



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Spring 2016

A Tale of Two Caskets

By Joanna Brown, FCAWM board member

Recently, I helped a friend to cope with the sudden loss of a close family member. My friend, in the midst of deep grief, had already called a local funeral director and instructed the funeral director to embalm the body, host a viewing for local relatives, and transport the body the next morning to an airport so that it could be flown to another state where a second funeral and the burial would take place. She had made these arrangements verbally, without knowledge of the costs associated with these two sets of funeral arrangements or her rights as a consumer.

As a member of FCAWM familiar with our online funeral home price survey report, I was able to discuss with her the range of costs for embalming, professional services, caskets, burial vaults, and other elements of traditional funeral services. She was shocked by the high costs involved yet did not want to consider cremation, so I sat down with her to consider ways to reduce her expenses and still have the final arrangements she desired to honor her loved one.

I told her that buying a casket directly from a discounted vendor could save her a substantial amount of money, and that by law, she had the right to do so; the funeral home could neither refuse the casket nor charge her extra money for using that casket. Through FCAWM I had become aware of a business, Affordable Caskets and Urns, which sells directly to the public. I drove with the family to the showroom, in a large industrial building in Three Rivers, where the thoughtful owner Lenny Weake allowed my friend and her family all the time they needed to

select a casket they liked. My friend purchased that casket at a cost of \$1,200, including delivery to the funeral home.

We then drove to the funeral home with which she had made preliminary arrangements by phone to finalize those arrangements. There, the funeral director showed a similar casket costing \$3,400. My friend, informed by me of her rights as a consumer, calmly told the funeral director that she had already purchased a casket and it would be delivered the next day to the funeral home.

Through the knowledge and information from FCAWM that I was able to supply to my friend, she saved \$2,200 on the cost of the casket and she purchased a less expensive burial vault rather than being persuaded by the funeral director to buy a more costly one, saving another \$800. The total of \$3,000 saved through being a wise consumer allowed my friend to fund much of the cost of the funeral services in the other state.

This is why we do what we do at FCAWM. Our goal is to educate the public about our rights as consumers of funeral services so that we can choose dignified and affordable final arrangements. If we do not do this work of educating the public, who will?



**Announcing a
NEW telephone
number with voice
messaging:
(413) 376-4747**

*For more
information,
see next page.*

We have a new phone number:

(413) 376-4747

June 6, 2016: This new number goes directly into a voicemail system where you can leave a message **at any time**. This "smart messaging" system will work 24/7, collecting messages and automatically sending an email notifying us whenever a message awaits.

FCAWM is an all-volunteer organization – no office staff, no office hours. We work from our homes or meet in other spaces. For years we have relied on the generosity of one loyal member who, in her home, handled all incoming calls for FCAWM. At last we have solved the puzzle of how to share this responsibility.

Several volunteers will now be able to monitor messages and respond to your inquiries. We will develop a schedule so that only one person at a time will be responsible for responding. So far, we are pleased that the messages are easily retrievable via different devices (telephone, cell phone or online via computer). This flexibility is appreciated.

The previously-published number will continue to exist, but a message there will refer callers to this new number. We will revise our FCAWM publications as soon as possible to complete this transition. Please be patient as we adapt to this new system.



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P.O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302-0994

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Editor this issue: Sandy Ward

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral of memorial services.

Reinvigorating the Alliance!

Our Bylaws call for staggering the terms of our Trustees "to encourage the election of interested persons who have not served before, in order to **annually reinvigorate** the Alliance."

We will have 3 openings this fall for new people to start 3-year terms on our Board of Trustees. Please consider this opportunity. We also have an opening for a 1-year term (to fill a vacancy).

Eligibility for election to the Board? Must be (or become) a member of the Alliance and must not to be in the business of selling any funeral services or products.

A few of our Trustees are stepping down for various reasons. Please help us recruit new candidates. You know of our good work, and may know people who would enjoy being part of this team.

The "About Us" section of our website provides background and lists the current Trustees and Officers. Our Board meets about six times a year, usually in Greenfield or Northampton, though location and timing can be adjusted as needed.

Volunteers sought for Nominating Committee:

President Sandy Ward will soon appoint a Nominating Committee composed of one Trustee and two members at large. Would YOU like to help on this short-term task? The goal is to develop, by mid-September, slates of candidates for the FCAWM board and for officers for next year. Those slates are to be announced in the fall newsletter, and voted on at our next Annual Meeting, October 23, 2016.



We thank **Trevor Boeding** for his service as a Trustee of FCAWM. Trevor was elected to a three-year term in October 2014, but had to step down for personal reasons in spring 2016. We will miss his insights and assistance. We wish him well in the future.



