



In Touch

Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association

www.ba-fca.org

Annual Meeting at New Location

This year's Annual Conference will be held at

Sunday, May 21 1-4 pm
Midtown Room
Mitchel Park Library, 1st Floor
3700 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Our featured speaker will be Deborah Meckler, former BA-FCA board member and president and continuing volunteer. Her topic, "What To Do With the Body: An Environmental Perspective" will address both conventional and imaginative ways of dealing with human remains in a massively populated world, with an eye to how these death-care activities affect Earth's ecosystems and resources.

Ms. Meckler earned her BA in History from UCLA in 1971 and her BS in Natural Resources Management and Conservation from San Francisco State University in 2006. Her interest in environmental issues and her desire to apply her interest in some area of human endeavor not subject to the vicissitudes of the economy led her to consider death care, for which the need is continuous and grows with the population. She focused on green burial, which eliminates much of the energy and resources used in conventional burials.

Meckler began working with BA-FCA to familiarize herself with death care issues in general and then

with a land trust interested in making green burial more available in the Bay Area. But Meckler is hardly alone in seeking more environmentally friendly possibilities for dealing with human remains, and she will explore these varied and fascinating ideas in her talk. We hope you will join us for an enlightening afternoon.



A business meeting at 1:00 p.m. will precede the program at 1:40. The meeting will include election of new Board members, consideration of the budget, a review of 2016, and plans for 2017-18 with opportunity for audience input.

Continuing members of the Board are Roberta Bailey of Sunnyvale, Allan Behr of Half Moon Bay, Suzette Sherman of El Cerrito, and Ned Lyke of Castro Valley. Byron Chan of San Francisco is formally leaving the board after six years as treasurer, but has agreed to attend meetings and help his successor, plus continue in the Speakers Bureau for San Francisco on behalf of BA-FCA. (Continues on page 3)

Alkaline Hydrolysis in CA—Trying Again

Although thirteen states now allow alkaline hydrolysis (AH) for human remains, the process is not yet legal in California, though the effort is working its way through the legislature for the third time as AB 967 (Gloria). On previous attempts the effort has failed in committee with questions about what it is and how it can be regulated (see our previous stories about this in the Fall 2010 and Fall 2013 issues of *InTouch*, available at www.ba-fca.org/AboutPublications.html.)

The BA-FCA Board of Directors decided on April 10 to support the bill with letters of support.

The AH process has long been used to deal with

animal carcasses and in some cases for donated bodies at the end of their utility for research purposes.

The modern AH process, which requires less energy than cremation and unlike cremation, produces no direct air pollution, uses a high pH solution to dissolve and sterilize biological matter, leaving softened bone much as cremation leaves "ashes." The remaining liquid can go down the drain after the pH has been neutralized. The effluent from the process is described as excellent nutrition for the working bacteria that clean up waste water.

To further lower the environmental impact of the process, provisions in the bill also allow for the effluent to be "transported by a state-licensed biomaterials handler to an anaerobic water treatment facility where the hydrolysate will be utilized for the cogeneration of bioenergy." Check on the status of the legislation at leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/.

We could certainly slow down the aging process if it had to work its way through Congress
~ Will Rogers ~

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SPRING 2017 Issue

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Welcome

to

Redwood Funeral Society

members who are receiving this newsletter for the first time. See the back page for details on transferring.

MEMBERS: Update your Info

Do you have a new address? A new phone number? Have you given us your next-of-kin information? Your date of birth? Have you decided or changed your mind about the mortuary you want to use? WE NEED TO KNOW! And we especially need a good email address for you. Send an email to office@ba-fca.org with your updated info. Or go online to www.ba-fca.org/MemUpdateForm.html. Or use your remit envelope or call us or send the info via US Mail. We accept all forms of communication!

