alliteration aside, in 1998 a court ordered him to stop making this false claim, and in 2003 the Federal Trade Commission charged that he knowingly violated the 1998 order. So he's been nailed twice for lying in his ads and has had to pay hefty fees and fines due to them... which is why it's even more astonishing that in 2008 he was charged once again for false claims, this time about his book "The Weight Loss Cure 'They' Don't Want You to Know About". And it would be cruel of us to mention the two years he spent in federal prison for credit card fraud as well, so we'll leave that be.



In his infomercials, Trudeau claims the diet in his book is easy to do, and "ultimately allows readers to eat whatever they want." It turns out this is not really quite true, and instead the book advocates severe dieting, taking non-FDA approved drugs, and maintaining the diet for life.

Because of this small breach of reality, and also his past violations, the FTC fined him a whopping \$37 million! While we applaud the FTC and are glad of the huge sum, we don't think that will replace the lives of the people who read his book and believed the snake oil he knew he was selling. Caveat emptor always applies, certainly, but in this case that doesn't extend to out-and-out fraud.

So Kevin Trudeau is the recipient of the Pigasus for purposely and with contempt storming right through several FTC court-ordered fines and convictions. Perhaps his next book will be "Felonious Actions 'I' Don't Want You to Know About."

Links:

The FTC 2009 Statement ([/site/ http://www1.ftc.gov/opa/2009/01/trudeau.shtm](http://www1.ftc.gov/opa/2009/01/trudeau.shtm))

The FTC 2007 Statement ([/site/ http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2007/09/trudeau.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2007/09/trudeau.shtm))

The Skeptic Dictionary entry on Kevin Trudeau (<http://skepdic.com/trudeau.html>)

[◀ Prev \(/site/index.php/jref-news/501-tiger-woods-interferes-with-dennis-lee-show.html\)](/site/index.php/jref-news/501-tiger-woods-interferes-with-dennis-lee-show.html)

[Next ▶ \(/site/index.php/jref-news/496-problem-with-youtube.html\)](/site/index.php/jref-news/496-problem-with-youtube.html)

Main Menu

[Home \(/site/index.php\)](/site/index.php)

This is the archived site - [Click here for the new site \(http://web.randi.org\)](http://web.randi.org)

