



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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

Newsletter

Spring 2023

Human Composting Gaining Support

On May 6, 2023, the FCA of Greater Rochester hosted a program on the topic of Natural Organic Reduction (a.k.a. NOR, N.O.R, or human composting). The speakers were Seth Vidal from Colorado, founder of **Natural Funeral**, and Micah Truman, CEO of **Return Home**, a Seattle-based company. Great progress has been made in a short time, reports Sandy Ward, who observed this event via Zoom.

These companies are up and running, offering human composting. They are having success helping families bury loved ones in organic materials, creating healthy soil. During the Zoom program they presented photos and videos of the processes used, and shared comments from the people involved. Families have expressed heart-felt thanks for ways they could be involved; some add flowers or notes into the composting vessel, some make repeat visits to sit nearby and say goodbyes; many appreciated obtaining the resulting soil, or taking a portion while donating the rest to help a forest grow.

There's a spirit of collaboration among these company leaders. "It's been fun to learn of the operators and their techniques," said Seth. He admires Micah's methods and welcomes him. "Together we make it NORmal!" NOR is a common abbreviation for Natural Organic Reduction, which can also be called NR, human composting, or body composting.



Seth reported that 150 people attended a Body Composting Conference in Denver held March 15-17, 2023; others participated remotely from Europe, South America, and elsewhere. A recurring theme was how quickly this composting idea is catching on and spreading.

This is "the hottest topic in the consumer realm," declared Seth. Although his funeral home offers a "wide lane" of options, including conventional burials, private property burials, cremation, alkaline hydrolysis, and natural organic reduction. "NOR is what we get asked about the most!" His company has already done about 75 funerals involving NOR. Micah commented, "Our industry is incredibly fast-growing!"

Composting is centuries old. "The process was invented by nature."

For human composting, credit is given to Katrina Spade, founder of **Recompose** and a pioneer developer. She spent years researching, fundraising, and lobbying for legalizing the composting of humans. Her home state of Washington, in 2019, was the first to approve necessary legislation. Oregon, California, and Colorado soon followed. New York voted for it this spring. Will Massachusetts follow?

Read Sandy Ward's article on monitoring Massachusetts legislation (page 5).

Save this date for our next Annual Meeting & Program:

Sunday, October 22, 2023, 2-4 pm

Come hear the latest news about changes that are underway, or pending, in several arenas:

- FTC's decisions about online posting of General Price Lists
- MA bills to legalize new options in death care
- Pilot program in MA re indigent burials (under Office of the Chief Medical Examiner); implications for future
- National FCA's move to "virtual"

Come tell us what YOU think needs fixing or changing; what issues should we tackle next?

Come for DOOR PRIZES!

Refreshments!

We'll announce more details (location!) in our Fall newsletter and on our website. We're aiming for a venue in or near Northampton.

We welcome YOUR requests for speakers or topics you'd like to hear in future meetings.



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Editors this issue: Cecile Richard and 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.

Re-supply of "Before I Go..." Planners: English and Spanish

Do you need a new copy of the handy "Before I Go, You Should Know" planning booklet?

We are well-stocked now, thanks to a visit to the national FCA office in April. We have a good supply of the current 30-page version in English or Spanish, and some of the older, smaller blue ones (English). All versions have illustrations by artist Edward Gorey.

If years have passed since you filled out your copy, now's a good time to review what you wrote and make any needed updates. If your copy is lost, or worn-out, perhaps you'd like a replacement? We can send you one. We would appreciate, but don't require, a donation of about \$15 to cover our cost for the planner and mailing.

If you'd prefer a digital version, you can purchase (\$9.95) and download the file (English or Spanish) from the national Funeral Consumers Alliance website: www.funerals.org/bookstore/



Seeking Volunteers

We have **openings on our nonprofit Board of Trustees**, which typically meets (via Zoom) once a month. We welcome people with perspectives from different cultures and experiences.

We also welcome **volunteers for short-term projects**. Examples: writing an article for our newsletter or a letter to the editor of a local newspaper; creating a flyer; editing a brochure or webpage; gathering information on a topic; or assisting at an information fair.

