



In Touch

Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association

www.ba-fca.org

463 College Avenue
P.O. Box 60448
Palo Alto, CA 94306
(650) 321-2109

Spring 2021 Issue

Annual Meeting on May 2 by Zoom

The Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association will hold its **2021 Annual Meeting via Zoom on Sunday, May 2 at 12:45pm. See details at right to join the meeting.** Our featured speaker is Stephanie Allen, of Sunnyvale, a licensed professional fiduciary, whose presentation, "A LIFE WELL LIVED: End-of-Life Planning" will address the basics of estate planning including the roles played by the pertinent agents and the various legal documents involved.



Stephanie Allen

Stephanie brings a wealth of experience to the role of Fiduciary. As an ordained Presbyterian clergy, she spent 23 years caring for people in crisis, and leading non-profit organizations. She is known for probity in financial stewardship and skills in the areas of administration, project management, and conflict negotiation.

She has a B.A. in Communications & Religious Studies from University of California at Santa Barbara, and finished a Masters of Divinity at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, as well as an M.S. in Psychology at San Jose State University. Ms. Allen is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) who has worked in executive roles in Silicon Valley high-tech companies. She is a Nationally Certified Guardian through the Center for Guardianship Certification. Her passion is serving vulnerable people in our society, and this is reflected in her volunteer work

the past four years—leading a team to raise money for the Immanuel Refugee House and tutoring refugees in English skills.

Join the meeting at **12:45 pm for an informal chat.** The half-hour business meeting starts at 1:00 p.m. where you will hear a review of how Covid affected BA-FCA activities over the past year, vote on new board members and the 2021-22 budget, and hear how we are attempting to change our website and operating mode in the future.

Register online for the meeting at bit.ly/BAFCAMtg. A link to join the meeting will be sent to you.

New Office Admin

Krystle Bantilan left us for a job in Nevada and now **Vanessa Wright** is our **new office administrator** as of Feb 22. Vanessa graduated from Stanford University with a degree in Human Biology with a focus on social sciences. She is a people person who connects well with others, and a good listener who is sensitive, considerate and caring.



Vanessa Wright

Her work experience includes resolving issues for unhappy Walmart customers, managing a busy acupuncture office and coordinating palliative care for hospice patients. She worked as an executive assistant for AT&T, and as legal secretary and corporate paralegal. In addition to her part time assistance at our office, Vanessa currently has a private practice in energy healing and energy medicine in San Jose. She is fluent in Spanish and conversational French.

She enjoys hiking, gardening, reading, watching movies and looks forward to getting back to visiting art museums.

Inside this issue:

Annual Meeting on May 2	1
New Office Admin	1
Support for Improved End-of-Life Options Act	2
Proposed 2021 Budget	2
Open Board Positions	3
Another Way to Turn Your Body into Soil Nutrients	3
New Mortuary Price Surveys	3
Tributes	3
News You Can Use	4

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO MEMBERS

We need your email address! Email is the most efficient mode of communication.

Please **send us an email** at office@ba-fca.org with your full name and phone number.

Our office is open during this pandemic to serve you and provide information and support however we can.

Mondays 10am—2pm
Fridays 10am—2pm

Let us know, too, if you would like to volunteer from home to help us get price information from cemeteries and mortuaries.

To sort out your values and desires regarding end-of-life, try out the CODA Alliance's **Go Wish** card game on your computer, free and with instructions at www.gowish.org/gowish/gowish.html

When you are dissatisfied and would like to go back to youth, think of algebra.
~~Will Rogers

Support for Improved End-of-Life Options Act

BAFCA has supported the End-of-Life Options Act that legalized medical aid in dying, but the act had significant hurdles to its use and many people were unable to take advantage of the control it provided. California Senate Bill 380 has now been introduced to address and mitigate some of the hurdles. The BAFCA Board of Directors wrote to the CA Senate Committee on Health to support SB380, and we urge all members to write their legislators in support of the bill as well.

Here is what the Board wrote:

Bay Area Funeral Consumers Alliance is writing to support Senate Bill 380, which would keep and improve California's End of Life Options Act.

The original EOLOA took effect in 2016 and since that time nearly 2,000 mentally capable, terminally ill Californians with six months or less to live have experienced their legally available option to receive a prescription for medical-aid-in-dying medication to peacefully end their great suffering.

At the same time and for a variety of reasons, too many suffering terminally ill Californians have been unable to access their end of life options. The burdensome 10+ step process has hampered or prevented many patients from accessing the law.

