



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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

NEWSLETTER

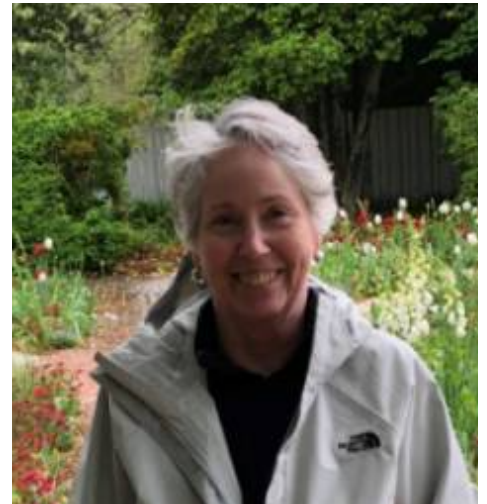
SPRING 2025

Reclaiming Privileges of Home Deathcare

Lee Webster, noted researcher, author, educator, long time hospice volunteer and home funeral guide, spoke at the FCAWM annual meeting in October 2024. Lee's talk, titled "You Can Do This: Family-Led Funerals," addressed the practical aspects of reclaiming and exercising our rights around traditional home death care which was long practiced prior to the ascendance of the funeral industry. You may access the video recording here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/clips/share/6BilpBfkTGuumZMzgjeZDg>

This 90-minute recording includes Q & A with the audience at the end. Pardon our amateur effort at capturing the live program. We realize that the camera position could have been better, and we should have selected "Audio Transcript" in our Zoom settings rather than have a volunteer typing notes in the chat. (For business meeting report, see page 4.)



FCAWM Board Welcomes Pamela Shad

The board of the FCAWM is proud to announce the latest addition to the Board of Trustees, Pamela Shad. Pamela has worked in the healthcare and deathcare fields for most of her life. She became a certified death doula recently after retiring from 20 years as a hospice social worker. In addition, she has chaplaincy training and worked as a chaplain intern at Beth Israel Hospital in NYC. She volunteered for many years with the National



Pamela Shad was elected as a FCAWM Board member at the Fall 2024 Annual Meeting.

Buddhist Prison Sangha and at Woodbourne Correctional Facility, as well as the Astor Nursing Home and the People's Food Pantry, and she cooked for the Putnam CAP soup kitchen. Currently, Pamela is on the Human Rights Committee at Berkshire Meadows and is a student at Zen Mountain Monastery, where she served on the Board of Directors for 8 years and now facilitates a caregivers support group, a quarterly Death Café, and helps to coordinate a network of volunteers who assist community members who are facing illness.

Recent Outreach Events

Your volunteers at the FCAWM have been very active these past several months increasing awareness of consumer rights and options when selecting meaningful, dignified and affordable final arrangements. We held many talks and Q & A sessions throughout our service area in all the counties of Western Mass. Some included the Sixteen Acres Golden Agers and Civic Associations, Health and Safety fairs in Holyoke and Northampton, talks at Councils on Aging in Adams, Ludlow, and Williamstown, to name only a few. We also provided a panelist at a Greenfield Public library event.



service to request further information.

Additionally, we have attended various volunteer matching events in Greenfield and Springfield seeking new volunteers and trustees. At these events we spoke with many community-minded people about FCAWM's mission spreading awareness about resources available on our web site, our phone line and email



And we're not done! In the near future we will also staff a table at the South Hadley Council on Aging "Aging in Place" on June 25th (10am - 2pm). On July 8th we will speak at the West Springfield Library (5:30 - 6:30pm) on "Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die." Open to all!

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Editors this issue: J. Couchon, S. Ward
P. Shad, A. Tinari, C. Coan

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.

Save the Date!

On Sunday, October 5, 2025, 2:00-4:00pm, our Annual Meeting & Program will be held at Rockridge Retirement Community, 25-37 Coles Meadow Road, Northampton, Mass.

