



# Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

## Spring 2014 Newsletter

www.fingerlakesfunerals.org • info@fingerlakesfunerals.org

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### Green Burial: A Return to Tradition

#### Public presentation by

#### Mark Harris

Author of *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*

**Sunday, April 13, 2014**

2:00 PM, Kendal at Ithaca Auditorium,  
2230 North Triphammer Road, Ithaca

Sponsored by

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes  
and  
Cornell University's Religious Studies Program

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Mark Harris is an award-winning journalist and a former environmental columnist with the Los Angeles Times Syndicate. He is an authority on the "green burial" movement and the modern funeral industry.

His book, *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* (2007, Scribner), is the first book to explore the environmental aftermath of modern burial and funerals in North America and to showcase the more natural alternatives that are beginning to replace them.



Mr. Harris will present a "lively tour" of a new, greener American Way of Death. His presentation is a visual foray into natural cemeteries and domestic graveyards, sea burials of ashes, and "memorial reefs." He shows eco-coffins of simple pine, bamboo, and wicker, and introduces "alternative funeral practitioners" who conduct home funerals. Archival photographs will show early American funerals and their progression to the

more involved sendoffs of today.

Harris has keynoted numerous conferences on funeral rights, home funerals and green burial. He speaks regularly to college students, hospice workers, church groups, funeral consumer advocates, and funeral directors, among others.

Mr. Harris is a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow and adjunct instructor of writing at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA. He is a graduate of Stetson University and the University of Chicago.

Mark Harris has been a guest on the NPR show *Fresh Air* and has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, and ABC World News. His views on death and dying have been reported in major national news publications. His current book project explores issues of home and place through the construction of a "green" and senior-friendly home in the state of Georgia.

For more information, see Mark Harris' web page: [www.gravematters.us](http://www.gravematters.us)

### Annual Business Meeting

The business meeting will follow Mr. Harris' presentation. Please stay for the meeting. The two main items of business will be approval of a revised set of bylaws and election of officers and directors. Your attendance at the business meeting will be important to achieve the quorum required to conduct business. A copy of the proposed new bylaws is enclosed with this newsletter. See the explanatory article on the next page.

#### Election of officers and directors

An ad hoc nominating committee will offer the following slate of candidates for 3-year terms:

President: Donna Scott

Vice-President: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: Wayne Sinclair

Treasurer: Carol Hardy

Board of Directors: Patricia (Pat) Pryor

Nominations from the floor will be invited.

Continuing members of the Board are Barry Adams, Roy Colle, Cathy Darrow, Carolyn Eberhard, Ralph Jones, and Cullie Mowers. Advisors are David Bandler, Dorothy Sholeen, and Philip Winn.

Retiring members of the Board are Monty Berman and Dominick Paolillo. In addition, Suzanne Kilgore,

Louise Richards, and Dorothy Sholeen resigned during the winter due to changing personal circumstances. We thank all of these people for their help. In particular, Louise Richards designed and evaluated the 2013 member survey, Suzanne Kilgore has served ably as Secretary during 2013–2014, and Dominick Paolillo has been a mainstay of the Alliance since 2006, serving as Treasurer and Vice-President. He facilitated numerous projects, two of the most important being the Alliance's achievement of tax-exempt status and its funeral price surveys.

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### Meet a New Nominee for Board of Directors

Patricia (Pat) Pryor retired in 2000 from a 38-year teaching career, mostly as a Special Education teacher in the Ithaca School District. She then served a term on Ithaca's Common Council, including a year as Acting Mayor, before moving to Lansing and being elected to a term on the Tompkins County Legislature. As Chair of the Special Committee on Broadband she was instrumental in forming the public/private partnership that won 2.2 million dollars in state funding to bring robust internet service to most of rural Tompkins County. In her 3rd retirement she continues to be engaged in the implementation of the broadband project and other activities including spending time with her five-year-old granddaughter, walking her four dogs, and continuing to speak out on public issues.

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### Bylaws Revision Needed

Why? Because important sections have become obsolete. Since the last revision, in 2009, the Alliance has completed the transition from a funeral buyers' club to an organization fully dedicated to consumer education and protection in funeral-related matters.

