

In Touch

FUNERAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION & FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE

Nonprofit organizations educating consumers in
San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties



463 College Avenue, P.O. Box 60448, Palo Alto, CA 94306 (650) 321-2109 www.funeralconsumerinfo.org Fall 2008

National FCA Sued by Michigan Mortician

South Burlington, VT. — Michigan funeral director and author Thomas Lynch sued Funeral Consumers Alliance, Inc., our national organization, in federal court September 12. Lynch's suit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, accuses FCA of defamation, economic injury, and "harm to [the] business reputation" of Lynch's funeral home businesses in Michigan. The document in question is a presentation titled "Deconstructing Thomas Lynch," available at www.funerals.org. The slideshow quotes an article by Lynch and criticizes the article's presentation and viewpoint.

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FEF Cemetery Survey Is Released

At long last, the Funeral Education Foundation's survey of local cemeteries is completed.

The committee found some resistance from cemeteries, as this was the first survey ever made and they didn't know whether to trust FEF. In the end, they managed to get information from all except three cemeteries.

The surveyors found it difficult to obtain comparable prices. On the price of a single grave, there was a lot of bundling of vaults and other items into the cost of the land use. Some cemeteries have pre-installed

vaults of their choosing so there is no way to separate land and vault cost. Without bundling prices, a family could choose from a variety of vault and liner types which would affect the bottom-line cost. Grave prices also vary by location in the cemetery.

The Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule, which requires funeral homes to provide a standardized price list to consumers, does not require this of cemeteries. However, we found many around here do provide a price list, and those that do are noted on the survey.

The survey includes age of the cemetery, size in acres, single grave prices, cost of opening and closing a grave, opening and closing a niche, amenities to be found at the cemetery, restrictions, languages spoken, whether they accept burials directly from a family not using a mortuary, whether a purchaser can sell the lot back to the cemetery, and the date of contact.

We also asked what were the cemetery concerns at the present time, the percentage of cremations to burials, depth of graves, how many urns can be buried with a casket in a single grave, special burial sections, whether they offered tours, whether they al-

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Mailing Party—To enable you to receive two newsletters a year despite a budget shortfall, the FCA/FEF board of directors and other members pitch in to stuff and put mailing labels on the newsletters. Seen above hard at work are Joan Buell, Carolyn Bechthold, Carl Ditmore, and Meredith Ditmore.

Cemetery Survey

(Continued from page 1)

lowed shrouds and cardboard boxes to encase the body, and how they kept their records. We also found only one cemetery was looking into using land for green burials (Holy Cross in Colma).

The committee learned a lot about cemeteries, and has in mind different questions to ask in future surveys. We do need more people to join the mortuary and cemetery committee, so the tasks involved in surveying would go more quickly.

If you are in the market for cemetery property, let us know if you would like a copy of the survey. A donation to offset the cost of printing and mailing would be welcome. Mark the enclosed remit envelope.

In Touch is issued twice a year by Funeral Education Foundation and Funeral Consumers Alliance, P.O. Box 60448, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Phone/fax (650) 321-2109. The subscription list includes FEF donors, members of Funeral Consumer Alliance of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, agencies, churches, and selected organizations.

2008-9 FEF Officers

Harry Anisgard, President
Lou Gado, Vice President
Carolyn Bechthold, Secretary
Katoko Sax, Treasurer

2008-9 FCA Officers

Lou Gado, President
Harry Anisgard, Vice President
Carolyn Bechthold, Secretary 4/08-10/09
Secretary TBA 10/08-4/09
Linda Borders, Treasurer 4/08-10/08
Bechthold, Treasurer 10/08-4/09

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Allan Behr, Marjorie Bridges,
Joan Buell, Barbara Hultgren,
Robert Marder, Nora Noldon,
Judy Yee

Office Mgr.—Ann Cherry
Office open M-W from 9 to 12 p.m.

Advisory Council:

Joan Dammann, Janet Brewer, Dr. Henry Mayer, Dr. Robert Glaser, Doris Hawks, Jack Wallace, Jane Hillhouse, Richard Roe



Ann Cherry came aboard as the new FCA Office Manager in September. She is shown using the files where your Planning Forms are stored. An ongoing project is to scan what's in each member's folder and put it on the computer.