Report of the 2015 Annual Meeting

On October 18, 2015, we gathered at Rockridge Retirement Community in Northampton.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Sandy Ward reported on the activities of the Alliance over the past year. The Board is working well together. We participated in outreach events including a Northampton Health and Safety Fair, the Western Mass Elder Care Conference and the Get on Board networking event which 150 people attended. A highlight of the year was becoming engaged at the state level with the Board of Registration in Embalming and Funeral Directing. The FCAWM board members who have attended meetings have been impressed with how the state board conducts its business. We, FCAWM, also had the opportunity to say something about who we are and what we do. We have felt very welcomed. One of the state board members commented, "We work harder with you in the room." We will continue to monitor as revisions to the state regulations are considered. The national FCA, in partnership with consumer groups, is announcing a new study about pricing of funerals. Our next Price Survey will be conducted and published in 2016.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Joan Pillsbury reviewed the financial status of FCAWM for FY 2015.



Our income from contributions was \$4,527.50 for FCAWM and \$2,362.50 for Green Burial for total contributions of \$6,890.00.

ELECTION OF TRUSTEES and OFFICERS

These trustees were elected October 2015:

- Sandy Ward for a 3-year term
- Cecile Richard for a 3-year term
- Susie Maddern for a 3-year term
- Joanna Brown for a 2-year term

•Election of Officers for the coming year:

- President: Sandy Ward
- Vice-President: Cecile Richard
- Treasurer: Joan Pillsbury
- Secretary: Kathleen Winkworth



Sandy Ward and Cecile Richard

Twenty-seven people attended the meeting and program. We are very appreciative of Rockridge Retirement Community for hosting us again this year and for providing refreshments.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Winkworth, Secretary*

(For report on our October 2015 Program
"5 (or More) Shades of Green"
please see next page.)



Thanks to our donors...

Your contributions keep us going. Your support is very much appreciated. FCAWM is a 501c3 nonprofit organization; your donations are tax deductible. *Thank you!*



5 (or more) Shades of Green

Considering the environmental aspects
of burials, cremations, and other final arrangements.



Panelists: Carol, Candace, Judith, Heather, and Sandy *Photo by Joanna Brown*

Carol Coan discussed “greenness” and whether some new and unusual burial products are really green. Usually greenness in burial means biodegradable and sustainable, i.e. not burying things that won’t break down or that are toxic, and avoiding things that are shipped from far away or produce by-products. Carol described and showed pictures of several products that are being advertised: a burial pod for whole bodies, a biodegradable cremation urn with seed of a tree. Carol also described upright burial – auger out a hole 10 feet deep, freeze the body and place it down the hole. All of these procedures are intriguing and appealing, but closer examination shows that they pose logistical difficulties and substantial energy inputs.

Candace Currie from Mt. Auburn Cemetery discussed Green Burial Council certification. She stressed importance of making sure what someone is getting is what GBC approves/certifies as far as funeral homes, cemeteries & products such as caskets and shrouds. In other words you need to find out if something is really green. GBC allows consumers to rest assured that the green or natural burial services have been thoroughly vetted and meet up-to-date standards. Candace talked about Mt. Hope cemetery in New York. Mt. Hope is a municipal cemetery that is a hybrid of traditional and green. Mt. Auburn is non-sectarian cemetery that is well endowed and does both traditional and green burials. Mount Auburn is a botanical garden as well as a cemetery.

Judith Lorei, on the Montague Cemetery commission and also a member of Green Burial Massachusetts, said that green burial is not the norm in Massachusetts. However, towns and private cemeteries are increasingly permitting natural burial. If owners of cemetery allow green burial than it can be approved. Four towns that allow green burial are Chesterfield, Warwick, Heath and Shutesbury.

Heather Massey discussed natural vs. conventional death care. She described how in natural death care one prepares a body i.e. washing, cooling, closing the eyes and mouth. Heather had on display products that one would use to prepare the body and talked about containers available. She announced an upcoming workshop in November. There is also something called the “Infinity Burial Project” (a burial suit) and one can go to the TED talk to learn about it.

Sandy Ward presented some very unconventional options for us to consider. She told us about sky burial and burial at sea. The idea of being generous and giving the body back to nature were ways to think about this. Sandy said that in conventional cremation the heat is not captured for any use and that on average 400 kilos of carbon dioxide are released and any mercury given off is also not captured. She also described alkaline hydrolysis and urban composting.

The panel then entertained questions and made themselves available once the meeting was formally adjourned.

