

IN TOUCH

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 2007

Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, AB 1689

As this is being written, the revised Uniform Anatomical Gift Act, AB 1689 sponsored by Sally Lieber (D-San Jose), and Tom Berryhill (R-Modesto) was passed by the legislature and is awaiting the Governor's signature. Gov. Schwarzenegger has until Oct. 14 to sign or veto the act.

The bill repeals previous law which dates back to 1987, and expands the number of body parts that will be available to save and improve the lives of anxiously waiting recipients. AB 1689 passed the Senate 44-0 and the Legislature 77-0 after amendments.

"Anyone can save a life by just registering on-line with Donate Life California or check 'Yes' when renewing your driver's license," said Lieber. The website to volunteer as a potential donor is at www.donatelifecalifornia.org.

The new law would honor the choice of people to be donors, disallowing others to override that choice. If the person chooses not to be a donor, that bars others from donating his or her organs or tissues after death. Minors eligible to get drivers licenses are also able to register as donors. The bill also adds health-care agents as first on the list of those who can make decisions to donate body parts, and under certain circumstances, parents or guardians. Coro-

ners have a more important role because they will now be able to assess and harvest needed healthy organs and other body parts from bodies for whom a responsible kin or denial of body/organ donation cannot be located within the first 12 hours the body is sheltered.

The bill is an attempt to mesh California's existing laws with progressive ideas on donation to create a standardized piece of legislation that is consistent with other states. There is a great unmet need for whole bodies, organs, eyes and other body parts, called tissues. Presently there are 20,000 people needing an organ transplant in California waiting for donors. Besides transplantation, the tissues and bodies may be used for education, therapy, or research. (The individual can pick all or some uses, or limit the parts of the body he or she wishes to donate.)

The law makes it simpler for a sick or handicapped individual to donate. If the donor or other person is physically unable to sign a record, it may be signed by another individual at the direction of the donor or other person and be witnessed by at least two adults, at least one of whom is a disinterested witness. A signal of some type is also a valid agreement, if witnessed.

CostCo Caskets Are New Option

When Costco began handling casket sales last year, that seemed to be the ultimate step in responding to consumers' desire for easy-to-buy and economical containers. You can order online or in a Costco warehouse and have the casket delivered in a timely manner for a funeral, or if you have storage room, order well ahead.

Prices range from \$925 (18 gauge steel) to \$2,699 (solid cherry) to \$2,999 (32 oz. copper), and standard shipping is included.

There are choices of styles, sizes, and colors, besides materials.

The manufacturer of these caskets is Universal Casket of Cassopolis, MI, a three-generation family business formed 60 years ago by Edward F. Jones. They have five distribution centers around the U.S. to expedite the response time.

They also offer people and pet urns in an assortment of styles and materials (top price \$150), and an American flag case.

We'll Be There At

Senior Faires

Oct. 17
& 18

Funeral Education Foundation and Funeral Consumers Alliance will have a booth at the 16th Annual Adult Services Resource Faire on Thursday, October 18 in San Jose, sponsored by Department of Aging and Adult Services and Friends of the Human Relations. Lou Gado and Paula Troncone will represent FEF/FCA and bring brochures and treats to distribute.

The event will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Unify Center, 765 Story Road (behind Wal-Mart) in San Jose. There will be free health screenings, workshops, and resource networking among the booths.

We'll also be manning a booth at the 20th annual "Seniors on the Move" conference on Oct. 18th at the So. San Francisco Conference Center, 255 S. Airport Blvd. from 8:30 am to 3pm. The conference is a preregistration event, due to limited space. Allan Behr and Bob Marder will be meeting attendees there.

"Death is just nature's way of telling you to slow down."

Dick Sharples

Cemeteries Suffer As Metal Prices Rise

Across the country, cemetery caretakers are noticing that metal accessories at graves have gone missing. Bronze, brass, copper, and even aluminum vases and veterans' standards vanish overnight. Sometimes the culprits are caught when they attempt to sell the metal to salvage companies. As metal prices rise, the thieves cannot resist the temptation to take these items if they are unguarded.

First Cemetery Survey By FEF Volunteers

Funeral Education Foundation is conducting a Cemetery Survey this fall for the first time, trying to include all active cemeteries in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. It appears there will be between 30 and 40 cemeteries included.

This will be the first attempt to document the ownership, age, size, what other amenities are available on the grounds, whether they will welcome "home funeral" customers, will buy back an already-purchased lot, restrictions on clientele, and a few of the costs.

We could use a couple more people to help with this research (or other projects).

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Office open M-Th from 9am to 1pm
National FCA: 800-765-0107

Each volunteer phones one or two cemeteries and asks 19 questions and records the one-word answers on the survey form.

To reserve a copy, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope to FEF, P.O. Box 60448, Palo Alto, CA 94306. The envelope will be returned to you when the survey results are completed.