Please contact us at fcawmass@gmail.com or 413-376-4747 (a voice message service available 24/7), or join us via the membership form on our website or in our brochure, and indicate the ways you'd like to volunteer. We look forward to hearing from you. THANK YOU!



Summary of 2022 Annual Meeting and Program

On Sunday October 16, 2022 we held a hybrid meeting: in person at the Meadows Lodge AF & AM in East Longmeadow, and virtual via Zoom. President Cecile Richard reviewed accomplishments of the year; Treasurer Joan Pillsbury reported a balance of \$8,930 in the FCAWM bank account as our fiscal year closed August 31. Expenses of \$3,693 exceeded our income of \$2,955 that year.

Two new Trustees were elected: Tom LaValley for a 3-year term; Annamarie Mason LeClerc for 1 year. The following officers were re-elected for the 2022-23 term: Cecile Richard, President; Jim Couchon, Vice-President; Joan Pillsbury, Treasurer; and Kate Mason, Secretary.

Following this business meeting, we presented an educational program of heart-felt stories:

“Stories of Death Care with Love, Vision, and Surprises”

Joan Pillsbury, a retired nurse and FCAWM board member, spoke about death care and green burial for her husband, Dennis Pillsbury. “Dennis chose green burial. Our family chose to care for him at home and transport him to Cedar Brook Burial Ground in Limington, Maine. We lovingly cared for him using the guideline from the website Peaceful Passage at Home <https://peacefulpassageathome.com/> Our family was surprised at how this experience of participating in the death care for our loved one helped our grieving process.”

Kate Mason, a retired hospice nurse with 13 years of loving and interesting experiences in the Boston area before she moved to Greenfield and joined our FCAWM Board in 2018. She shared these four unique and memorable experiences from her hospice days; the names have been changed.

- Mary had accepted her daughter’s Jewish traditions for end of life and death care. Her death occurred at the beginning of Sabbath so there would be no notifications until the end of Sabbath. It might have been problematic if Mary had not agreed to respect her daughter’s Jewish teachings.
- Edith was surrounded by her adult children when she died unexpectedly. They realized no one knew of her plans for after death care. After being presented with multiple options, they chose a do-it-yourself burial. They rallied to secure a shroud, permits, and a van to transport the body. They brought her to Maine for a green burial. This was the first spontaneous Do-It-Yourself funeral I witnessed.
- Rebecca – Responding to a call in the wee hours of the night to make the death pronouncement, I found the small shrouded body in a darkened room on the floor with candles at her head and feet. The apartment was full of somber adults and children, dressed in black preparing to caravan the body to Brooklyn for the funeral later that day as was the tradition for Orthodox Jews.
- Andrew – I had been trained to encourage families of the deceased to stay in a backroom while the body was wheeled out in a zippered bag. In this particular case, the family asked that the funeral home attendants NOT zipper the bag and the whole family escorted their dad to the hearse. What an honorable finish!

Cecile Richard, FCAWM President, has been involved with FCAWM since October 2015. “I had the privilege of providing end of life care to two family members in 2021.” For her full story, titled “Two Deaths and Six Lessons Learned,” see pages 4-5 of our Spring 2022 newsletter, available on our website.

Dina Stander, an End-of-life Navigator, funeral celebrant, and burial shroud maker, shared some of her experiences is working with families. She spoke of a special man who was supported through several stages as he prepared for death. She knows that shrouds made from a favorite quilt, table cloth, or other family heirloom can add special meaning. Visit www.dinastander.com for more about Dina’s work.



Introducing a New Board Member

Annamarie “Marie” Mason Leclerc was elected to the Board of Trustees in October 2022. Marie is a social worker, mother, grandmother and soon-to-be great-grandmother who became interested in the Funeral Consumers Alliance after attending several annual board meetings in support of someone she greatly admires. She found the program topics both fascinating and eye-opening. As a social worker, she interacts with people and families who have no knowledge of the options available, especially when they are financially challenged. Marie sees this volunteer role as a means of not only learning for herself but also for educating and informing consumers with whom she interacts. She is interested in learning more about ways to leave this planet a better place.

