ANNUAL MEETING & PROGRAM

Sunday, October 15, 2017
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Rockridge Retirement Community
Community Room
25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton, MA

Light refreshments will be served. A brief business meeting will precede the program:

Answering Questions about Cemeteries

Bring your questions! For example, why do some cemeteries require “vaults” or grave liners? What happens when a cemetery runs out of space? How far in advance should I buy a plot? What is the likely cost? What are “opening and closing” costs? If our family has an extra plot, can we sell or donate it? Does the federal Funeral Rule apply to cemeteries?

Our Panel, moderated by Sandy Ward, will include
• Joshua Slocum, Executive Director, FCA
• Carol Coan, Cofounder of Green Burial MA; Caretaker, Mt. Toby Friends Burial Ground
• Joan Pillsbury, Member of Gill Cemetery Commission; Board member of Green Burial MA and FCAWM.

Special Guest: Joshua Slocum

We are delighted that Joshua Slocum will join our panel October 15. He has worked at the national Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA) since 2002, serving as Executive Director since 2003. He has appeared as an expert commentator on funeral issues in national media such as 60 Minutes and the New York Times. On behalf of FCA’s nationwide federation of consumer information groups, he has testified before Congress and helped draft federal and state statutes protecting funeral consumers.


The Funeral Consumers Alliance’s recent public policy work in conjunction with the Consumer Federation of America produced several national surveys of funeral home price disclosure policies, and led to the organizations petitioning the Federal Trade Commission to require funeral businesses to disclose their prices online.
Volunteer Opportunities

Could you … Join our board?
We have a good team of six experienced board members (Sandy Ward, Joan Pillsbury, Susie Maddern, Joanna Brown, Cecile Richard, and Miryam Williamson), but we’d like to add new voices. Currently there are three open seats. We encourage recruitment and election of interested persons who have not served before, in order to “annually reinvigorate” this organization, as stated in the FCAWM Bylaws. We meet as needed, usually only about every other month (less often when we can conduct business via email). We are seeking candidates to be elected at our annual meeting (Oct 15, see page 1).

Help with our website?
We intend to revise the FCAWM website to make it easier to maintain and more effective in conveying necessary information. Sandy Ward, our volunteer webmaster, would welcome help, especially if you have experience with WordPress (the proposed software) or website design.

Gather information about local cemeteries?
See article on next page.

Help with a price survey?
See two projects described on page 4, Eastern MA now, and Western MA in 2018. Could you visit a funeral home to collect a price list (GPL) and conduct a brief interview with the Funeral Director? Or help review and compile data?

To volunteer, please contact us. Thanks!

Reflecting on cemeteries by Joan Pillsbury

Cemeteries are interesting places to visit. Some say they are scary places but I find them a great place to stop and have a picnic – a break from a long car ride in rural New England. Cemeteries are places quiet enough to hear the birds sing or watch the clouds go by. A sacred place, ancient cultures believe a final resting place is hallowed ground that has power of the ancestors. In our western society I hear folks say the cemetery is a place to be close to their loved one. They may visit the grave to talk and connect. Every Memorial Day my mother-law would, while she was able, set out cemetery boxes for her parents and a baby that had died at birth. The point is that everyone has their own thoughts about cemeteries.

When my granddaughter was a baby we often strolled through a nearby historic cemetery. I enjoying reading the old stones engraved in the 1700-1800’s. The names like Endocia, Erlesta, Thirzah, Wealthy Ann, Experience, and Thankful made me wonder how their parents called them to dinner.

Why do cemeteries have fences? It is not to keep the dead in. In years gone by, cemeteries were locked to keep grave robbers out. I guess old traditions are hard to change. Now the fences mark the boundaries of the grave yard.

I decided to join my town’s cemetery commission because I would like to see a green cemetery in our town someday. It has turned out to be a satisfying job. I talk with people who are planning and want to purchase a lot, or families sometimes from far away that wish to bury a loved one and need the grave marked for the funeral home. Perpetual care income plus the town’s annual allocation must cover costs related to maintaining the cemetery property.

Next time you pass by a cemetery think about its history, its present, and its future.
Which Cemeteries Have Plots for Sale? Is There a Directory?

These questions are challenging. FCAWM President (and webmaster) Sandy Ward has been trying to find helpful resources to post on our website to guide consumers who are seeking available plots. We do not currently have a directory of cemeteries in western Massachusetts, other than a short list (maintained by Green Burial Massachusetts) of cemeteries known to permit green or "natural" burial.

For historic and genealogical purposes, FindaGrave.com can be useful, providing information for "over 400,000 cemeteries in over 200 different countries." If you select "Cemetery Lookup" and choose our state and one of our counties (without typing anything in the name field), you can retrieve a very long list of local cemeteries, e.g., over 200 in Hampden County, but with no information about which ones might still sell plots.

More useful is a search for cemeteries via Funerals360.com, a new service from "I'm Sorry to Hear." You can enter a zip code or city name, and retrieve Search Results with an interactive Map locating cemeteries nearby. Try their vendor search form and select "Cemetery" as type of vendor. This tool has great potential, but does not yet indicate which cemeteries are still “active.” (Rachel Zeldin, the owner, is willing to add such annotations, if we could provide the information.)