We will do another Funeral Home survey when enough volunteers step forward. The last one was accomplished last November, and copies are still available. FEF analyzed price lists for about 50 funeral homes. Unlike mortuaries (who are mandated by the Federal Trade Commission to have price lists available to shoppers) cemeteries are less likely to have printed literature since they are not required by law.

Books About Death Fascinate Readers

Evidently people would rather read about than talk about the possibility of death. Some of the best sellers concerning death are:

Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, (2005, Knopf, \$23.95) about her life after her husband's sudden death.

Mark Harris' *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*, [2007, Scribner, \$24 (\$20 to FCA members at www.funerals.org)]

Walter Smith's *Grandad's Ashes*, (2006, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, \$14.95) a children's book introducing the concepts of cremation, scattering, and remembering the dead.

John Banville's *The Sea*, (2006, \$24) about a man's grief over his wife's death.

Sandra M. Gilbert's *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, (2006, Mor-ton, \$22.50) This English professor emeritus from UC-Davis explores how death and grief have changed over the years.

Mary Roach's *Stiff*, (2003, Norton, \$13.95 to FCA members at www.funerals.org.) Funny and educational about what happens to corpses.

If you have read and enjoyed any of these or other books concerning end of life, FEF would be happy to accept your tax-deductible donation of new or used books for the lending library at 463 College Ave., Palo Alto.

Board News

Richard Roe had been filling in as bookkeeper/treasurer for FCA for several years, and he resigned as of September 30. The organization thanks Rev. Roe for his long service, including president as well as treasurer. Linda Borders of Palo Alto, who has worked in accounting, human resources, and meeting planning at Sun Microsystems and Avenidas Senior Center, will fill Rev. Roe's shoes at least until the next annual meeting.

Robert Marder of Hillsborough stepped forward in April to volunteer for the one-year board opening. He is a retired state Administrative Law Judge, and is especially helpful in legal matters.

After a short period off the board, Lou Gado of Los Altos agreed to rejoin for the rest of the year. He has a particular interest in our marketing projects.

Please consider using your talents by volunteering for a board position. The usual term is for three years, but shorter stints are certainly possible. The board meets from 10 to 12 on the 1st Monday each month at Friends Meeting, 957 Colorado Ave., Palo Alto. Members are welcome to come and observe or contribute.

Ideas Abound For Funeral Palls

Some people who favor a simple closed casket do not realize that they can easily dress it up to suit the personality of the deceased by the type of covering. We all have seen flag-draped caskets for veterans. But there are bedspreads, embroidered tablecloths, hand-made quilts, afghans, tapestries, and throws that are possible funeral palls. Some have animal, bird, sports, flowers, or special scenes that would remind attendees of the decedent. Or you could shop for velvet, satin, lace, or upholstery-weight fabrics that might fill the bill.

"When my mother passed away last October, we used one of her own handmade quilts as a casket covering which reminded her family and friends of her love of quilting. Everyone thought it was very unique. It also saved us \$500-\$700 for a 'family spray' of flowers atop the casket," wrote a Mississippi contributor to FCA's chat group.

“Before I Go” Is FCA Best-Seller

The best-selling item at the national FCA headquarters in Vermont is the “Before I Go, You Should Know” kit designed to be read, completed, and stored in your refrigerator or freezer. Emergency technicians, police, and firemen will know that you have some important health information inside because it comes with an attractive warning magnet to put on the refrigerator door. The \$10 kit comes in a plastic pouch with a California Advance Health Care Directive and useful brochures, plus the 20-page “Before I Go” booklet. This is to encourage you to get your Directive and planning done now.

“FCA National has sold more than \$10,000 worth of BIG kits so far this year, including retail sales, wholesale to affiliates, and as member benefits for Friends of FCA,” said Joshua Slocum, the FCA National Executive Director.

He (and the local group) would like some feedback about what members think about the kits. We included a kit with each new membership for the past two years. We want to know if and how you are using it, and what improvements you would like to see. Revisions are in the works, so now is the time to speak up. If you do not find it useful, we’d like to know that, too. Tell us what else you would like to see in the kit.

If you joined before 2004 and would like a kit, enclose a check for \$10 in the remit envelope and don’t forget to include where to send it. It would make a fine gift for someone you care about.

Details, Details

Joining a Funeral Society, planning your disposition and letting your next of kin know about your wishes is considerate and a good way to save money on funeral arrangements, but there are more things to that you should consider including in your end-of-life plans that will reduce the decisions your family will have to make.

☛ What about Rex? Have you indicated what will happen to your pet if he should outlive you? You should designate who you wish to take care of your pet(s) and perhaps put aside some funds for that person to help with the costs. Long-lived pets, like large exotic birds, can live up to 50 years or more, so make sure the person you designate will be up for the long-term commitment. If you don’t have a friend or family member suitable, find the local, appropriate, animal rescue group and contact them about taking in your pet when the time comes. Keep their information with your other ‘last wishes’ and you’ll help both your next of kin and ease what can be a difficult transition for your pet. Visit www.1-800-save-a-pet.com and www.estateplanningforpets.org for more information.

