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Bay Area Funeral Society

Summer/Fall Newsletter

Bay Area Funeral Society
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Summer/Fall 2010

The Bay Area Funeral Society (BAFS) is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to protecting the funeral consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable death care.



BAFS is Evolving - Help Us Revitalize This Important Organization

The Bay Area Funeral Society's mission is evolving. In the past, the organization's main function was to provide access to affordable death care. Negotiating with funeral homes, we use the power of collective bargaining to get discounted burial and cremation packages for our members. This is a great service, and we will continue to provide it into the future. However, the emphasis of our work has shifted so that—instead of being primarily a “buyers club”—we have become (or are in the process of becoming) a true funeral consumer advocacy group. This means that our mission is not only to facilitate economical funerals, but also to educate consumers about their rights and options; follow state legislation that will limit choice or increase cost; and play “watch dog” to local funeral businesses which may be manipulating people in our communities.

Since becoming president of the group in February, I've done a lot to effect this transition. For example, our

website has been redesigned so that, while it promotes membership, it also provides useful information on planning ahead, funeral prices in the Bay Area, organ/tissue donation, alternative funeral options, financial resources, and much more. We've given presentations on affordable, green, and home funerals at libraries, hospices, and nursing homes. I've also been looking into complaints about violations of California's pre-need laws and monitoring legislation that may affect the funeral rights of military men and women.

But this is not sustainable. BAFS cannot be a two-person show (myself and one active volunteer). Right now, we are seeking 5 members to actively participate on our Board of Directors. A term is two years, and there is no limit to the number of terms that a member can serve. The board meets face-to-face once a month, and members are expected to be engaged with projects between meetings. The minimum time commitment is

1-2 hours per week. If you are interested, please contact me for an application. BAFS needs board members who understand (or are willing to learn about) funeral issues. Those with legal, technical, promotional, financial, or fundraising skills are indispensable to any successful non-profit, so if you have experience in any of these areas, please consider joining the board. This newsletter is going out to about 1,500 people. Surely there are at least five of you who appreciate what BAFS can do for the public and who want to help make it the great organization that it has the potential to be.

In addition to board members, we also desperately need volunteers. We need people to take phone calls; contact hospices, churches, and senior centers to schedule presentations; work on the cemetery survey; mail “New Member Packets”; follow legislation; post flyers and engage in PR. If you think that you might be

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interested in any of these things, I urge you to contact me.

To our membership: your talents and skills are needed now! When funeral consumers don't know their rights and options, they end up getting hurt both financially and emotionally. You can help prevent this from happening by becoming a board member or a volunteer.

Tracy Auclair, President



Money Saving Tips for Funeral Consumers

1. Only buy what you want.
2. Consider the no-frills "direct burial" or "immediate cremation" options.
3. Skip embalming. Embalming is not routinely required by law.
4. Plan a memorial service without the body present.
5. Consider handling all of the arrangements yourself.

BAFS Policy Change

On April 1st, 2010, BAFS changed its enrollment/mortuary selection process. In the past, members not only kept copies of the enrollment form for themselves and their families, but also mailed copies to their selected mortuaries and to us. The new policy is this: members still keep copies for themselves and their survivors, but that's it. In order to receive the BAFS discount, survivors must provide the funeral home with the enrollment form at the time of death.

The reasons for this change are myriad. First, the old process had the unintended effect of discouraging members from pre-planning with their families. Too often, members die and their survivors have no idea that they had enrolled with BAFS. When adult children come across BAFS paperwork in the things of a recently deceased parent, they assume that mom or dad purchased a pre-need funeral. Then they call us for a refund. Other families simply walk into a funeral home, say that the deceased was a member of BAFS, and provide no documentation at all. Still others contact us, thinking that we're a mortuary, and become annoyed when they discover that we are not. The new policy should put an end to this confusion.

Another problem with the current process is that, Deer Creek, a funeral home with which we contracted in the past, has been using the

enrollment forms for marketing purposes. None of our current cooperating funeral homes engage in this practice. Still, the new policy will act as a safeguard.

Finally, the change simplifies the process of enrollment for everyone involved. Less copying and mailing.

Presentations on Affordable, Green, and/or Home Funerals

If you know of an organization or group that may be concerned about the high cost of dying or interested in "alternative" funeral practices (home funerals, green funerals), recommend a BAFS presentation. As part of our community outreach program, we conduct free information sessions and would welcome the opportunity to address your church, social club, senior center, etc.