Report by Kathleen Winkworth, Secretary



Green Burial news:

An important milestone in the history of Green Burial Massachusetts was reached this year with official incorporation in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and approval as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, effective March 7, 2016:

Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc.

New phone number: **(617) 393-5011**

Website: www.greenburialma.org

Tax-deductible donations may be sent to:

Green Burial Massachusetts Inc.

PO Box 323

Greenfield, MA 01302

Officers of Green Burial Massachusetts, Inc.

PRESIDENT - JUDITH LOREI

TREASURER - JOAN PILLSBURY

CLERK - EVA S. MOSELEY

Directors: Judith Lorei, Joan Pillsbury, Eva S. Moseley, Carol Coan, Candace Currie

Green Burial Massachusetts has recently partnered with Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust with the goal of opening the first green cemetery in Massachusetts. The cemetery we aim to establish will not permit use of embalming chemicals, metal or hardwood caskets, or concrete vault liners, and will be open to all Massachusetts residents. If you have any questions, please contact info@greenburialma.org.

Congratulations to the volunteers who have worked so hard on this cause. FCAWM, as the parent organization of the former Green Burial Committee, has now passed green burial funds to GBM, Inc.

Have you attended a Death Café yet?



A Death Café is an opportunity for people to enjoy refreshments and discuss death. The goal is to “increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.”

A Death Café is *not* an end-of-life planning workshop, nor a bereavement, counseling, or therapy group. It is a group-directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or themes. There is no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product or course of action.

This model was developed in 2011 in London by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid (based on ideas of Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz). The first US café was held in Ohio in 2012. The first death café in our state was the Cape Cod Death Café in Falmouth, held in October 2013. The FCA of Eastern Massachusetts has hosted many cafés. Visit the website www.deathcafe.com to learn more about this global movement, and to find forthcoming death cafés near you.

On April 26, 2016, over 35 people gathered for a Death Café hosted by the Granby Public Library. Three FCAWM volunteers (Sandy Ward, Cecile Richard, and Joanna Brown) served as facilitators, each of us sitting with a small group. Discussions were lively! “What would you consider to be a **good** death?” is one intriguing question that prompts thoughtful comments and heartfelt sharing. A second café was offered April 27 to accommodate people who had not been able to fit into the first one.



Meanwhile, other people and organizations in western Massachusetts have also offered death cafés. The Pioneer Valley Shambhala Center hosted one on Halloween 2015. Two Streams Zen has hosted several in Northampton, and Jonathan Stein has hosted several in Florence.



Cake at a 2015 Death Café hosted by FCAEM.

Hospice of Franklin County in collaboration with St. James Episcopal Church in Greenfield periodically invites people to “Coffee, Tea & Mortality — a lively conversation designed to take death out of hiding and talk about it openly, while enjoying delicious refreshments.” FCAWM Trustee Susie Maddern has enjoyed attending several of these Coffee, Tea & Mortality! events, which are very similar to death cafés, though not using that title.

Please make checks payable to FCAWM and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.
Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of
___\$15 ___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$100 or \$_____

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$_____

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of \$_____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page, spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address (if different from that on reverse side): _____

E-mail: _____ **Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No**

✂----- cut here -----

PLEASE help us reduce postage costs. We'd love to add you to our email list if you have ready access to email and could receive or view our newsletter electronically. You may respond via email to fcawmass@gmail.com or use the form above.

THANK YOU!

National FCA Conference June 23-25

The Funeral Consumers Alliance is holding its biennial conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Workshops include *Ethics at the end of life: how to get the death you want*; *Writing a journalistic obituary*; *12 Home Funeral do's and don'ts*; and *Who owns the dead? How the long arm of the law reaches into our most private funeral choices*. Katrina Spade of the Urban Death Project is a featured speaker. More about the program can be found at

www.funerals.org/fca-conference-2016/

FCAWM President Sandy Ward plans to attend and room with Ashlie Taylor, newly-elected President of FCA of Eastern Massachusetts.

The national FCA website has a completely new look!

Visit

funerals.org

and explore their new design.



* * * * *

Save the date!

Sunday, October 23, 2016, 2:00-4:00 pm

Annual Meeting and Program

Rockridge Retirement Community, 25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton, Massachusetts

Cremation: Pros, Cons, & Environmental Impact

We will also provide updated information about cremation options for residents in Western Massachusetts. One option ceased when Eternal Blessings (Guilford, VT) stopped accepting customers from MA, and some months later went out of business.

Eternal Blessings had specialized in direct service to families.

What other crematories will work directly with consumers?

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