A committee (Sinclair, Adams, Paolillo) appointed by President Donna Scott in early 2013 drafted a thorough revision that the Board considered and approved in February 2014. It is enclosed with this Newsletter.

The proposed new bylaws will take effect immediately if approved by the membership at the 2014 Annual Meeting on April 13. Please attend the meeting for this important vote.

Significant changes from the 2009 version of the bylaws include the following: Article I is an entirely new description of the purposes and plan of our organization. Article III, Section 1 allows FCAFL to hold the Annual Meeting in April or May instead of just in April. Article V, Section 1 excludes funeral industry professionals from membership on the Board of Directors, thus avoiding conflict of interest; and Section 2 provides that at least one member of the Nominating Committee will not be a member of the Board of Directors. Article VI, Section 1 changes the terms of elected officers from one year to three years with a limit of two successive terms. This change will enhance continuity of leadership. Section 2 specifies that members of the Board may be re-elected without term limits. Article VII, Section 1 expands the ability of the President to delegate responsibilities, Section 3 puts the Secretary in charge of the Alliance's office functions, and Section 9 specifies that the Board of Directors shall maintain a conflict-of-interest policy. This last is required for our operation as a tax-exempt organization.

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### No Small Concern

Last summer a member of the FCAFL Board of Directors received a gratifying thank-you note from someone he had helped by providing information needed for making final arrangements for a dying mother. We have anonymized and shortened the note below:

*We are very grateful for your help in the days preceding my mother's death. The information you sent us was invaluable in making key decisions. Things could not have gone more smoothly. We would never have known about the vast differences in cost if it were not for you. The XYZ Funeral Home's comforting, efficient*

**The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Inc.**, founded in 1958 as the Ithaca Memorial Society, is a non-profit, tax-exempt, public-service organization that promotes advance planning of funeral arrangements and consumer education and protection with respect to funeral-related issues. Membership is free and open to all. Volunteers provide all services and programs. A Board of Directors is elected by the members. The FCAFL is supported entirely by donations and is a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, Inc., which has more than 90 affiliates. This Newsletter is published twice a year and is freely available.

**The Board of Directors, 2013–2014:** Donna Scott, President; Dominick Paolillo Jr., Vice President; Suzanne Kilgore, Secretary; Carol Hardy, Treasurer; Barry B. Adams (to 2016), Monty Berman (to 2014), Royal Colle (to 2016), Cathy Darrow (to 2016), Carolyn Eberhard (to 2015), Ralph Jones (to 2016), Culver Mowers (to 2016), Louise Richards (to 2016), Dorothy Sholeen (to 2015), Wayne Sinclair (to 2015). Advisors: David Bandler, Philip S. Winn.

*service was wonderful. Because we were able to make this decision prior to Mom's passing, the process moved like clockwork. Thank you again for the enormous service you provided [to] our family.*

Our correspondent clearly appreciated not just the sympathetic assistance at a time of great stress, but also the work that lay behind that assistance. Given that level of appreciation, FCAFL should be well supported by the Ithaca community. Right?

The advice we offered acquired its value in no small part from the work of investigation, compilation and dissemination by the FCAFL. That work is done by means of cost-free volunteer labor, as for example with our periodic price survey, but there are significant financial costs as well: printing brochures, maintaining a web site, and producing and mailing this newsletter all require real money. For meeting these expenses we are totally dependent on free-will donations from members of our Alliance, as well as members of the public. Since 2007, when we eliminated membership enrollment fees, membership per se provides no financial help, although the great majority of new members since mid-2007 have made enrollment gifts.

However it is disheartening that enrollment in our organization has been declining despite efforts to engage the public. Over the last six years the Alliance has presented dozens of funeral-planning seminars and workshops in Tompkins County, most of them publicly advertised and open to all. Last year the Board of Directors considered how to make senior citizens in particular more aware of the non-commercial funeral-planning information that is available from the Alliance. We sent out first-class mail pieces introducing the publications and services of the FCAFL to over 60 relevant facilities, agencies, and senior residences in our service area. Only one response was sent in return. This winter we sent a similar mailing to over 75 churches and other religious organizations in Tompkins County. As of mid-March we have seen only one response.