Shockingly, according to a study by Kaiser Permanente Southern California, one-third of terminally ill adults who tried to access the End of Life Options Act died before completing the time-consuming process, which includes a 15-day waiting period and can sometimes take months to complete.

In addition, COVID-19 pandemic has exposed health disparities in access to care among different communities. The hurdles that make it difficult for dying people to use this compassionate law is magnified in communities of color, where patients often don't have access to the same resources and referral networks that can best inform them about their end of life options.

For these reasons, we believe that California lawmakers should permanently reauthorize the End of Life Options Act via Senate Bill 380 which includes amendments to improve access to the law, especially for under-served communities of color and rural communities, ensuring all eligible terminally ill people can access it, while preserving its essential patient safeguards.

Proposed BAFCA Budget for 2021			
		2020 Actuals	2021 Budget
INCOME			
	Donations	\$ 20,395	\$ 18,000
	Memberships	\$ 7,983	\$ 10,000
	Misc (book sales, etc.)	\$ 110	\$ 300
	TOTAL INCOME	\$ 28,488	\$ 28,300
EXPENSES			
	Printing Newsletters	\$ 5,830	\$ 4,500
	Mailing & Postage	\$ 1,974	\$ 1,800
	Office	\$ 5,585	\$ 4,600
	Dues (State and Nat'l)	\$ 300	\$ 600
	Payroll	\$ 8,816	\$ 11,800
	Outreach/Web upgrade)		\$ 5,000
	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 22,505	\$ 28,300

Open Board Positions

We have four open Board positions. Come join the Board and learn more about the funeral business, and share your skills and interests to improve our services.

One candidate so far is Rhyena Halpern of Belmont.

After a lifelong interest in holistic health and spirituality, Rhyena became a hospice volunteer, and worked for UC Davis, Pathways and Mission Hospice. She works with patients at bedside and is a Community Ambassador for Mission. In that role, she helps lead Death Cafes on Tuesday mornings, leads a study group, and leads workshops in advance care directives.



Rhyena Halpern

She is a board-certified health and wellness coach, focusing on holistic health, design of the third acts of our lives, and end of life planning. Rhyena is also a professional End of Life Doula, certified by the University of Vermont's Larne College of Medicine. Her work is all done virtually at this time and she plans on teaching a class through Reimagine online this summer.

She retired from a career in documentary filmmaking and arts management in the public sector. She also was an adjunct faculty member, with an MFA from California Institute of the Arts in Documentary Filmmaking. Rhyena also worked as an artist and massage therapist.

Any member can self-nominate for a board of directors' position. Send an email describing past work and volunteer experience to office@ba-fca.org. April 26 is the deadline and the election will be May 2 at the annual meeting. The board now meets via Zoom, so distance and driving are not barriers as before. But you do need a computer and email!

Another Way to Turn Your Body into Soil Nutrients



Mushroom mycelium, the part that grows underground, has a super power. It is a fast-growing, fibrous material that can eat almost anything, including toxic substances that it converts from waste to nutrients. It is “nature’s recycler,” says Bob Hendriks, a bio-designer from the University of Delft. “Mycelium is constantly looking for waste products—oil, plastic, metals, other pollutants—and converting them into nutrients for the environment.” Trees and other plants rely on the nutrients that mycelium contributes to a healthy soil.

All of which prompted Hendriks and his Netherlands-based company Loop to design a “living coffin” by growing the mycelium around a coffin-shaped frame. It takes about a week to grow a coffin, which they call a Living Cocoon. When buried, it composts into the soil in just 30-45 days. The body inside breaks down in two to three years. Compare this to the 10 or more years for a conventional coffin to break down. And in the U.S., where coffins are nested in concrete or plastic vaults, it is nearly impossible for the decomposed bodies to mingle with the soil at all.

In Netherlands, grave space is rented for 20-30 years, then re-used. But even still, land for burial is a rapidly-dwindling resource in long-populated places. Mycelium coffins will free up the grave space more rapidly. But there is an even greater advantage. Loop is conducting research on the impact of human bodies on soil quality, with the hope of convincing policy-makers that it is possible to convert polluted areas into healthy forests with human bodies as nutrients. In this way, rather than appropriating lush and picturesque areas for cemeteries, societies could **create** more lush and picturesque areas from polluted wastelands through use of the Living Cocoon.

More info at: <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/bob-hendriks-living-cocoon-mushroom-coffin/>
#.X8vl2Lfzrdo.mailto.

New Funeral Home Price Surveys

The 2021 Survey of retail mortuary prices in the Bay Area is almost finished and all counties except Contra Costa are posted online. Check the information obtained by dedicated volunteers at our homepage, ba-fca.org.