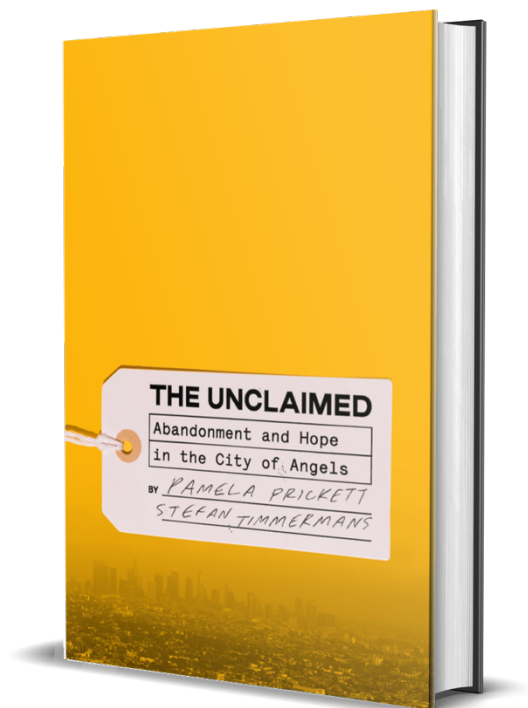
Guest Speaker Dina Stander, noted local celebrant and coach, End-of-Life Navigator, poet, and shroud maker, will speak on the topic of "How to Start the Conversation" for planning final arrangements. We hope to see you there to learn tactics on how to address this topic from this engaging speaker's informational talk.

“The Cost of Goodbye: Confronting Funeral Poverty in Our Communities”

A conference for FCA affiliates, June 26-29, 2025

Two representatives from FCAWM (Jim Couchon and Sandy Ward) will be attending this in-person conference in Cary, NC. We will report on it in the next newsletter.

The keynote speaker will be Pamela Prickett, co-author of *The Unclaimed: Abandonment and Hope in the City of Angels*. Her work delves into the lives of those left behind by traditional systems of support, offering insights that resonate deeply with our mission. If you are interested in this book, you could borrow a copy from a library. (There are 25 copies in our local CW MARS system.)



Other confirmed speakers include Joyal Mulheron (Evermore), Victoria Haneman (University of Georgia School of Law), Mel Bennett (Life Forest Cemetery), Sarah Chavez (The Order of the Good Death), Liz

Dunnebacke (WAKE), Isabel Knight (National Home Funeral Alliance), Sara Williams (FCA), Dianna Repp (FCA), Miranda Panther (NAGPRA Officer, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), and Charlotte Seto (Handled Milestones).

This topic is of concern to us. In November 2020, FCAWM co-hosted a forum titled “Raising the Alarm about Bodies in Limbo.” We continue to educate ourselves about how Massachusetts is handling this issue, and to advocate for affordable and dignified disposition options for all.

On March 14, 2025, we received an inquiry from a student in the Boston University Statehouse Program that read: “I’m currently reporting on a story exploring why an increasing number of bodies are being left in morgues for extended periods – either because families cannot afford funeral costs, or because the bodies remain unclaimed. This issue is leaving many without dignified burials.”

Sandy Ward shared with this student resources from our earlier forum, questions we continue to ask, and information we’ve learned since. In the process, Sandy updated the “follow-up” portion of our state-wide report of the 2020 forum, which you can view at this address:

<https://funeralsma.org/bodies-in-limbo>

(Look for the tabs along the top of that page, and select Follow-Up to see the newer information.)

October 2024 Annual Meeting Report

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts held its annual business meeting and public presentation at the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence on October 20, 2024. The hybrid online and in-person event was called to order at 2:10pm. President Sandy Ward updated the assembled group on the accomplishments of the Board over the prior year which included the completion of the 2024 Price Study, twenty speaking events at Council on Aging centers and Health Fairs, attendance at many workshops and webinars on topics such as FTC Funeral Rule, After-Death Care and Climate, the Wake Forest Law Review Symposium “The Future of Death Care in America,” a successful Indigent Burial Program in Kentucky, and a Death Care Superconference. In addition, Sandy sat in on the meetings of the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Embalming and Funeral Directing to stay in-the-know about industry trends and changes.



Sandy reminded FCAWM’s members that the organization answers public inquiries that come via email and phone, produces two newsletters a year, and regularly reviews its handouts and website content so that the information is up-to-date. This year, the Board revised the organization’s bylaws.

Sandy gave special thanks to the FCAWM’s long-serving Treasurer, Joan Pillsbury, when introducing her to give the Treasurer’s report. The Treasurer’s report emphasized that we are an organization that relies on public contributions from our members. In addition, this year we were very fortunate to have received grants from PeoplesBank and from the UMass Chan Medical School which helped underwrite our newsletter publication and mailings.

We elected a slate of Trustees to serve for various term lengths to assure continuity of the organization. Elected as officers for the coming year were: Jim Couchon, President; Sandy Ward, Vice President; Joan Pillsbury, Treasurer; and Alex Tinari, Secretary.

Changes to our bylaws were approved by the voting members present before the business portion of the meeting adjourned at 2:30pm. Thank you to all our members who attended this meeting in person and online, and who continue to support the educational work of FCAWM.

We thank our guest speaker Lee Webster for presenting an excellent educational program after a brief break for refreshments and door prizes. If you missed her talk, you are invited to view our video recording; see page 1 for more information about Lee and her program, with a link to the recording.