Without more interest in maintaining the sources of funeral knowledge on the part of at least a small segment of the public, and without a stream of new members and regular financial support from existing members, the FCA of the Finger Lakes may well fade away. Is there really such a lack of interest in helping others communicate their wishes to their survivors and in helping those survivors fulfill the wishes of their parents?

## **More About Donation of Bodies to Medical Schools**

If you are considering donation of your body to a medical school or if you already have arrangements for donation, then read this. You may already have learned that free transportation of donated bodies to the Anatomical Gifts Program at Upstate Medical University is no longer available. It is now necessary for a donor's family to engage a funeral home for transportation of a donated body from the southern Finger Lakes area to any medical school. The cost of this service varies widely among area funeral homes, so we advise calling several funeral businesses to find out what they would charge if the service were needed now. The General Price Lists of most funeral homes do not include transportation of a body to a medical school, but a funeral director will quote a price upon request. We checked a few businesses in 2013 and were given quotations ranging from near \$900 up to \$2350. You can consult the Alliance's 2013 Funeral Price Survey at our website (or the excerpt in the Fall 2013 Newsletter) to see which businesses have lower-than-average prices for listed services and are therefore likely to quote lower-than-average prices for transportation to a medical school.

Some anatomical gift programs now have enough would-be donors registered to ensure more-than-adequate availability of bodies. For this reason and others it is important for a would-be donor to be registered with the program and to have a back-up plan. Note: most programs can not accept obese bodies. See the link, *Anatomical Donations*, on the *Resources* page at our website for more information.

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## **Can We Contact You By Email?**

The Board of Directors occasionally contacts the membership about important matters, usually via the Newsletter and sometimes by mailing a letter or an announcement. The Board wants to be able to reach and receive input from members who care about the Alliance's projects and programs. If you are one of these members and are willing to receive an occasional email from the Board, then please send to us an email message with FCAFL in the title line. The body of the message can be empty or not, as you choose. Send it to [info@fingerlakesfunerals.org](mailto:info@fingerlakesfunerals.org). We will record or update your email address as seen in the "Sender" line. We promise not to annoy you with trivial messages.

## **Friends and Loved Ones Remembered**

The Alliance reports memorial donations in each Newsletter. The memories of the following people were honored by donations received since the Fall 2013 issue was published: June Drew, Patricia A. Dubin, Nina and Roy Linton, Ernest F. Schaufler, Michael Talutis, Rev. John Taylor, and Daniel Yale, MD.

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### **Costs of Obituaries**

For standard format, two-column width:

#### ***The Ithaca Journal***

\$40 set-up fee

\$25 photo fee

\$4.10 per line

Deadline: 5 PM Mon–Sat (no Sunday paper)

#### ***Elmira Star-Gazette***

\$40 set-up fee

\$25 photo fee

\$4.10 per line

Deadline: 5 PM Sun–Sat

#### ***Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin***

\$40 set-up fee

\$25 photo fee

\$6 per line

Deadline: 6PM Sun–Fri; 3:30PM Sat

#### ***The Cortland Standard***

\$5.70 per line

This price all inclusive.

A photo increases the line count by about three.

For help composing or organizing an obituary, see *Guidelines for Writing an Obituary*, available at the Alliance's website: <http://www.fingerlakesfunerals.org/resources/obituaries.html> or by contacting the Alliance's office.

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### **Love Story**

An old man lay dying in his bed. Suddenly he smelled the aroma of his favorite scones wafting into the bedroom. He gathered his remaining strength and struggled out of bed. Leaning on the wall, he slowly made his way to the kitchen door. Were it not for the pain in his body, he would have thought himself already in heaven, for there on the kitchen table were dozens of scones. Was it heaven? Or was it a final act of love from his devoted wife of sixty years? With great effort he reached the table and slumped to his knees. His withered hand trembled toward a scone at the edge of the table, then was suddenly whacked by a wooden spoon held by his wife. "Hands off" she said, "they're for the funeral."

(Story modified from one seen in *The Good Funeral Guide Blog*, January 2014)