Vatican Issues New Rules for Ashes

Cremations for Catholics have been allowed since 1963 as long as it was “not done for reasons at odds with Christian doctrine” but the Church continues to strenuously recommend body burial so that souls can reunite with their resurrected bodies at the End of Days. Currently 45% of Catholics in California request cremation, and due to equally strong demand by Catholics everywhere, in large part because of the cost, land use, and environmental issues of conventional body burial, the Vatican has responded to what it calls “the unstoppable demand” for cremations by setting firm guidelines for what to do with the ashes. These guidelines were released late last year, just before All Souls Day.

The decedent’s ashes must be kept together, the rules say, not divided among family members, and certainly not scattered, which shows a lack of respect. The document explains that the Church cannot “condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the person, or the moment of fusing with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a state in the cycle of regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the ‘prison’ of the body.”

The ashes may not be kept in an urn on the mantelpiece or in the closet or made into jewelry but must be kept in a “sacred place” such as a niche in a columbarium or buried in consecrated ground so that the whole Christian community can visit, pray for, and remember the dead, while also venerating martyrs and saints. If the deceased requests the scattering of ashes and this is done, then a Christian funeral must be denied.

In the United States, the choice of cremation among people of all religions, or none, is growing quickly, up over 40% now versus 20% a mere 15 years ago. Sixty percent of people in California request cremation and the rate is over 70% in Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Vermont, according to a 2015 survey.

California has few rules regarding the handling of ashes. Scattering may be done on any private property with the consent of the owner, and may often be done with a permit on public property, such as parks, wilderness areas, and at sea.

FTC Conducts Inspections

Federal Trade Commission investigators working undercover in nine states found failures to disclose pricing information to consumers, as required by the FTC’s Funeral Rule, in 31 of the 133 funeral homes they visited during 2015 and 2016

Key provisions of the Funeral Rule require funeral homes to provide consumers with an itemized general price list at the start of an in-person discussion of funeral arrangements, a casket price list before consumers view any caskets, and an outer burial container price list before they view grave liners or vaults. The Rule also prohibits funeral homes from requiring consumers to buy any item, such as a casket, as a condition of obtaining any other funeral good or service.

Funeral homes in violation of the rule for the first time can enter the Funeral Rule Offender’s Program (FROP), a training program designed to increase compliance with the Rule. All funeral homes found in violation during the past two years have chosen to enter the FROP rather than face lawsuits seeking civil penalties up to \$40,654 per violation.

You will be happy to learn that none of the 10 funeral homes inspected in California were found to be in violation.

Advisory Council

Your Bay Area FCA Board needs the assistance of experts occasionally, and these kind appointees below are helping us occasionally as members of the Advisory Council. The board extends a thanks to all for past and future service.

Carolyn Bechthold	Financial
Marjorie Bridges	Mortuaries, speaking
Janet Fire	Publications
Lou Gado	Past President
Jane Hillhouse	Caskets, natural burial
Allan Hutty	Cemeteries
Thomas R. Leroux	Attorney
Robert Marder	Attorney
Deborah Meckler	Webmaster, editor, environment
Ray Sowards	Attorney
Mike Turbow, M.D.	Health
Jack Wallace	Psychology
Anh Weber	Psychology

The Board of Directors and office manager can’t do it all! Please lend a hand to keep our services available.

No volunteers = no BA-FCA

What’s your line? Call Margie Bridges for more information, 650-325-2000.

IN TOUCH is issued twice a year from the offices of Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association, 463 College Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306



Tributes

With thanks to these donors

Each year our organization receives gifts made to honor respected individuals or in memory of loved ones who are missed. Below are the financial tributes we have acknowledged since the last newsletter:

In Memory of:

Carolyn Ow, from Jeffrey Ow
Cecil E. Duncan, from Adrienne Duncan
Dave and Margaret Botsford, from Peter Botsford
Edwin Lee Hukill, from Merry Hukill
Jean Chamberlin, from Ted Chamberlin
Margy Staley, from Sue Staley
Paul Garrett, from Jean Garrett
Ruth Vurek, from Gerald Vurek
Wheaton Smith, from Marjorie Smith