‘When the Saints’: Finding beauty in a personalized celebration of life

By Joan Axelrod-Contrada

Originally published in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*
4/18/25 online; 4/19/25 print
Reprinted with permission.

Louis Armstrong knew how to turn a slow and solemn hymn into a toe-tapping, heart-thumping anthem. He infused “When the Saints Go Marching In” with an undeniable swing that had crowds swaying to the rhythm. It’s like he took out his trumpet and said, “Let’s show everyone how we do things in New Orleans.”

New Orleans gave birth to the jazz funeral, a procession that starts out slow but then picks up its pace. On the way back from the cemetery, the brass band cuts loose. Onlookers hop in, waving handkerchiefs and parasols, and dance down the street in what’s known as the second line.

Because my late husband, Fred, loved the Crescent City, we gave him a New Orleans-style parade for his memorial in 2018, complete with a procession led by the Expandable Brass Band, from the Forbes Library to the Hotel Northampton. My Renaissance man of a husband – a mountain-climbing, karate-kicking fiction writer and journalist – was the kind of guy who deserved to have traffic stopped in his honor.

While the idea of planning a memorial for a loved one might sound as appealing as getting a root canal, I can vouch for it as time well spent. The best part? It brought back the old, healthy Fred from the dead and let me share him with the community.

As a baby boomer, I grew up with funerals so stiff and somber they felt like the equivalent of a corpse. Fortunately, they’ve come a long way since then. The grim, one-size-fits all ceremonies of yesteryear have increasingly given way to the more upbeat and personalized celebrations of life.

Still, maybe you’d rather do anything but plan a memorial. Let’s face it: Losing someone you love is hard enough, but organizing an event without the guest of honor can feel like hosting a magic show without the magician. At some point, though, it might be up to you to give that special someone the sendoff they deserve – one that truly reflects their personality.

Granted, fresh grief can make you want to curl up in a fetal ball rather than deal with anything outside your own muddled headspace. Believe me, I know. But here’s where time and a support system can work wonders. I didn’t schedule our memorial for Fred until after my own private mope-fest.

Everyone puts their own spin on a memorial, and, for my kids and me, music played a huge role. Fred and I had grooved to the Expandable Brass Band at events around town, and their spirit – self-described as “loud, raucous, and full of fun” – brought back memories of New Orleans, with its Bourbon Street and gumbo.

Like a rich and smoky gumbo, the city’s brass bands combine a variety of flavors – jazz, blues, funk, and soul – to create their own trademark sound. The brass instruments provide the bold, rich meat while the drums are like the roux, forming the foundation and rhythm that brings everything together.

Of course, New Orleans jazz is just one of myriad possibilities for a memorable event. The beauty of modern memorials? Their custom-ability. Gone are the days of having to stick to funeral homes or houses of worship. Gone, too: Those old sad cucumber sandwiches and bland hors d’oeuvres. Ditto for those formal eulogies. These days, participants can pass around a mic, telling stories about what made someone a legend in their own time. Organizers can book a public park, library, or civic center – perhaps even treat guests to tacos or burritos.

Granted, the idea of turning a funeral into a fiesta might feel a bit off – like wearing jeans to a wedding. No one’s saying you can’t hold on to old traditions. Also, a small, quiet gathering might work best for those who lived their lives that way. People are as unique as snowflakes. And, when all your effort captures the essence of that special someone? Well, that’s the ultimate tribute.

No one knew better than Satchmo how to blend the old with the new. Of course, some naysayers found his version of the traditional hymn “irreverent.” But here’s the kicker: It’s the one that’s stood the test of time. So, the next time you hear “When the Saints Go Marching In,” feel free to do a little second-line around your kitchen. The man with the horn and gravelly voice proved that, even in death, there’s room for a little jazz. And if that’s not heavenly intervention, I don’t know what is.

FAQs

by Pamela Shad

Q: How do I make sure my wishes for my after-death care are followed?

A: So, you've researched your options for funeral arrangements, decided how you would like your body to be prepared or donated, how you would like your remains to be taken care of, and made sure there is enough money for all of this (for help with all of this there are numerous checklists to be found online—or refer to our website, FuneralConsumersWMass.org). Maybe you have even picked out the music you would like to have played and the outfit you might wear. But how can you be sure any of these wishes will be followed?

One of the common phone calls we receive is from partners of the deceased who are suddenly at odds with the relatives of their loved one; or the deceased person's wishes are unclear and family members disagree on how to proceed. Sometimes this happens when a person's parents or children have been estranged or disapprove of the decedent's lifestyle. There are instances of LGBTQ+ partners not being acknowledged, decedents being dressed in improper clothes, or sometimes religious beliefs and practices that aren't approved of. At times, even with the best of relationships, grief-stricken family members feel that their own ideas of what a funeral should look like are the best way to honor their loved one, even when it is not what that person wanted.

