



Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes

Fall 2018 Newsletter

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TALKING ABOUT DEATH WON'T KILL YOU

...it can help you make informed decisions about
end-of-life plans for yourself and others

Drop by Saturday, November 3 • 2:00-4:00 pm

The Space@Greenstar • enter parking lot from N. Fulton & Court St.

Explore these topics with staff from local agencies:

- ♦ health care proxies & living wills
- ♦ accessing palliative care
- ♦ hospice care
- ♦ wills & trusts
- ♦ organ donation
- ♦ funeral planning
- ♦ green burial
and more

www.facebook.com/theartofdyingwell

Brought to you by The Art of Dying Well, Cayuga Medical Center, Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network, Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Finger Lakes, Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, Hospicare, Human Services Coalition, Ithaca College Gerontology Institute, Visiting Nurse Service of Ithaca

Talking About Death Won't Kill You Join us – Saturday, November 3, 2:00-4:00 pm, The Space@Greenstar, 700 W. Buffalo Street, Ithaca

(enter at Court St. and N. Fulton) – to develop the practical know-how needed to plan well for the end of life. The format is open, so you can drop by for a few minutes or stay for two hours.

Talking about death won't kill you – it can help you make informed decisions about end-of-life plans for yourself and others.

Many people die in ways inconsistent with their values and wishes. Planning ahead provides an opportunity to think about and communicate what you do and don't want at the end of life.

Staff from local organizations can help you explore:

- advance directives: health care proxies & living wills
- accessing palliative care
- hospice care
- wills & trusts
- organ donation and how you can make a difference at any age
- funeral planning and how to control costs
- alternatives to traditional burial

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Check out the Facebook Event Link:

<www.facebook.com/theartofdyingwell/>



Cemetery Project

By Barry Adams, FCAFL vice president

A major expense not covered in the Alliance's biennial price survey is the cemetery plot and the cost to open and close that plot. Charges levied by a funeral home cover a wide range of services, including transportation to the place of burial, but the cost of the plot where the remains are laid to rest is something else again. This is pertinent to what are called "earth burials" but also of interest to those who choose to be cremated and have their cremated remains buried rather than scattered or preserved in a columbarium.

New York State's Cemetery Board and its Division of Cemeteries office regulate all cemeteries in the State except those owned by religious, private, or municipal organizations or the federal government. The total of regulated cemeteries in our service area (Tompkins and eight surrounding counties) is well over a hundred. In Tompkins County itself there are 31, plus another 30 or so that fall within the not-regulated category. All cemeteries, whether regulated by the State or not, are subject to health department regulations and local ordinances but are operated independently by individual cemetery associations or churches or municipalities, and these are the bodies that establish policies, determine restrictions, and set prices.

In keeping with the FCAFL's mission as a consumer advocacy organization, we appreciate the value of comparative pricing data of the sort presented in our price survey covering some 36 funeral homes in our service area. Because of the so-called Funeral Rule, which is based on US Congressional legislation and enforced by a federal agency, there is a reasonable degree of uniformity in the pricing information offered by funeral homes, which makes the task of comparing prices relatively easy once one amasses the General Price Lists from various funeral businesses.

There is much more variety when it comes to cemeteries, however, so much variety in fact that for practical reasons we have chosen not to attempt a survey like the one we have been doing for funeral homes prices. We are working on a directory with cemetery contact information for Tompkins County. It will be a little more detailed than our current Regional Cemetery List you can find linked on our website (www.fingerlakesfunerals.org) from the bottom of the Cemeteries page. In the course of gathering this information, we have acquired some pricing information that we wanted to share to give you a sense of the range for a body plot, a cremains plot and opening costs.

West Hill Cemetery Association, Frear Memorial Park

- Body plot: \$600 (plus \$600 to open)
- Cremains plot: \$300 (plus \$375 to open)

Brookton (formerly Quick), Brooktondale

- Body plot: \$700 (plus \$650 to open)
- Cremains plot for two sets: \$700 (plus \$300 to open)

Lake View, Ithaca

- Body plot: \$750 (plus \$700 to open)
- Cremains plot: \$500 (plus \$400 to open)

Ludlowville/Pine Grove, Lansing

- Body plot: \$400 (plus \$500 to open)
- Cremains plot: \$275 (plus \$280 to open)

Greensprings, Newfield

- Body plot \$1000 (plus \$1000 to open)
- Cremains plot: \$350 (plus \$350 to open)

Making the reaper cheaper:

Why undertakers are worried

By Peggy Haine, FCAFL board member

Condensed from a 4/29/2018 article in *The Economist*

The bereaved, better-informed, no longer always do what they are told to do or to pay whatever they are asked.