Senior Faire Coming Up

Funeral Education Foundation will give away a lot of literature at the next Adult Services Resource Faire to be held Friday, November 14 at the Santa Clara Convention Center, 5001 Great America Pkwy., Santa Clara. The free event will be open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Door prizes will be given, and there will be workshops and health screenings. It is co-sponsored by Santa Clara County Department of Aging and Adult Services and two financial organizations.

Meet Ann Cherry

We welcome new office manager Ann Cherry, who began September 22. Ann will keep the office open the same hours as her predecessor, Judy Yee, 9 to 12 p.m., M-T-W.

Ann comes to us as a U.S. government retiree after serving four agencies in 28 years—U.S. Geological Survey, Moffett Field housing, VA Medical Center in SF, and Social Security Administration. Since retirement she has taken college courses, worked in a bank and Sacred Heart Community Services, and volunteered at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. She recently earned a credential as a paralegal, and may work in the afternoon doing bankruptcies.

Judy resigned to devote more time to developing her own business. However, she was appointed to fill a vacancy on the board of directors, so we will still be able to use her expertise with the computer projects and in fund raising. She will serve until April, 2009, and can run for a three-year term if she wishes.

New Information for My File (I Already Have a "Planning Form" in My File)

Name #1 _____
Name #2 _____
Date _____ Memb. No. _____
Old Address _____
Old City, Zip _____
New Address _____
New City, Zip _____
New Phone _____
Current Email _____
New Mortuary _____
New Next of Kin _____
Kin's Address _____
Kin's Phone _____

(A new wallet card will be automatically sent to you with changes of kin or mortuary.)

I (we) now desire

- C1—Direct Cremation
- C2—Cremation & Scattering at Sea
- B1—Direct Burial
- B2—Direct Burial with Graveside Services
- B3—Traditional Funeral with Simple Casket

Signed #1 _____
Signed #2 _____

Should Kidney Donors Be Rewarded?

A record number of Americans — nearly 100,000 — are on waiting lists for organ transplants. Seventy-six thousand are waiting for kidneys, and thousands will die before they get them. Kidney disease kills twice as many people as breast cancer, but kidney disease is unique in that it can be treated by an organ donation from a living person. A federal law banning payment to organ donors was passed 24 years ago, when the average wait for a kidney was less than a year; today it is more than three years. So a debate is raging over whether living donors — who can lead healthy lives with one kidney — should be paid.

“Making human organs a commodity is not moral,” says Dolph Chianchiano of the National Kidney Foundation, “and it is not a good idea.” Chianchiano and others worry that paying for organs could exploit poor people who need cash.

But Sally Satel, a psychiatrist whose life was saved by a donated kidney, says key precautions can be taken. “Don’t offer cash,” she suggests. “Compensate people with lifetime health insurance or a retirement contribution instead.”

At least 13 states now offer a tax deduction or credit to living donors. Wisconsin, the first state to do so, has one of the highest organ-transplant rates. (From: *Intelligence Report, Parade Magazine; Government Watch Contributors: Lyric Wallwork Winik, Matt Bushlow, and Mark Naymik. Published: July 13, 2008*)

Cemetery Trivia

Harold and Maude was filmed at Holy Cross, Woodlawn & Cypress Lawn cemeteries in 1971. ***Colma had only 246 living citizens in the 1950 census. *** In Santa Clara County, the earliest cemeteries were Oak Hill Cemetery, 1839; Mission City, Santa Clara, 1845; Santa Clara Mission, 1851; and IOOF and Masonic Cemetery, now Gavilan Cemetery, in 1852 in Gilroy.