Keep in Touch Electronically

About one hundred members with email addresses received information about recent BAFS events. The rest of our subscribers were not informed. If we do not have your email address, please submit it through the "Existing Members" form on our website.

Support the National Funeral Consumers Alliance!

You know the value of your membership in the Bay Area Funeral Society, but do you know about the extraordinary work of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA)? Among many other things, the FCA

- Lobbies on the national level for funeral consumer protection laws. For instance, thanks to the FCA's efforts, Rep. Bobby Rush recently introduced the Bereaved Consumers Bill of Rights Act. This bill will require cemeteries, crematories, and every other death-care vendor to give you (1) honest information about the goods and services that they sell, (2) the right to choose only what you want, and (3) the right to printed, plain-language information on cemetery and crematory services.
- Monitors funeral consumer protection laws in each state and helps local affiliates intervene when industry lobbying groups try to take away consumer choice or raise prices.
- Answers 10,000 emails, phone calls, and letters every year - thousands of these are folks looking for local affiliates like the Bay Area Funeral Society.
- Represents the 100 FCA groups and all funeral consumers in the national and

local media, including the New York Times, CBS News, NPR, and the Washington Post.

- Offers dozens of pamphlets on funeral planning that groups like ours can use for free, as well as low-cost planning kits.
- Maintains a fantastic website chock full of funeral consumer information.

FCA is a one-of-a-kind organization—no one else acts as a watchdog on the \$15 billion-a-year funeral industry and no other nonprofit organization lobbies to protect your right to be free from funeral rip-offs. But, watchdogs need to be fed. Please make a fully tax-deductible donation to the national FCA.

You can donate at www.funerals.org or mail a check to:

33 Patchen Road
South Burlington, VT 05403

Better yet, consider pledging \$5 or 10/month for the coming year. They can set it up as a monthly deduction from your checking account, Visa or MasterCard or through PayPal. They won't share your donor info with anyone outside the FCA.

Thank you!

Want a Green Burial?

A green burial has two components: what happens at the funeral home and what happens at the cemetery.

AT THE FUNERAL HOME

Embalming is not required by law. So if you want a green burial, then skip this toxic and often expensive option.

Choose a biodegradable casket or shroud. If your funeral home doesn't sell them, then bring your own. For a list of eco-friendly shroud and casket vendors, visit The Green Burial Council at <http://www.greenburialcouncil.org> or The Natural Burial Company <http://www.naturalburialcompany.com>.

AT THE CEMETERY

In California, "Vaults or grave liners are not required by law, but because they keep the ground from settling after burial and make mowing and maintenance easier, cemeteries may have their own policies regarding them" (The Cemetery and Funeral Bureau's "Consumer Guide to Funeral & Cemetery Purchases").

Call cemeteries in your area and ask if they will accommodate you.

Check out our cemetery survey at <http://www.bafswb.org/pdfs/CemeterySurvey2010.pdf>

Choose a cemetery featured on The Natural End website.

Consult the Green Burial Council's online list of approved cemeteries.

When shopping for a cemetery, ask if they allow the use of biodegradable shrouds and caskets.

For a Donation of \$25...

Receive a BAFS T-Shirt!

The T-Shirts are green and come in both men's and women's sizes - small, medium, and large. To order, please visit our website at <http://www.bafsweb.org>.



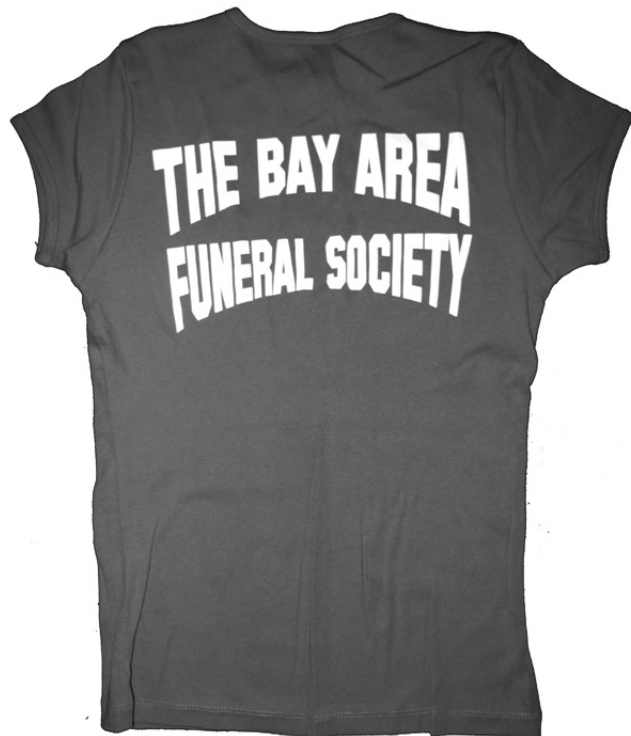
Men's (Front)



