



## Funeral Consumers Alliance of Oregon

## Funeral Consumers Education Foundation

### PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

*Jim Sitzman*

It has been a good year! We recruited new volunteers. We are still solvent, with thanks to our new **Development Committee**. We adopted mission statements, with eyes still trained on an evolving future. Our websites are improved. **The Education Foundation** presents its first symposium on June 3rd following the FCAO Annual Meeting. Read ahead about our work and then answer the questions we have for you as part of our Member Survey on page 4. Our future work relies on your support and continuing involvement.

Our most promising effort is the **End-of-Life Education Committee**, whose work endeavors to produce a best-practices guide addressing a range of issues that most concern our members. We want to reach around the State with our presentations along with the data from our price survey. This is a big undertaking; however, we hope to achieve it with partnerships and volunteers from the communities we visit. (Photo by Lynden Tanenbaum



© 2011.)

To join the journey, contact me at [jim@sitzman.net](mailto:jim@sitzman.net) or [fcaoregon@gmail.com](mailto:fcaoregon@gmail.com).

### FIRST ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

SUNDAY, JUNE 3<sup>RD</sup>, 3:30 PM

Symposium linguistically means “to drink together,” but it also means a “free interchange of ideas.” The latter is what we expect on June 3rd at the First Unitarian Church of Portland.

Commencing at 3 p.m. with refreshments and social time in the Channing Room, the symposium will then convene at 3:30 p.m. in Eliot Chapel, 1011 SW 12th Avenue in downtown Portland. (For directions and parking see [www.firstunitarianportland.org](http://www.firstunitarianportland.org).)

The opening topic of the symposium, **Planning an Appropriate Death: From Before to After**, will explore the meaning of the phrase “appropriate death” and present some practical steps a person can take with their family to prepare for an approaching death and for the after-death memorial.

Our program continues with **The Value of Ritual: Traditional and Changing**. The **Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell** will present her perspectives on end-of-life rituals, how they are changing, and how to meaningfully connect tradition and change. Reverend Sewell, Minister Emerita of the First Unitarian Church of Portland, is a writer, editor, and subject of the documentary, “Raw Faith.”

The following guest speakers will each share an essential ritual from their own religious/ethnic tradition or personal experience:

- **Elder Linda Meanus**, granddaughter of Celilo Chief Tommy Thompson, who may share a song or drumming from her longhouse tradition.
- **Rabbi Daniel Isaak**, Congregation Neveh Shalom, who serves as President of the Oregon Chapter of the Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East.
- **Rev. Wendy Weinstein Fish**, Chaplain, Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center, and Minister Emeritus of Unitarian Churches in Ohio and California.
- **Shahriar Ahmed**, President, Bilal Mosque, Beaverton, Oregon, who found his voice as Muslim spokesperson on 9/11. Ever since, Bilal Mosque has held an open house on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

An interchange among these presenters seeking clarity, highlighting commonalities, and elaborating important concepts will ensue before the audience is invited to engage in the dialogue and share in what promises to be a rewarding and perhaps inspiring experience. Please plan to attend!

## ELECTIONS FOR BOARD OF TRUSTEES AT ANNUAL MEETING ON JUNE 3<sup>RD</sup>

In keeping with our By-Laws and tradition, the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Oregon will hold a membership meeting and an election to fill open positions on its Board of Trustees. The Nominating Committee, Cliff Wamacks, Johnette Orpinela and Eleanor Davis, reports that four candidates have agreed to serve a 3-year term, if elected. Two of the candidates are current Board members whose terms are expiring, Nancy Bieber and Cliff Wamacks. Two members choosing to end their service to the Board are Leon Paulson and Jeanne Staehli. Nominated to fill those positions are Libby McKirdie and Ed Warmoth.

The Nominating Committee had hoped to expand the Board of Trustees beyond the current 7 positions to nine. Any member who wishes to be considered by the Nominating Committee can contact FCAO by email to express their interest and learn more about the commitment required for Board service. All nominees are required to attend the Annual Meeting on Sunday, June 3, 2012 at First Unitarian Church, (Eliot Chapel), 1011 SW 12th Avenue, Portland, Oregon, from 2:30 pm. to 3:00 pm.