We welcome Marie!



Archiving our History

Aaron Rubinstein, Head, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass-Amherst, welcomed our donation of old FCAWM paper files (photo, left) in summer 2021.

His staff have by now transferred the contents into acid-free containers for better long-term preservation, inventoried the contents, and created a catalog record to help future researchers.

An online Finding Aid was published on May 4, 2023:

<http://findingaids.library.umass.edu/ead/mums1133>

The public may request specific items, which staff could scan to a pdf to send via mail or email, or could bring for in-person viewing to the Reading Room in the Robert S. Cox Special Collections & University Archives Research Center, which is located on the 25th floor of the W. E. B. Du Bois Library. For visiting hours and more information, see <http://scua.library.umass.edu/outreach/visits-tours/>.



Archivist Jeremy Smith invited Sandy Ward, FCAWM board member (and retired librarian), to view the collection this spring in the locked stacks, where it now resides.

Ten archival boxes contain FCAWM's historic files (1959-2020).

We thank former president Carol Coan, who for years had stored files from her predecessors, and added her



own. She passed those boxes to Sandy Ward, who took some time during the pandemic years to examine and learn from the contents. We thank Eva Moseley for suggesting that UMass archivists would welcome our files; they had recently accepted Green Burial MA files offered by Eva, a board member of GBM and a retired archivist.



Monitoring Massachusetts Legislation of Interest to Funeral Consumers

By Sandy Ward

A joint effort by teams from FCAWM and FCAEM is now underway to review proposed bills and consider what we might advocate for, or against, in this session of the Massachusetts legislature (2023-2024).

We are particularly interested in supporting the bills to legalize Natural Organic Reduction (N.O.R., human composting) and Alkaline Hydrolysis (water cremation), two environmentally-friendly options:

- H.2193 An Act expanding after-death care options, filed by Rep. Natalie Higgins and Rep. Jack Lewis
- S.1339 An Act expanding after-death care options, filed by Senator Cynthia Creem

Representatives Higgins and Lewis met with us May 26, 2023, on Zoom to discuss these bills and strategies for helping to move the bills forward towards passage. The priority right now is to add **co-sponsors** to these bills.

How to help: You can look on malegislature.gov to see the status of the bills and view (via Print Preview or PDF) the names of legislators who have already signed on as co-sponsors. If YOUR local representatives have not yet signed on as co-sponsors, perhaps you could be the one to persuade them to do so.

The Joint Committee on Public Health, to which these bills have been assigned, will likely schedule a hearing (this summer? or fall?) to gather public comments, which could be given in person (2- or 3-minute time limit) or submitted in writing. Tip: Written comments may be of any length, and could be prepared well in advance. Since we may not have much advance notice of the hearing date/time, it would be wise to be prepared ahead, ready on short notice.

For more about human composting, see page 1 of this newsletter, and visit Sandy's Blog on our website: <https://funeralconsumerswmass.org/category/sandys-blog/>

Other pending bills of possible interest:

Using keywords such as "funeral" or "burial" in the Search box on malegislature.gov, we generated a list of newly-filed bills mentioning those words. Volunteers then examined the bills and pruned the list down to ones that seemed relevant to consumer rights and options. Below is a short list of bills we selected for scrutiny. If you'd like to help this work in progress, please email us at fcawmass@gmail.com or contact Sandy, 413-250-8079 (voice or text). Thank you!

- H. 139 An Act relative to funeral assistance, filed by Rep. Tackey Chan (to increase DTA's allowable subsidy from \$1,100 to \$3,500, for funeral costs up to a cap of \$5,000)
- S. 989 An Act Establishing the Right of Disposition, filed by Senator Anne Gobi
- H. 1470 An Act Designating the Right of Disposition, filed by Rep. Daniel Donohue
- H. 2206 An Act to permit the scattering of unclaimed cremated remains at sea, filed by Rep. Patrick Kearney
- H. 275 An Act relative to funeral directors*, filed by Rep. Tackey Chan
- H. 328 An Act relative to funeral homes and charitable organizations*, filed by Rep. Steven Howitt

* The last two are assigned to the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure.



