



# FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 774-2320  
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Spring 2010

## ASSISTING FUNERAL CONSUMERS FOR 50+ YEARS

**Good news!** Volunteers did step forward in response to the call in the fall newsletter. So we enter our 51<sup>st</sup> year with new energy and leadership.

If interested, or if you have questions, please call our Information line (413-774-2320), which Carol Coan will continue to answer, or contact Sandy Ward (413-532-4306 or [sandy@nonotuck.us](mailto:sandy@nonotuck.us)).

### Welcome to our new Officers and Trustees!

**Sandy Ward, President**  
**Ted Ennis, Vice-President**  
**Joan Pillsbury, Secretary**

<see profiles inside>

**More good news:** Membership contributions and donations of over \$1,400 have been received since September 1, the beginning of our Fiscal Year.

### THANK YOU!

Your donations have helped ensure that we can continue to serve our mission, covering anticipated costs of newsletter production and mailing and the 2010 price survey project, as well as our dues to the national organization, Funeral Consumers Alliance, of which we are an affiliate. *Additional contributions are always welcome. See form on page 3 and enclosed envelope.*

More volunteers would of course be welcome. *Please join us!* You'll meet interesting people, learn a lot, and have fun working for an important cause.

We look forward to hearing from you.



### Annual Meeting Succeeds—FCAWM to Continue; Home Funerals Lauded -- Carol N. Coan

Vice President Doug Barnshaw opened the Annual Meeting shortly after 2 pm, October 25, 2009. Trustee Carol Coan gave an abbreviated history of the first 50 years of the FCA of Western Massachusetts. She pointed out that, although the specific needs have changed—for example, it's a fairly simple matter now to arrange for cremation, unlike 50 years ago—the need for unbiased information on end-of-life options continues today.

Carol introduced our panel on home funerals. **Erica Gees, Dorian Gregory and Celia Riahi** each spoke of her experiences with caring for a dying loved one at home. Erica said, "After death, the pain of dying falls away. After he died, the person my father was came back, he came out. He looked more beautiful every day." Each also spoke of difficulties with the conventional funeral process. Dorian

(continued on page 2)

## Report on Annual Meeting and Program (continued from page 1)

noted that death has become “an opportunity for someone to make a profit; they take away the process and sell it back to us.” Celia told us, with some humor, that there were many deaths in her family when she was young, and each time “the bodies just disappeared. I spent years in therapy because of that.”

While each panelist’s story was distinct, there were also common themes: wondering a little whether it was permissible to care for her loved one’s body at home, yet knowing it was exactly right; feeling responsible to do things for her personally rather than hand the body off to strangers; finding healing in the process of caring for her before and after death, in knowing how the body was cared for, and in the grieving. The stimulating discussion afterward made clear that caring for a deceased loved one at home can be a moving and empowering experience, and that knowing it is an option is vital.

A short business meeting followed. Vice President Doug Barnshaw announced that, during the special meeting immediately preceding this gathering, there was strong interest in keeping our organization going, and two people volunteered to serve on the Board. Those two, Sandy Ward and Ted Ennis, were elected by the members to serve three-year terms (2009-2012). Continuing trustees are Will Thayer (to 2010), Don Bourcier (to 2010), and Ceil Lewonchuk (to 2011). The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 pm.



Erica Gees, Dorian Gregory and Celia Riahi are members of “Return to the Circle,” which they recently founded to “bring death back into the circle of life.” Their website is [www.returntothecircle.org](http://www.returntothecircle.org)



### Profiles of our new Trustees

**Sandy Ward:** I am a retired reference librarian. My membership with FCAWM dates from 1993, transferred from the Peninsula Funeral Society (CA) when I moved here to become Science Librarian at Mount Holyoke College, my alma mater. I'm now an active volunteer with various community agencies in Holyoke, MA. The mission of FCAWM appeals to me. Providing reliable unbiased information to people as a public service makes a reference librarian happy!

**Joan Pillsbury:** I became interested in the Funeral Consumers Alliance while taking a field trip with Carol Coan to a Green Cemetery near Ithaca, NY. I decided to join the Board of Trustees and agreed to be the secretary. The mission of The Funeral Consumers Alliance is to promote and protect a consumer’s right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements. I wanted to be part of that work and I will benefit by educating myself in the process.

Published by Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts, Inc., P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302-0994; (413) 774-2320. Editor for Spring 2010 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 or memorial service.

I have been a nurse for 35 years. My practice has included caring for people along life’s continuum at our local community hospital. Currently, I am a Nurse Hospital Case Manager.

**Ted Ennis,** our new Vice-President, spends each winter in Florida. He'll submit a brief profile for the next newsletter.