☛ What don’t you want? If you are leaving the disposition of your cremated remains up to your next of kin but have always hated the ocean or dread the thought of your cremated remains collecting dust in a closet, you should make those ‘anti-wishes’ known as well. A person having cremated remains in their possession is legally obligated to provide for their care or disposition upon their own death, so making the decision beforehand will be appreciated.

☛ Donations - Your hospital and caregiver have told you about organ, tissue, or pacemaker donation, but did you realize other devices can be donated as well?

Various local institutions will accept eyeglasses for the needy. For instance, the Lions Club accepts eyeglasses and used hearing aids. Non-profit hospice groups may accept home-care equipment. Vida (Volunteers for Inter-American Development www.vidausa.org) in Emeryville accepts donations of prosthetic limbs and used medical equipment in good condition. We’re currently working on updating donation information on one of our brochures; if you have some ideas or information to share on this issue please let us know.

In a cemetery in England:
Remember man, as you walk by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so shall you be.
Remember this and follow me.
To which someone replied by writing on the tombstone:
To follow you I’ll not consent ...
Until I know which way you went.

New Information for My File

(I already have a “Planning Form” in my file)

Name #1 _____

Name #2 _____

Date _____ Member No. _____

Old Address _____

Old City, Zip _____

New Address _____

New City, Zip _____

New Phone _____

Current Email Address _____

New Mortuary _____

New Next of Kin _____

Kin’s Address _____

City, Zip _____ Phone _____

(a new wallet card will be sent to you with change of kin or mortuary)

I(we) now desire: (circle one)

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 _____

Fall 2007

Tidbits

The FCA of California met October 5-6-7 in San Diego. San Mateo/Santa Clara was represented by Marjorie Bridges, who is state President.

Please speak to the program chair of your organization(s) and see if they would like someone from the Funeral Education Foundation Speakers Bureau to give a free program about the importance of planning ahead or how to shop for a funeral. They can call our office at (650) 321-2109 to make arrangements.

Some of the discussions on the FCA-sponsored chat group get very interesting. You can lurk and learn or take an active part in discussions. To subscribe send a blank e-mail to: subscribe-deathcare@lists.listmoms.net

Some members may have missed the announcement last spring that Byrgan is no longer on our list of cooperating mortuaries. Funeral prices there have reverted back to the same as offered to the public, so there will be no savings for FCA members. Please contact our office with your new funeral home selection. The funeral homes and prices are listed at our website: www.funeralconsumerinfo.org, and you may email from that site, phone during office hours (M-Th, 9 to 1), or fill in and submit the "change form" in this newsletter.

We had a couple answers to our announcement that we are collecting names of people who have experience with home-based funerals. When a few more

respond, we will form a home funeral advisory committee. In the meantime, we have a free brochure to for those who are interested.

The Speakers Bureau of Funeral Education Foundation has invitations to speak soon at Avenidas and Catholic Charities. Call the office if you would like a speaker or discussion leader for your organization or church. (650) 321-2109.

Needed: Volunteers to help with light office work; please call Paula at the above number. We can also use donations "in kind" (it's tax-deductible!). If you have an extra ream of paper, a piece of office equipment/technology etc., let us know and if we can use it, Paula will arrange for pick-up or drop it by the office. In particular, we're wishing for an LCD projector to help with our presentations and similar items.

Free Legal Service Available to Seniors

Free legal advice? Yes, people over the age of 60 can get accurate advice on any legal subject by phone, from elder abuse to Social Security to age discrimination. A team of lawyers, paralegals, interns, and volunteers field questions from a hotline Monday through Friday. If all advocates are busy, a receptionist will set up a phone appointment in a day or two. Seniors can also email Senior Legal Hotline with a form online at their website. Phone number for outside Sacramento is (800)

Report and Resolve Funeral Problems

As a wise shopper—and you are, because you joined Funeral Consumers Alliance—you may want to keep a few phone numbers handy, just in case you or a friend run into a problem with a funeral home, crematory, scattering service, or cemetery.

- FCA of San Mateo & Santa Clara County, (650) 321-2109, www.funeralconsumerinfo.org
- FCA's national office, (800) 765-0107, www.funerals.org
- California Dept. of Consumer Affairs, Cemetery & Funeral Bureau, (800) 952-5210, www.dca.ca.gov
- Consumer Protection Unit of Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, (408) 792-2880.
- Better Business Bureau, (408) 278-7400, www.bbb.org
- Federal Trade Commission, (877) 382-1222, www.ftc.gov

222-1753 for 9 to noon and 1 to 4 Monday through Friday. They are also open till 7 p.m. on Thursday. Or log onto www.seniorlegalhotline.org to send an email with the legal question. The website also has helpful fact sheets on some legal topics.

In 2006 the federal government changed its criteria for funding, and California does not fund these hotlines, so SLH is welcoming donations (including vehicles) so they can stay in operation.