In the US, more than 19,000 funeral homes with 120,000 employees are earning more than \$16 billion a year. As baby boomers hit old age, the annual death rate will rise from 8.3 per thousand people today to 10.2 by the year 2050. So why are undertakers worried?

They report that their jobs are increasingly focused on event planning for “life celebrations,” shooting ashes into the skies with fireworks, karaoke, and tiki huts. The rising trend in direct cremation has very little role for them at all. And cremations have increased in popularity; these days more than half of American dead are cremated, up from less than 4% in 1960. (In Japan, cremation is nearly universal.)

A study in 2015 found that more than 60% of Americans older than 40 would consider a “green” burial, with no embalming and a biodegradable casket, if any. In 2010 it was just over 40%. According to one funeral director specializing in green funerals, it’s inconsistent “for someone who’s recycled all their life and drives a Prius to then be put under the ground in a concrete vault, plastic-sealed casket and with their body pumped full of chemicals.”

An alternative beginning to catch on is alkaline hydrolysis, a process that involves dissolving the body in an alkaline solution and then crushing the bones to dust, which typically produces less than a seventh of the carbon of normal cremation.

Remains have been incorporated into jewelry; one company invites the bereaved to send a blood sample of the deceased and \$500, in return for which it will send a small stainless steel capsule with the extracted DNA; Amazon and Walmart offer coffins and urns online, and while few buy them, they notice their undertaker’s often quite dramatic mark-up.

In this hypertechnical age, reviews of undertakers on Google or Yelp give consumers useful information, and software companies

sell programs that enable the bereaved to post tribute and funeral videos online. There are QR codes that can be affixed to a tombstone linking to an online tribute page.

It’s a new age in the business of death.



FCA 2018 National Conference

By Donna Scott, FCAFL board president

Every two years the national Funeral Consumers Alliance hosts a conference and this year it was held near the Genesee River in the center of



Rochester. Generous donations to FCAFL have allowed some Board members and advisors to attend these conferences for the last two occasions. Advisors David Bandler and Helene Croft, and President Donna Scott attended the June conference in Rochester.

FCA Executive Director, Josh Slocum, updated the group on the important work of the FCA. One item: He is working with the



Consumer Federation of America (CFA) to attempt to get the Federal Trade Commission to require that funeral homes nationwide put their General Price Lists on their websites. Very few funeral homes post their

prices publicly or on websites. The inspiring keynote address for this conference was given by Stephen Brobeck from the CFA and this subsequently caused us at FCAFL to become members of CFA!

The conference had a broad range of topics: Storytelling in fund raising efforts; Death Café information; the basics of social media to help FCA affiliates keep in touch with the public; various commentaries on funerals these days, as well as the history of dying and funerals in the US; obituary writing techniques; a 4-person



panel discussion on New York funeral law that was surprisingly interesting; an equally compelling talk on death with dignity; a fun talk on being a modern mortician; and finally a tour of Rochester's Mount Hope Cemetery (see following article).

It is especially interesting and fun to meet people involved in funeral consumer alliance work from all over the US and Canada. We share ideas and also slide sets and other educational materials. All in all, we have found these conferences to be very well produced given the financial constraints of the national Funeral Consumer Alliance.

Mount Hope Cemetery, Rochester, NY

By Donna Scott, FCAFL board president

One highlight of the National FCA Biennial Conference in June was a walking tour of Rochester's Mount Hope Cemetery. I eagerly signed up for the tour, because even though I was born and raised in the Rochester area and had driven by it many times and even viewed it from my parents' various hospital rooms in Strong Memorial Hospital (rather ominous!), I had never been into Mount Hope Cemetery. I was not disappointed. One of the most remarkable Victorian cemeteries in America, it spans 196 acres of short, steep hills and hidden valleys shaped by glaciers of the last Ice Age. Its terrain is truly beautiful and is right in the middle of the city.