Outreach and Educational Presentations by FCAWM Volunteers

Sharing information with the public is an important part of our mission. We enjoy speaking to groups, and are pleased to be invited.

Here is a list of the public outreach we have done, in person with groups, in the months since our last newsletter report:

- Longmeadow Public Library, September 27, 2022 – Jim
- Holyoke Council on Aging, October 13 – Sandy
- Adult Foster Care, Springfield, October 26 – Cecile and Joan
- City of Holyoke, group of employees, November 9 – Sandy
- Ludlow Council on Aging “Lunch & Learn” January 25, 2023 – Sandy
- Hadley Council on Aging “Lunch & Learn” February 22 – Sandy
- Orchard View Apartments, Easthampton, May 16 – Cecile and Sandy
- Williamstown Council on Aging, May 23 – Sandy

We continue to do outreach each year during the Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) Fall Conference. We collaborate with FCA of Eastern Massachusetts to reserve and staff a table for two days in the Exhibit Hall. This is fun and fruitful, giving us the opportunity to reach hundreds of Senior Center directors and staff. Sandy Ward (FCAWM) and Patti Muldoon (FCAEM) staffed the table October 19-20, 2022 (Falmouth, MA) and plan to do so again in Danvers, MA, October 11-12, 2023.

Upcoming presentations:

- *Caskets, Coffins, and Shrouds, Oh My!* June 1, 2023. Sandy Ward will do a 20-minute slide show as part of the monthly Nerd Night Holyoke (7-9 pm) in the Divine Theater, Gateway City Arts, 92 Race Street, Holyoke, MA.
- *Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die!* July 11, 2023, 10 -11 am at the Holyoke Senior Center, 291 Pine Street, Holyoke. Public welcome.

Please let us know if YOU would like to invite us to speak to a group in your neighborhood or in an organization of your choice. Thank you!

For examples of possible topics we could cover, and a sample video from one presentation, visit the **Speaker for Your Group** page (under About Us) on our website. Here's the direct link to that page: https://funeralconsumerswmass.org/speaker_for_your_group.



Please make checks payable to **FCAWM** and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302-0994.
Or donate ONLINE by credit card or e-check: funeralconsumerswmass.org/donate/

Contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501(c)(3) 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 ___\$30 ___\$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: _____

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

✂----- *cut here* -----

YOUR donations are important, enabling us to be here helping people in need:

- A couple with questions about planning their funeral services requested information about prices for cremation, and how to decide on a funeral home.
- A woman helping a family with an unexpected death looked for guidance on what to do. She found our website and used the price chart and directory of funeral homes. We advised her also to review the "When Death Occurs" page, to look for things that have not been addressed.
- A person sought advice about questions to ask when seeking a pre-payment insurance plan for direct cremation for someone who may need assets set aside for Medicaid.
- A woman inquired about the possibility of arranging direct cremation without hiring a funeral home. Yes, it is possible, with preparation. She was advised of the steps involved with death certificate, the Electronic Death Registry System, permitting for transportation, with mention of the alternative container and the need for medical examiner. She consulted our Price Comparison Chart and was surprised to learn of the wide range of prices charged by funeral homes for direct cremation.
- A man inquired what is needed to arrange a green burial for his mother on Martha's Vineyard.
- A man asked questions about how to accomplish a burial in a family cemetery. He wanted to know who should confirm the death, what is needed to move the body to his home, what is needed to transport the body to the family cemetery, and whether the body can be transported in a casket.

This is just a sample of inquiries that we have handled in recent months.

Thank you for supporting this important work!



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NOTE: Please notify us if you change your address, wish to unsubscribe, or wish to change your preference (electronic vs. print) for our newsletters (2 per year). Call 413-376-4747 or email fcawmass@gmail.com. THANK YOU!