2017 Budget

	2016 Actuals	2017 Proposed
INCOME		
Donations	14600	14600
Memberships	6500	6500
Before I Go Kits	750	750
TOTAL INCOME	21850	21850
EXPENSE		
California FCA Dues	75	75
National FCA Dues	1338	1400
Facilities and Equipment (rent, insurance)	3119	3200
Before I Go Kits	200	200
Postage & mailing (permit, box, stamps, etc)	904	1000
Printing & copying (newsletter, brochures)	6054	6100
Supplies (paper, pens, office needs)	401	500
Telecom (phone, internet, website, remote access)	1414	1500
Worker's compensation insurance	500	600
Payroll (wages, state & federal taxes & fees)	6756	11200
Miscellaneous	170	225
TOTAL EXPENSE	20931	26000

NOTE: The deficit is not unexpected. The Board understood the impact to the budget when it voted to increase office hours by 5 hours/week to accommodate extra work and responsibilities of the Office Manager. It is hoped that increased memberships, individual donations, and special gifts will cover this deficit, but the Board may at any time revisit spending choices.

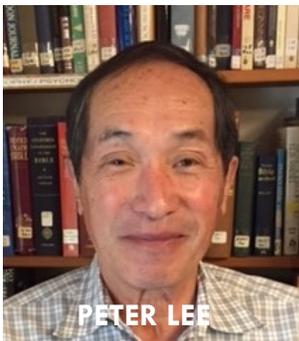
A Cautionary Tale of Online Cremation Provider

When a Colorado family contacted Heritage Cremation Provider to arrange cremation for their son, they believed the Heritage website which promised "Compassionate community service close to home" and proudly claimed it was "family-owned and operated for over two decades." But the troubles began immediately. The first invoice had a wrong spelling of the deceased's name. Subsequent "corrected" invoices also contained erroneous information about the name, as well as bogus charges for an "oversized" body though their son weighed a quite normal 165 pounds. When the family went to pick up their son's ashes, they found that Heritage was not a local company and had no office in Boulder, and that despite the word "provider" in their name, they were actually a remote middle-man that did not provide cremations at all but rather contracted out the work. Worse yet, Heritage had "lost track" of their son's body and did not recover it for over a week, casting serious doubt about whether the ashes the family finally received were even their son's ashes.

Even legal recourse against Heritage was problematic. Though there were five complaints against them in 2015 in the state of Colorado, two years later the state agency dealing with funeral complaints had still not completed the investigations so Heritage still showed as in good standing with the state, despite a D- rating from the Better Business Bureau of Southern Colorado. North Carolina filed an injunction against Heritage in 2016 for "unlicensed practice of funeral services" and Oregon fined them \$10k in 2014 for "a sales presentation or practice that conceals or misstates a material fact."

Moral of this story: Check that cremation providers that you find online have a local address. Visit them if you can. Ask them where the cremations are actually performed, and if you can watch. Usually watching is extra but be wary when if the answer is simply "no." Ask why.

Annual Meeting (cont. from p.1)



PETER LEE

Proposed nominees for three year terms on the board are Peter Lee of East Palo Alto, Robert Marinelli of Palo Alto, and Marjorie Bridges of Stanford. The nominating committee is looking for and encouraging other members to consider serving, as the Board has two more openings.

Peter is semi-retired, still works in real estate (Keller Williams Realty) and life insurance sales. He worked in high tech industries

for over 40 years as a financial manager. Born in Menlo Park, he graduated from Menlo-Atherton HS and obtained his B.S. from CSU-Hayward. His hobby is ballroom dancing.

Bob has lived in Palo Alto for over 20 years and has held management and engineering positions in high tech firms, and did Stanford post-doc research in biology. As a volunteer



BOB MARINELLI



MARGIE BRIDGES

for another non-profit, he developed assistive software relating to talking books for the blind.