Founded in 1838, Mount Hope was America's first municipal cemetery and it contains thousands of marble, bronze, zinc, and granite monuments. Because Rochester was and is a prosperous city, many of the monuments erected by wealthy families are quite grand and opulent. Handsome Greek Revival mausoleums abound. The fertile soil here nurtured the many large trees, including two breathtaking giant ancient beeches that have almost swallowed many of the old surrounding gravestones. These trees alone are reason enough to visit the cemetery.

Besides its array of funerary sculpture and mausoleums, the cemetery features two Gothic Revival style chapels, a certified green burial section, a garden for scattering ashes, and a newly renovated crematory. It is a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat and sponsors a nesting Bluebird project. Mount Hope's famous "residents" include Susan B Anthony and Frederick Douglass, as well as other well-known reformers, inventors, statesmen, and industrialists.



For more information about Mount Hope Cemetery, including open hours and guided tours, see <www.cityofrochester.gov/mounthope>.

Greensprings Update

By Joel Rabinowitz, FCAFL treasurer

Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, in Newfield, NY, began operating in 2006 as the first "green" or natural burial cemetery in NY State. Bodies are buried in biodegradable caskets or in shrouds, and must not be embalmed. Cremated remains ("cremains") are accepted and buried in biodegradable containers. There are no standing monuments; grave markers must be flush-to-the-ground fieldstones.

Prices have not been raised since 2014. A standard lot costs \$1000; cremains lots are \$350. Interment (open/close) fees are \$1000 for full-body burials and \$350 for cremains burials. Since opening, Greensprings has performed 316 burials and has sold well over 1000 lots.

In 2014 the cemetery purchased an adjacent property of almost 30 acres, including an old, unmaintained farmhouse and outbuildings that have recently been torn down and removed. Only about 16 acres of Greensprings' total 130 acres are presently devoted to burials, so the cemetery has room to expand the burial areas for decades to come.

Greensprings is currently engaged in an innovative project – establishing a pet

cemetery. Pending state approval, five acres of Greensprings land will be sold to a separate corporate entity, which will operate the pet cemetery.

For contact information, please visit Greensprings' website at www.naturalburial.org.



At a Death Café people drink tea, eat cake and discuss death. The aim is to “increase awareness of death to help people make the most of their (finite) lives.” Join us at the next **Ithaca Death Café, Saturday, November 10 from 2:00-4:00 pm**. If you'd like to be informed of future dates, or you'd like to discover where we will gather on November 10, drop us a line at [<deathcafeithaca@gmail.com>](mailto:deathcafeithaca@gmail.com).

Donations gratefully received

Elizabeth Einstein *in memory of* Linda Folley
 Peggy Haine *in memory of* Phil Lempert
 Cathy Paddock *in memory of* Jean Warholic
 Lucille Wernsing *in memory of* Bill Wernsing

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Antoinette S Levatich	Donations received
Lois Lounsbey	1/1/18 to 10/1/18
J Michael Lowe	<i>Sincere thanks to all our</i>
Lodewijk & Beatrice Magre	<i>donors – we couldn't do it without you!</i>

FCAFL joins the Consumer Federation of America

By Barry Adams, FCAFL board member
 At its most recent quarterly meeting (on 7/19/18), the FCAFL Board voted unanimously to join the Consumer Federation of America [<https://consumerfed.org>](https://consumerfed.org). The CFA is a not-for-profit research, education, and advocacy organization harnessing the energies of other organizations that have as their mission protecting the interests of consumers. We will be joining what is in effect a consortium of 275 organizations dedicated to advancing this effort, which the CFA has been engaged in for 50 years.

**Funeral Consumers Alliance
of the Finger Lakes**

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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 80 affiliates. This Newsletter is published twice a year and is freely available.

Check out our website: fingerlakesfunerals.org AND "LIKE" on Facebook

The Board of Directors, 2018-2019

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**Ways FCAFL helps
the public**

Those with questions about funeral planning can talk to an FCAFL volunteer by phone (607-273-8316) or by email info@fingerlakesfunerals.org

FCAFL presentations

Volunteers from FCAFL give presentations at Lifelong in Ithaca and at other venues in Tompkins County. Presentations include information on funeral planning facts with backup fliers on the numerous areas involved for planning ahead.