Prices have increased greatly since we did the last survey in 2016. We have added two more bits of information—whether they have a General Price List on their website and their Funeral Home license number. We only surveyed funeral homes that had clear, active licenses. Some of the funeral homes we listed in 2016 have disappeared. Some went out of business, some merged or were taken over by another mortuary.

The nine volunteers under the chairmanship of Margie Bridges deserve a big applause for their perseverance in getting the information. They are: Kathleen Hunt and Meg Creelman of El Cerrito (San Francisco mortuaries), Sandy Kriegsmann of Petaluma (Sonoma County), Leslie Muennemann of Menlo Park and Elizabeth Poulson of Redwood City (San Mateo County), Elisabeth Seaman of Mountain View (Santa Clara County), Monalee Fritch of South San Francisco (Marin County), and Nancy Buell of Oakland (Contra Costa County). Margie Bridges of Stanford did the Alameda County survey.

In addition, Mary Anne Oliver of Berkeley has updated the cemeteries in Alameda County. We’ll do the other counties’ cemeteries when volunteers come forward.

Roughly 1/3 of the funeral homes did not have prices listed on their website, so that meant the volunteer had to call multiple times to request a GPL. There is a state law that funeral homes must post their GPL on their websites, or list the services they offer. These one-third just list their services, so get by the law. The national FCA is hoping the Federal Trade Commission will establish a rule that all mortuaries must post their prices, but they haven’t announced a decision on this yet.



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:

Al Meckler by Deborah Meckler

Catherine Lutz by Henry Lutz

David & Margot Botsford by Peter Botsford

Edith Haubrichs by Evelin Brinich

Paul Seaver by Kirsten Seaver

In Honor of

Byron Chan by Carolyn Hee



Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association

463 College Avenue
P.O. Box 60448
Palo Alto, CA 94306
Phone: 650-321-2109

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PALO ALTO, CA
PERMIT NO. 12

Visit us on the web! www.ba-fca.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Annual Meeting
Sunday, May 2
1:00pm
By Zoom

Pre-paying vs Pre-Planning

At BAFCA, we recommend not to pay in advance for funeral arrangements, but definitely to pre-plan, which is really just planning. Share with your family, friends, and your designated decision-maker what you want for yourself when you die. They may not want to talk about it, but we encourage “taking the bull by the horns” and initiating the conversation. Make sure they are comfortable with carrying out your decisions, and make sure the money is set aside for the expenses, and that they know where the money is and how to access it. Put your wishes in writing and give everyone copies. No guarantee that they will follow them but it will be one thing checked off your bucket list!

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

Composting Remains May

Come to California: Assembly Member Christina Garcia has introduced Assembly Bill 2592, which provides another legal option for human remains to be respectfully returned to nature. By allowing individuals who wish to be organically decomposed into soil, AB 2592 will help prevent one metric ton of carbon from entering the atmosphere with each individual. If every California resident chose natural reduction as their after-death preference, we would save nearly 2.5 metric tons of CO₂ in just 10 years. You can also use the soil to plant trees, which are good for the air as they act as a sink to capture carbon and other particulate matter. By reducing human remains to soil, family members can honor the dead in an environmentally-friendly method.

~~~~~

**Aquamation in Washington:** The Washington State People’s

Memorial Association (PMA, an affiliate of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, [www.peoplesmemorial.org](http://www.peoplesmemorial.org)) has partnered with First Call Mortuary Services in Oregon to provide Aquamation (alkaline hydrolysis) services to PMA members even before it is technically available in Washington. The process has been used for years for pets, and it was indeed a pet funeral home, Resting Waters, that helped make it legal in the state. Alkaline hydrolysis has been legal in California since July 2020, but is not yet available because no entity has yet been licensed for it.

~~~~~  
Prepayment Refunds? Years ago your father prepaid for a lavish funeral with your local funeral home. Hundreds of people would attend the viewing. Now your father has died, but Covid-19 restrictions mean that no more than 10 people will be allowed to

gather to remember him. Can you get at least get some of that money back, since services were indeed NOT rendered, through nobody’s fault? Is there some legal remedy you need to pursue?

Josh Slocum, Executive Director of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, wants people to understand that funeral homes MUST comply with state and federal guidelines to help prevent the spread of Covid-19 and that no law deals with refunds of prepayment during a pandemic.

Slocum advises that the family reach out to the funeral home directly that they may be open to refunding at least some of the money. Slocum says that in his efforts to help those who have come to him with questions about this, that he has never encountered a funeral home that refused to discuss the matter. But each situation is unique, and a negotiation will be required as to the amount of the refund.