Marjorie retired from careers in journalism, editing, and counseling; was educated at U. of Missouri and San Jose State, worked in the BA-FCA office 1995-2002, served previously for six years on the Board, and currently is mortuary chair and in the Speakers Bureau. Her hobby is genealogy.

Following the program, we'll have refreshments, look through brochures, and meet other members. All are welcome, the public as well as members.

NOTE: At the meeting, we will have a box to deposit your used printer ink cartridges and toners. Each brings us \$2 credit toward our next purchase of ink, toner, or stationery. We appreciate each donation!

We are sorry to hear that Greg Miller, retired site manager of Miller-Dutra Funeral Home in Half Moon Bay, died on March 2. His brother, Chris Miller, continues as location manager at the mortuary.



Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Save the Date:
Sunday, May 21
1-4 pm
Annual Conference
Mitchel Park Library, 1st Floor
3700 Middlefield Road,
Palo Alto

SMILE!

You know that you can get about anything you want through Amazon.com, but did you also know that Amazon will support your favorite non-profit every time you make a purchase? And at no extra cost to you! It is called **Amazon Smile**.

You just log in to your Amazon account through Smile.Amazon.com/ch/94-3402027, and a portion of whatever you spend will be donated to BA-FCA! We have a direct link to Amazon Smile on our homepage (www.ba-fca.org). Be sure to bookmark it! Anything you can get through Amazon.com is available through Amazon Smile. So now when you make a purchase, your money will go farther than ever!

Before I Go, You Should Know—This \$15 booklet contains useful forms (powers of attorney, advance directives, etc) and lots more! Order by emailing office@ba-fca.org or calling 650-321-2109.

News You Can Use

ATTENTION RFS MEMBERS!

If you were a member of the former Redwood Funeral Society (RFS), we are here to help! Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association (BA-FCA, www.ba-fca.org) has expanded to include the North Bay, an area formerly served by RFS. **THAT IS WHY YOU ARE GETTING THIS NEWSLETTER.** We wanted you to know that for a nominal \$25 you can transfer your RFS membership to a BA-FCA membership. You will receive all the member benefits you previously enjoyed with RFS. We have enclosed our membership brochure with information about BA-FCA, including a membership form and a return envelope. Or, you may visit our website at www.ba-fca.org to join using PayPal or a credit card. If you have relatives or friends who would also like to join, they would pay the membership fee of \$50. We have enclosed is a list of our Cooperating Mortuaries. The closest to you will probably be Fernwood Funeral Home and Cemetery in Mill Valley, but

others on the list may be able to help you as well. We have done price surveys of the other funeral homes in your county and this information is available on our website homepage. We want to do a similar survey of cemetery prices, and we will be seeking volunteers to do phoning for that. Besides discounts at funeral homes, members receive two newsletters a year, have a vote at the annual meeting held on the Peninsula, have access to numerous free brochures about funerals and end-of-life plans, and support a lot of education and advocacy on behalf of consumers. If you don't wish to join, we won't bother you with any more newsletters. (Hang onto this in case you change your mind in the future, however.)

Embalmer Training Regulations Revised. In what is perhaps a nod to the reality that there is less and less embalming going on in funeral practice these days, a new bill before the California legislature (AB-1381) would allow funeral establishments to use state licensed

contract embalmers to train apprentice embalmers in their facility instead of requiring that the facility have its own full time embalmer. Embalming is almost never a legal requirement in California except when bodies are shipped, so people frequently opt not to embalm bodies for burial. Embalming before cremation is not only unnecessary but would make the process even more environmentally damaging. These trends mean there is less demand for embalmers. Check on the status of the legislation at leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/.

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When you visit the BA-FCA office, please call first to make sure the office manager is there to let you in. Parking is limited. You can use the BA-FCA spot or the spot designated for the Church, if available.

**Do you need a cemetery plot in the San Jose area?** A family donated to BA-FCA a double-depth plot, complete with crypts, at Oak Hill Memorial Park. Call the office for more information.