Please make checks payable to **FCA of W. Mass.** and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.

Note: Until we obtain 501c3 status with the IRS, your contributions are not tax-deductible.

YES! I'm renewing my support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of W. Mass. and its mission of informing, educating and advocating for consumers and their rights and options for funerals and memorials. I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of

\$15     \$25     \$50     \$100     \$ \_\_\_\_\_

YES! I'm available to help with the 2010 Price Survey project

I could help with refreshments for future meetings

I'd like to help with writing/ editing future Newsletters

Please contact me about other volunteer opportunities.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



### **Price Survey**

“The funeral home’s General Price List (GPL) is one of the most important tools a consumer has at his disposal. The GPL lists (or should list) all the goods and services the funeral home offers, along with the price of each. Like a menu in a restaurant, the GPL allows the customer to select only those items he wants, and tells him how much each will cost.” (**How to Read a General Price List**, wwwFunerals.org, 2003)

Every two years the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts does a survey of the Funeral Homes in the four counties we serve – Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire. We request a copy of the General Price List from each funeral home, then compile the data, and publish the results on our website. Our most recent survey was 2008.

We plan to have the price list survey mailed out in April and the finished survey by the Annual Meeting in October. **Volunteers needed!**

Some of the Price Survey tasks are:

1. Updating the mailing list (I have an electronic copy of the list of funeral homes)
2. Preparing the mailing documents
3. Follow-up
4. Compiling the data
5. Analyzing data
6. Preparing the survey results for distribution.

Join us on **Sunday, April 18, 2010, 1-3pm** for a work bee (in Rockridge Retirement Community, Recreation Room). Please contact me if you are interested in helping: [Pillsbu@comcast.net](mailto:Pillsbu@comcast.net) or 413-863-4634. Let me know which area you would like to work.

*-- Joan Pillsbury, point person for the 2010 Price List Survey Task Force*



### **Green Cemetery Projects Continue**

Work continues on a possible green cemetery site in eastern Massachusetts (Essex County). A feasibility study is underway. Closer to home, the Green Burial Committee has begun a series of house parties to solidify interest in and actions toward establishing a green cemetery in Western Massachusetts. For more information on the next house party, or to host one at your own home (we'd love it!), please contact Carol Coan at 413.774.2320 or [cncoan@verizon.net](mailto:cncoan@verizon.net).

For more about what “green” burial is and how it works, send a business-sized SASE to P.O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302, for a copy of our brochure, “**Green’ Burial in Western Massachusetts: Questions and Answers.**”

FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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

(413) 774-2320

<http://www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org>

Address Service Requested

\* \* \* \* \*

**Save the date Sunday October 24 for the 2010 Annual Meeting/Program**

Details of the Program, time and location will be in the Fall newsletter, and will be posted on our website:

**[www.funeralconsumerswmass.org/](http://www.funeralconsumerswmass.org/)**

**President's Report**

The Fall 2009 Annual Meeting, “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Home Funerals but Didn’t Know Whom to Ask”, was well attended and sparked a lively discussion. *(See Carol Coan's report on page 1.)* We all learned much from the three panelists as they shared experiences with home funerals: body preparation, involvement of sometimes-skeptical family members, and their reflections on the results. Each woman had to overcome some barriers and solve problems on her own. None of them had previously known of the Funeral Consumers Alliance. There's a lesson here; we should be more proactive in getting the word out about the useful information we can provide. For instance, straightforward answers about whether embalming is required (no, it is not) would be helpful and reassuring to people considering the home funeral option.

I am eager to promote the work of this organization. In the past four months, since assuming the role of President, I have talked with many people about FCAWM and why I'm involved. I'm delighted at the positive responses. I've become more familiar with our national organization, **Funeral Consumers Alliance**, and look forward to attending the FCA Conference in June. We are very fortunate to have such a pro-active national group that lobbies for improved legislation, writes articles for the national press, and keeps us informed via website ([funerals.org](http://funerals.org)), an email discussion list about deathcare options, and a series of well-written brochures easily downloadable from the FCA website. This saves us much work at the local level!

I hope YOU will decide to attend our meetings and become active. Join us on **Sunday April 18, 1-3pm (Rockridge Retirement Community, 25 Coles Meadow Road, Northampton)** as we work together on the 2010 Price Survey. Please also talk with your friends and family about the benefits of thinking ahead and learning about end-of-life choices. It's good to know that you can plan for what YOU want, and help your family avoid traumatic (and costly) last-minute decision-making. I like the peace of mind that comes from knowing my basic information and planning is stored safely (in FCA planning kit) for those who will need it when the times comes. That leaves me free from worry, free to enjoy life in the present. -- **Sandy Ward**