### Nancy Bieber

- FCAO/FCEF Board Member (2010-2012); Secretary since 2011
- Chaired Membership and Contracts Committee; conducted Oregon Mortuary Price Survey
- Retired state manager; background in dispute resolution and mediation.



### Elizabeth (Libby) McKirdie

- After graduating in art history, lived and worked in New York City for the next 20 years in art and administration
- Back now in the Northwest, loving nature, people, and places



### Cliff Wamacks

- Active in Arizona's Memorial Society and the Funeral Consumers Alliance since the early '60s.
- Retired; attorney at law
- Current FCAO/FCEF Board member



### Ed Warmoth

- Former FCAO Board member (2007-2010)
- Retired; public relations and communications professional
- Rotary Club volunteer



## CONTRACTS EVALUATION AND PORTLAND AREA PRICE INCREASES

Much has changed in the funeral industry during the fifty years since Funeral Consumers Alliance of Oregon-Oregon Memorial Association was formed. There is both more integration of funeral homes with cemeteries and crematories and more small-scale specialty providers often associated with the cremation industry. Just as importantly, attitudes have changed about end-of-life choices. Today fully 70 percent of the deceased have chosen cremation. Former traditions like home preparation and ceremonies are returning to favor. And "green" practices like simple burials without embalming are more often followed.

FCAO decided recently to undertake a review of its current contracts to address these changes and other considerations. Our first action, taken in the interest of our 12,000 members, will be to visit each contract mortuary to review carefully the current contract provisions, the contractors' experience under the contract, and the relationship between contractors and FCAO. This step will lead to an investigation of options for expanding our contract coverage to other parts of the state and, potentially, to adding contract mortuaries in areas already served by an FCAO contractor. Finally, and more long-term, we will evaluate our current contract model to determine whether modifications should be made. Your responses provided by the Membership Survey on page 4 in this newsletter will help us during this evaluation.

Recently, our Portland-area Contract Mortuary, River View Cemetery, requested an amendment to the price for each of the six service packages. FCAO has considered this request and acted to amend the contract with River View. In addition to the price increases, an amendment adding an audit clause was approved. The new prices, effective June 1, 2012, are as follows:

River View Package Prices	
Direct Burial	\$1,090
Simple Graveside Service Without Embalming or Visitation	\$1,500
Traditional Funeral Service in Funeral Home Chapel with Burial	\$2,745
Direct Cremation, No Service	\$795
Direct Cremation with Memorial	\$1,210
Traditional Funeral Service in Funeral Home Chapel with Cremation	\$2,910

## THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FINAL WISHES

Most of us probably know that Oregon's Personal Preference law obliges survivors to honor the written wishes of the deceased. Many of us may not know that we also have the option of naming the person to whom we have given this responsibility.

Oregon's law (ORS 97.130(3)) permits you to name a designated agent for body disposition using a "Directive Regarding Disposition of Remains." Because your wishes must be written out, you have the opportunity to thoughtfully plan your final arrangements and to make choices that are meaningful to you.

To help aid in your planning, FCAO recommends the booklet *Before I Go, You Should Know*, a detailed and helpful resource. It is a publication of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance and is included in the end-of-life planning kit you can purchase from FCAO (Price: \$12.00; order one by contacting FCAO by letter or e-mail.)

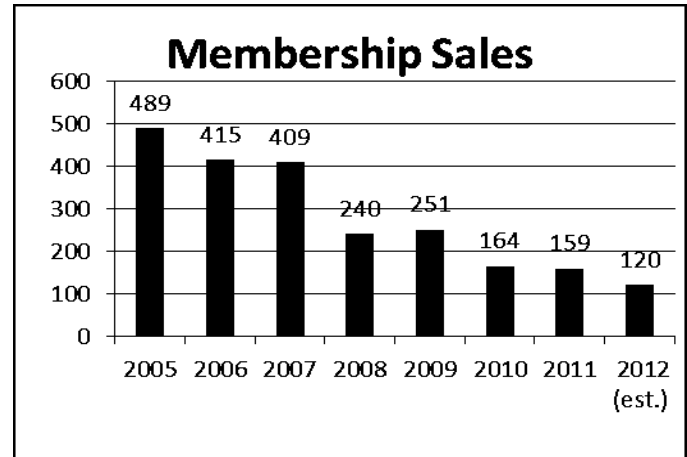
A similar help is the Personal Instruction Form (PIF) that FCAO distributes to members when they join. Members are asked to specify the mortuary of their choice along with disposition and service preferences. The PIF is a simple way to express your final wishes, make the essential pre-arrangements, and achieve peace of mind.