Metal Remains from Crematoriums Are Recycled for Charity

From devon.editorial@archant.co.uk
National charities and the environment in England are to benefit from a new scheme to recycle waste metals, following guidance from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium management (ICCM). From September 1, 2008, with the consent of the bereaved families, any waste metals that remain after cremation will be sent for recycling. Money raised will be donated to a range of health charities such as the Heart Foundation and cancer research. The metals involved include implants such as joint replacements, and the metal components of coffins. Until recently, these waste metals have been removed from the ashes and buried in the grounds of the crematorium, a practice that has a negative effect on the environment. The process has already been running in parts of Europe for a number of years. Cremation paperwork includes a consent form seeking permission to recycle the metals. If family members do not want the metals to be recycled, then they can be returned to the family, or left in the cremated remains. Soft and precious metals melt during the cremation process and cannot be recovered, so it is recommended that all jewelry be removed prior to cremation. Full records of all collections, monies raised and charities that have benefited from the scheme were to be available for inspection at the crematorium.



David Lamphier of San Mateo was the winner of a \$100 gift certificate to Beltramo's Fine Wines and Spirits in Menlo Park. A drawing was held among the names of FCA/FEF donors to come up with a winner. The check was presented in August to Mr. and Mrs. Lampier at their home by Carolyn Bechthold, right, new treasurer of the FCA.

In California, by state law, the metal found in the retort after a cremation must be returned to the rest of the ashes, unless the family directs otherwise. Families should read the Permit for Disposition small print carefully, as sometimes the small print includes a clause that gives permission for the crematory NOT to return metal and foreign objects to the ashes. At this time, we are not sure what happens to metal that is not returned to the family.

Northern FCAs to Meet

Members from nine northern units of the FCA of California will meet Oct. 29 at Walnut Creek, including FCA-SM/SC. They will discuss common problems and new ideas, elect a board, and make annual reports.

Jay Leno: Funeral directors complain that people are so fat they don't fit in the cremation retort. It's just as hard to burn fat after you're dead as when you're alive.

GIVE TO A FRIEND TO JOIN

I would like to join Funeral Consumers Alliance. I enclose a check for \$50 (or \$100 for two). Mail to: FCA, PO Box 60448, Palo Alto 94306.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Birthdates _____ and _____

I was given this by _____

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Board Activities

FCA Treasurer Linda Borders will be leaving this month to take up retirement residence in Los Osos, CA, and Carolyn Bechthold, secretary for FEF and FCA, agreed to cover the position until the next election in April. Will someone with a finance background step forward to help on the board? Barbara Hultgren was appointed to take the board position of Jane Hillhouse, who resigned to begin a biodegradable coffin business called Colorful Coffins. Jane was appointed to the FCA Advisory Council. Barbara used to be President of FCA. Right now, she is recovering from knee surgery.

Board member Robert Marder is also on the mend from heart bypass surgery. Marjorie Bridges was elected secretary of the national FCA board, which next meets Oct. 10-11 in South Carolina.

Lynch Sues FCA

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“To call this lawsuit ‘frivolous’ would be too kind—it’s outrageous,” said FCA Executive Director Joshua Slocum. “Mr. Lynch appears unaware of the constitutional and common law rights citizens and journalists enjoy in this country. We don’t expect him to enjoy FCA’s critique, but his irritation does not cancel the rights of consumer advocates to publish fair comment on and criticism of his writings. Even worse, his attempt to extract money from a nonprofit charity is reprehensible.”

Lynch is widely known as the author of several books on American funerals and other topics. He was featured in the 2007 PBS Frontline documentary, *The Undertaking*. As a well-known commentator on funeral practices, Lynch has written and spoken widely about what he sees as the value of funerals — usually the

more involved and costly type that includes viewing the body and associated ceremonies.

FCA’s insurance company is providing legal assistance in the case.

Another Example of Preneed Funeral Insurance Fraud

A Texas circuit court placed National Prearranged Services and two of its affiliates, Memorial Service Life Insurance Co. and Lincoln Memorial Life Insurance Co., in receivership during the summer. The companies sold preneed funeral insurance in California as well as about 20 other states, allegedly defrauding funeral homes as well as individuals. Lawsuits in the Midwest charge the companies with crimes ranging from racketeering to conspiracy. An injunction prevents any further sales of preneed plans and freezes the companies’ assets.