Sandy recently found online a listing of Jewish cemeteries in Massachusetts, compiled in 2010 from several sources, including The Jewish Cemetery Association of Massachusetts (see www.jcam.org) and Dunham’s Green Book of Funeral Directors of New England.

Dunham’s Green Book is probably the key tool we should have on hand, but it is marketed as a subscription to Funeral Directors, not to the public. (See http://dunhamsgreenbookonline.com/ but a required login blocks public access.) Sandy has examined a printed copy from 2013-14; it is arranged by state and then alphabetically by town or city. For each location it does indeed list Cemeteries, with contact information and some price information (e.g., “Opening fee: 880-1012”).

Should FCAWM work to create a directory of local cemeteries?

People have requested a list of the cemeteries that sell plots, and also have requested price lists for local cemeteries. Such tools would be helpful for consumers, and well within our FCAWM mission. But we haven’t had enough volunteers to tackle these new projects.

Would YOU be interested in helping?

For instance, would you enjoy exploring a cemetery or two (or more) in your own community? Or share what you already know about a cemetery your family has used? Or make phone calls to organizations or people responsible for some cemeteries? Perhaps you’d enjoy working quietly behind the scenes to extract western Massachusetts cemetery information from the resources that we’ve already identified (mentioned above). We’d also appreciate help compiling information into a spreadsheet program (e.g., Excel or Google sheets).

Please contact Sandy Ward (call or text 413-250-8079, or email fcawmass@gmail.com) if you are interested. Advice and ideas welcome. Sandy says, “Let’s have FUN with this! How about a HALLOWEEN lunch or brunch meeting to share what we’ve learned so far, and discuss next steps? October would be a lovely time to scout some cemeteries while enjoying fall foliage.”
Call to Action from FCA of Eastern Mass: Asking Volunteers to Visit Funeral Homes for 2017 Survey

Our colleagues in the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts (FCAEM) have added a new twist to their biennial price survey. In the past they had mailed survey forms to the 450+ funeral homes in eastern and central Mass, but been disappointed by low return rates. Now FCAEM is inviting volunteers (consumers) to help gather data by visiting local funeral homes and conducting brief face-to-face interviews with funeral professionals. An excellent Tool Kit was emailed to FCAEM members, with introductory instructions:

“Simply read the How To Guide for volunteers, print a copy of the survey questions and visit your funeral home(s) of choice. For each funeral home you visit, and we hope you’ll visit a few, please print a separate survey questionnaire. Once completed you can either mail us a copy of the survey or enter your results directly online …. We appreciate every funeral home interviewed and would encourage you to visit several different providers. Not only will this give you a better sense of the variety in the industry, but it may prove helpful in your own future planning needs!”

Their survey asks interesting questions. For example, does the funeral home… Allow for a viewing without embalming? Allow the use of a shroud in lieu of container? Assist a consumer conducting a home funeral? What services are provided for a green funeral/ burial request?

FCAEM recognizes that “each funeral home differs in not only price but also services and other offerings. In this vein, to promote the idea of value and choice when making arrangements, we designed the survey to capture a more descriptive summary of what an establishment has to offer.” The entire survey form can be viewed online:


Note: You could help them, if you wish. October 15, 2017 is their deadline for receiving completed surveys. If you’d like to help, email FCAEM at fcaemass@gmail.com to request their Call to Action and Tool Kit.

What do you think of that model? Should we consider it?

In Western Massachusetts, our next “price survey” is due in 2018. Usually we just collect copies of the General Price Lists, without requiring each funeral home to answer survey questions. Our response rate from our postal mailing has been quite good, but we only learn about pricing. That’s why in 2016 we dropped the word survey and titled our report a “Price Comparison Chart.”

Should we consider changes for 2018? Should we design a survey like the FCAEM model above? If so, would you help us conduct interviews? What questions would YOU like asked of the funeral homes? We will of course seek advice from our eastern colleagues about how their new process is working, and what adjustments they might recommend.

Our planning for the 2018 project will begin this winter. Please email us at fcaawmass@gmail.com or leave a message at 413-376-4747 if you have suggestions or would like to help. Thank you.
Dr. Roger Kligler, Falmouth physician and volunteer with the national organization Compassion and Choices, will speak in Northampton on Monday, October 16, 2017 at the invitation of the Pioneer Valley Death with Dignity Action Group. There will be a 1:30 p.m. talk at the Northampton Friends Meetinghouse, 43 Center Street, as well as an evening talk, 7:00 p.m. at the Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz St. Both meeting places are accessible. There will be a question and answer period after the talk. Both events are free with donations welcome.

Dr. Kligler was a primary care physician in Massachusetts for over 30 years. He has been treated for prostate cancer for many years. Living with a terminal illness, he is a strong supporter of The End of Life Options Act (H1194 and S1225), legislation which would make Massachusetts the 7th state, along with Washington DC, to allow terminally ill and mentally capable residents to end their lives if their suffering becomes intolerable. Dr. Kligler and another doctor are suing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, claiming that current state law does not prevent physicians from offering terminally ill and mentally capable adults the option of medical aid in dying.