The best chance of having your wishes followed is to legally designate a funeral agent. Talk to the person who you would like to carry out your wishes to make sure they understand what you want and agree to take on this role. (If you would like some help with talking to others about your death, come join us on October 5 for this fall's annual program, where our speaker will address how to begin this conversation.) In Massachusetts, [General Law Chapter 190B 3-701](#) allows you to name a "personal representative" or "executor" in your will who has the authority to carry out your wishes. However, wills are usually not read until after the funeral has taken place, so it is best to also draw up a short document (dated, signed, and witnessed or notarized) to designate your personal representative. Make sure this document agrees with any pre-need contract you may have made with a funeral home. Then give copies of the document to all relevant survivors. Without a designated agent, Massachusetts law dictates that these decisions be made by next of kin: legal spouse, children, and then parents.

A special note of thanks....

We want to thank the many members of the community and the many members of the FCAWM for their generous tax-deductible contributions over the past year. Your financial support allows us to continue to publish our twice-yearly newsletter, pay for our phone line that our volunteers monitor to answer questions from the public, support occasional advertising for our annual meeting and speakers, fund our Zoom account to host informational events and monthly meetings, and pay for our post office box. We have no paid staff and rely strictly on volunteers to promote our mission to provide unbiased information on protecting a consumer's rights when selecting dignified, meaningful and affordable final arrangements.

We encourage anyone who may be looking for an opportunity to give back to their community or to help people protect their rights to reach out to us about the many opportunities available as a volunteer with the FCAWM. We enjoy talking with other like-minded service-oriented individuals, and we invite you to join us. Email us at fcawmass@gmail.com or call us at 413-376-4747.

Donations welcome!

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.

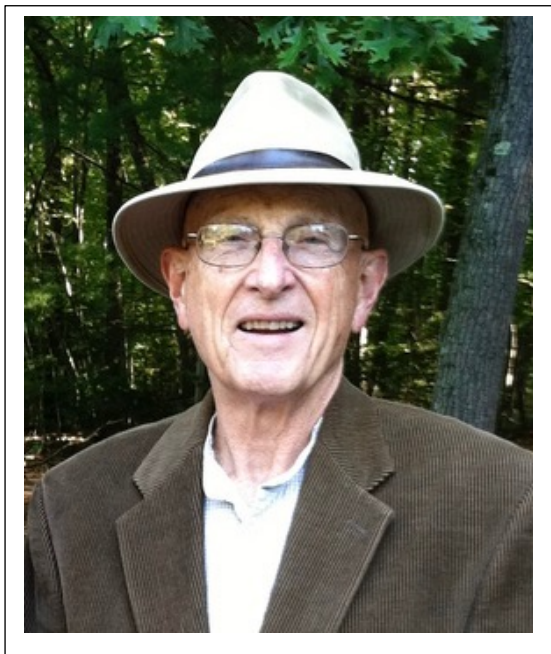
Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

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

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Remembering Doug Barnshaw, *by Sandy Ward*



H. Douglas Barnshaw, MD, died on January 25, 2025. We remember Doug fondly as a supporter of FCAWM. He joined as a member in April 1989 and later served several years on the Board of Trustees. In fall 2009, when I first volunteered for board service, he was Vice President and a key leader at a challenging time – doing extra duty in the absence of a president. He was helpful and welcoming as I was learning the ropes. Doug wrote a very good article for our Fall 2012 newsletter, sharing his experiences and lessons learned earlier that year in arranging death care, on short notice, for a loved one. "The Devil is in the Details, or the Value of Preplanning" can still be read in our newsletter archive. Reading Doug's obituary, we realize how many other adventures he had in life. He came to western Massachusetts in 1976, worked 25 years at Baystate Medical Center, then worked in community mental health and private practice until retiring in 2005.

A memorial service celebrating Doug's life will be held June 14, 2025, 10:00 – 11:00 AM at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield, 245 Porter Lake Drive, Springfield, MA.

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News in this issue:

Notice of our next Annual Meeting and Program
Sunday, October 5, 2025, 2:00-4:00 pm
Topic: How to Start the Conversation *(see page 2)*

Introducing a New Board Member *(page 1)*

Report on Lee Webster's presentation on family-led funerals *(page 1)*

The Cost of Goodbye: Confronting Funeral Poverty in Our Communities
A conference for FCA affiliates *(page 3)*

and more...

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Call 413-376-4747 or email fcawmass@gmail.com. THANK YOU!**