

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

2019

### OMA Board of Directors

First and foremost, I have to thank our very amazing Board. I've been on the boards of a lot of organizations over the years and I can tell you it is the dream of every board chair to have an active board of capable volunteers who will take delegation and get the jobs done. This has been one of the best boards I've ever had the privilege to serve on. I'll tell you why as we go along.

### Organizational Merge

One big change that has been implemented this year is to combine the Funeral Consumers Education Foundation and Oregon Memorial Association into one organization. Having separate organizations meant we had to have two boards (same members), two sets of officers (same members), two sets of books, two annual reports to state and federal agencies, and confusion among our members. When we visited People's Memorial Association in Washington state a couple of years ago, we discovered that they had that same dual organization structure in the past, but their lawyers had found how to combine them without violating IRS rules. We wanted to do that, but it took a lot of work and attention to details. Board member Donna Loveland, of Salem, undertook to spearhead the effort and almost single handedly got the job done. She will tell you about it after my remarks. There's a handout in your meeting packet.

We had to dissolve one organization and adopt new bylaws to accomplish the task. Fortunately, a majority of the boards was empowered to perform those tasks. While we were at it, we modernized the new bylaws to enable things like email voting. And in keeping with the reorganization, we'll continue using the fcaoregon@gmail.com email address, but will also receive email at omaoregon@gmail.com. Likewise, the website can be accessed at fca-oregon.org and also at omaoregon.org.

### All's Well That Ends Well

We told you last year that we wanted to expand our educational program All's Well That Ends Well to create more informed consumers of funeral services. We see this outreach as critical both to our members and to our organizational survival. Thanks to the efforts of board members Cathy Hall, Donna Loveland, and Joan Landsberg we have held AWTEW workshops at River View Cemetery in Portland, Restlawn in Salem, and Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Bend. Cathy has five more workshops scheduled around town, and we will be back in Central Oregon next year. Keep an eye on our website and FaceBook for announcements.

### Financial Challenges

The industry has changed a lot since OMA started 58 years ago. Back then our main attraction was that for a very low one-time fee you got a lifetime membership and discounted services at select funeral service providers. In return, OMA received "record fees" from the service provider whenever they processed a deceased OMA member. Since then, a majority of the population – over 70% -- has switched from embalming and interment to cremation, often

with no funeral service or a church memorial. This change has cut into the providers' market substantially. In addition, large national corporations have acquired local funeral providers, and their shareholders – sometimes your retirement investment funds – demand profits. As a consequence, we at OMA are finding it difficult to line up discount funeral services for our members.

Aasum-Dufour in Albany and Corvallis severed its ties with us earlier this year. While many in the mid-valley switched to Restlawn in Salem, new management there has opened negotiations for increased prices with OMA. And while some providers across the state will honor OMA's price list, they do not want to enter into contracts with us and provide the record fees we as an organization depend on.

Consequently, OMA is facing financial challenges of a magnitude it has never seen before. The board this year raised the membership fee to \$50 per individual, but this alone will not provide for our ongoing expenses. We dropped the 800 phone number because almost everyone now uses a cell phone service with included nation-wide calling. We announced this annual meeting via postcard rather than the expensive annual newsletter as another cost cutting measure. We have asked all of our members who can to switch from regular mail to email again to cut costs. This coming year, the board will face the challenges of signing up new mortuaries, possibly with an increase in our contractual discount prices. They will probably continue deliberating a switch from the lifetime single-fee membership to an annual subscription model. And we will be more dependent than ever on our members' generosity in making annual donations. The reorganized OMA I mentioned earlier has a 501(C)3 IRS designation, so everything except the membership fee is tax deductible.

### Management Change

Earlier this year our part time office manager, Mary Ziemer-McGinn, took a second part time job working with OHSU tracking clinical trials. She found the work so fascinating that she asked to be replaced at OMA. We were incredibly blessed that Robin Chilstrom was willing to step into the job. Robin was Mary's immediate predecessor as our manager. In her two year absence, she managed to write and publish a beautiful art book and pursue a other long-time dreams. Her willingness to come back demonstrates a real love for the work OMA does. If you or a loved one gets her on the phone in a time of distress, you'll see what I mean. We can't thank her enough.

### Personal Information Forms (PIFs)

One of our office manager's most important duties is to answer your phone calls. For example, here's an email I got from Robin last week. *"This morning xxxs's daughter called to find out member information for her mother - who just died. The mother and her husband joined in 1987, then somewhere along the line they transferred to People's in Seattle. In 2013 they became OMA members once again. They originally filed PIF forms, but it was so long ago that those PIFs are no longer in our records. The daughter was under the impression that there had been prepayment for services. Unfortunately, I had no information to offer them so I suggested*

*they look through their papers for a trust deed or contract with one of our providers. In order for us to help, members need to update their contact info and PIF forms."*

We weren't using a computerized database in 1987! We have some paper records, but how many of you have your records back 32 years? We depend on the information you provide us now to help to your family when the need arises. You bought the service, so it is in your best interest to keep that information up to date. Personal Information Forms are available in the lobby and on the website.

### [Plots and Crypts for Sale](#)

We have some donated cemetery plots and crypts for sale. More information in the lobby and on our website.

### [Parting Shot](#)

I have to go off the board after two three-year terms, and that's a good thing – both for my sanity and for the health of the organization. I want to tell you that serving OMA has been more than an honor ...it's been a privilege and, at times, a joy. This is important and satisfying work. OMA needs you. It needs someone qualified to step into the Treasurer position. It needs outreach volunteers to help us build membership, to help us expand our network of providers, to help with the website and FaceBook page, to become AWTEW presenters, and on and on. Please take a look at the "Ways You Can Volunteer" handout and give OMA serious consideration. If you do volunteer, I guarantee you will find that this board is a hoot to work with!