Sponsors include
Pioneer Valley Death with Dignity Action Group, Compassion and Choices Massachusetts, Amherst Senior Center, the Lathrop Communities, Care for Our Elders, and Living Fully, Aging Gracefully Support Groups.
Spreading the word…

We continue to do outreach and education whenever good opportunities arise. This photo of Carol Coan was taken at the “Community and Campus Resource Fair” at Greenfield Community College on September 20. For two hours she and Sandy Ward answered questions and enjoyed active conversations with interested people. Carol and Joan Pillsbury had also provided information at the recent TRIAD Health & Safety Fair in Gill.

One never knows the exact outcome of such outreach, but sometimes a simple, short contact at a fair can lead to significant followup. Two positive examples:

1) At the Health and Safety Fair at the Northampton Senior Center May 11, FCAWM board member Susie Maddern spoke with Donna Coyle, Marketing Coordinator of Appleton Corp, who requested a presentation for her Resident Service Coordinator (RSC) staff. FCAWM President Sandy responded, and was invited to a regional MARSCH meeting of RSCs July 13. Each of the attending RSCs was invited to schedule an FCAWM presentation for the residents in the senior housing complexes where they work. FCAWM Board member Cecile Richard attended Sandy’s July 13 presentation and subsequently did two presentations in Holyoke senior housing buildings, while Sandy also scheduled two in August. Word traveled to an RSC in Pittsfield, who set up a coffee-hour session she title: “What you should know about your own Funeral!” Sandy drove to The Berkshire in Pittsfield, not knowing what to expect, as sometimes no one attends these optional sessions. Twenty-five people were waiting for coffee AND they stayed afterwards to listen. They asked questions, shared experiences, and kept Sandy going for almost two hours. “You made it fun!” exclaimed one woman. Five people signed up to receive FCAWM newsletters via email. Midway through the question and answer session, Gail Ullman, the RSC, surprised us as she held up a small book she and a friend had written years ago: It's Your Funeral: Have It Your Way; a step-by-step guide to help you plan your own funeral service (Outskirts Press, Denver Co, 2008). She presented the book to Sandy, thanking her for the informative session.

2) Loomis Village in South Hadley held a Health and Wellness Fair May 31, with a space set aside for FCAWM (based on our presence in past years), but the invitation didn’t reach us until the day before. Joanna Brown, a South Hadley resident and FCAWM board member, was able to deliver brochures and handouts just in time. Sandy was able to come only briefly, but there she met a new representative of the UMass Medical School Anatomic Donation Program who provided essential information to update our handout on the subject. Months later, a Loomis Village resident who had picked up our handouts at the fair called FCAWM asking if a similar organization might exist in New York, where a terminally-ill family member lives. The telephone conversation led to an in-person visit, with Sandy bringing Before I Go, You Should Know planning kits, an FCAWM membership form, and other information. While there, Sandy guided the person to the national FCA website, and to the appropriate New York affiliate; NY has many different FCA groups, and it wasn’t immediately clear which one to select. A very helpful price survey was found, listing prices and addresses for the funeral homes in and near the relevant city.

YOU can help spread the word. Please invite us to bring information to your club, church, social group or neighborhood. Tell your friends about the helpful resources FCAWM provides. Thanks!
Please make checks payable to FCAWM and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.
Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I’m enclosing my voluntary contribution of ___$15 ___$25 ___$50 ___$100 or $________

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is $30.) I am enclosing $______

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of $_____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page, spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum $15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: ________________________________________ Telephone: _________________________
Address (if different from that on reverse side): ____________________________________________
E-mail: ________________________________ Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No

Thank you!

Online Giving
We accept donations and memberships online. You may donate by credit card or by e-check:

funeralconsumerswmass.org/join/donate.html

Your contributions help us reproduce and distribute educational materials, including our brochures, newsletter and price reports, and cover other costs (phone, website) of serving the public. All of our funding comes from voluntary contributions.

Your support is very much appreciated. You help keep this consumer education and advocacy organization going, enabling us to help others.

Thank you!

Words of Thanks from the Public
(from this summer’s phone calls)

Thank you. Thank you so much.
We need people like you.

Thanks a lot for all the good work you do.
I’m very thankful for the newsletter.

Extremely helpful.

I really appreciate your knowledge.

So extremely helpful! I’m glad I found your website. I really was lost.

Thank you so much.
We are pleased to announce that

Joshua Slocum, Executive Director, FCA

will be participating in our

Annual Meeting and Program

“Answering Questions about Cemeteries”

Sunday, October 15, 2017, 2:00-4:00 pm

Rockridge Retirement Community, 25 Coles Meadow Rd, Northampton

Come join us! See page 1 for more information about Joshua Slocum and this program.

Also of note: Dr. Roger Kligler, a Falmouth physician who volunteers with the national organization Compassion and Choices, will give two free talks in Northampton on

Monday, October 16, 2017:

The Death I Want: A Doctor Fights for His and Our Last Rights

See page 5 for locations, times, and more information.