Of course, you, your family and/or designated agent should understand how much your wishes will cost. You should not expect anyone to pay for a costly funeral if you don't set money aside for that expense. (*We'd like to acknowledge the Oregon State Bar as the source for material about Oregon's Directive Regarding Disposition of Remains.*)

*During the past year, our members have been very generous in support of our Education Foundation research and education endeavors. Through their tax-exempt contributions, 307 members contributed a total of \$12,187 in 2011. A big Thank You to all our contributors! Your financial support is vital to our work.*

## GIFTS ALWAYS WELCOME

We hope each and every donor who made a contribution this past year knows just how much their gift is appreciated. Individual contributions are becoming increasingly important to us. In our earlier years, membership revenue sustained our work. As the graph below shows, FCAO new memberships are at an all-time low.



The Treasurer's report to the FCEF Board last month was not unexpected: "A revenue shortfall of \$2,000 is a strong possibility unless our membership once again responds to our newsletter with donations."

"Then how do we move forward on our new education program? our outreach? our website?" replied President Jim Sitzman. "We cannot spend money we do not have, but our Apple computer is so old it can no longer be updated. New software is essential to adequately support the work of our new committees."

FCEF's limited resources mean that the annual newsletter is the one opportunity we have each year to make a plea to our 12,000 members. And to remind you that gifts "In Honor Of" and "In Memory Of" are always welcome too.

"A gift of \$100 means so much to a new foundation like ours," says Sandy Lofy, "Education is the best kind of consumer protection there is. And our members so appreciate the information I send them. Helping people make decisions about their last wishes gives them peace of mind. Who else can say that about their job? I know that FCEF could help so many more people - if only we had the resources."

Gifts may be made to either organization; however, only gifts to FCEF are tax deductible.

**Funeral Consumers Alliance of Oregon**  
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Sunday, June 3, 2012  
**FCAO Annual Meeting**  
2:30 p.m.  
**Education Symposium, 3:30 p.m.**  
First Unitarian Church, (Eliot Chapel)  
1011 SW 12th Avenue  
Portland, Oregon

## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Please help us plan for the future by answering a few brief questions and returning your survey form to us using the enclosed donation envelope. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and opinions.

1. As you know, FCAO Contract Mortuaries offer three burial and three cremation packages. As a member, which statement best describes your decision about your final arrangements:

- I plan to use an FCAO Contract Mortuary for my  burial service  cremation services because  the packages meet my wishes and family's needs and/or  to avoid shopping for funeral services.
- I do not intend to use an FCAO Contract Mortuary. I joined FCAO to  receive pre-planning information and/or  to support FCAO's work to make funeral home services available to those who want them.

2. Have you ever accessed membership benefits on behalf of any family member?  Yes  No  
If yes, was the FCAO Personal Instruction Form helpful?  Yes  No  Form Wasn't Completed

3. Have you ever accessed services from an FCAO Contract Mortuary?  Yes  No  
If yes, were their services:  Very Satisfactory  Satisfactory  Unsatisfactory

**If you were not satisfied** with the service or did not use the Contract Mortuary, was it because:

- No Contract Mortuary was convenient to my location \_\_\_\_\_
- Contract Services were not the type of services we decided were needed or wanted \_\_\_\_\_
- Contract Price was too expensive
- Contract Mortuary tried to sell different services
- Other reason: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do your final wishes include, or are you considering, any of the following?

- Home Funeral  Green/Natural Burial  Cremation/No Burial

5. Do you have skills or abilities you could volunteer to help FCAO and FCEF or its Committees with:

- Newsletters  Computer Support  Website Support  Distributing Publications
- Contract Mortuary Support and Recruitment  Clerical Assistance  Membership Promotion

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_