Men's (Back)



Women's (Front)



Women's (Back)

Bay Area Funeral Society Contracting Providers

1/1/2009-1/1/2011

In order for the contracted price to be honored, your survivors must furnish your selected funeral home with a completed copy of this form at the time of need. If you need another copy of the Mortuary Selection Form, you can print one up from our website. Visit bafsweb.org and click on "Members." Then choose "Existing Members" from the drop-down menu.

A Special Touch Funeral & Cremation

11848 Dublin Blvd.
Dublin, CA 94568
(925)875-1343

Service Area:
Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

Direct Cremation: \$995*
Immediate Burial: \$1,695*
* \$60 Pacemaker Removal
* After Hours Add \$150
* Non-Hospital Removal Add \$125

Bay Area Cremation & Funeral Services

Offices in San Francisco, Brentwood, Oakland & other areas
(800)916-4888

Service Area: SF, Alameda, Contra Costa Counties

Direct Cremation: \$859*
Immediate Burial: \$1,700*
* Pacemaker Removal Add \$150
* After Hours Add \$139 (5pm+ & weekends)
* Non-Hospital Removal Add \$139

Fremont Memorial Chapel

3723 Peralta Blvd.
Fremont, CA 94536
(510)793-8900

Service Area: Alameda County

Direct Cremation: \$995*
Immediate Burial: \$1,700*
* After Hours Add \$150
* Non-Hospital Removal Add \$150

Adobe Creek Funeral Home

331 Lakeville Street
Petaluma, CA 94952
(707)789-9000

Service Area: Marin and Sonoma Counties

Direct Cremation: \$963.50
Immediate Burial: \$1,285

Allied Cremation & Burial

All arrangements are made in your home.
1(877)916-4779

Service Area: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, Marin, Napa, Sonoma Counties

Direct Cremation: \$895
Immediate Burial: \$1795
Non-Attended Scattering at Sea: \$100
Private Charter Scattering: \$755
Pacemaker Removal, After Hours Removal, Non-Hospital Removal: No Charge

Bryant Mortuary

635 Fulton
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415)861-4559

Service Area: Within 15 miles of Bryant Mortuary

Direct Cremation: \$895*
Immediate Burial: \$1,052*
* After Hours Add \$75 (5pm-8am)

Pacific Interment

1094 Yerba Buena Ave
Emeryville, Ca 94608
(510)450-0187

2100 Folsom St.
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415)431-9940

Service Area: Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco

Direct Cremation: \$950
Immediate Burial: \$1,405

Catholic Cemeteries Protest Regulation, Delay Bill to Protect Cemetery Consumers

4/14/2010 - An alarmist letter from the Catholic Cemeteries Conference (CCC, a lobbying association) delayed the mark-up of HR3655, the Bereaved Consumers Bill of Rights Act of 2009. Sponsor Bobby Rush pulled the bill from markup in the House Energy and Commerce Committee May 5 after the CCC sent a letter to lawmakers full of exaggerated and just plain false claims. HR3655 would extend the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule to cemeteries, crematories, and third-party merchandise sellers. Consumers would have the right to printed, itemized price lists, freedom of choice in purchase, and accurate information. The bill will likely be resubmitted to the Committee after Rep. Rush has time to consider the situation.

In a bid to persuade lawmakers to exempt religious cemeteries from minimal requirements for transparency, the CCC claimed the bill would interfere with the religious freedoms of Catholic cemeteries through the "federalization of local religious operations," and by allowing the government to "polic[e] what religious organizations say to their members." Objecting to the idea that Catholics who buy burials at church cemeteries are "consumers"-and ignoring the fact that parishioners usually pay thousands

of dollars for the privilege-the Conference claimed Catholic cemeteries were a "ministry," and therefore off-limits to regulators.

Crying government interference with religious practice is fightin' words in the United States. Real instances of government meddling in religious practices should alarm anyone, but the CCC is crying wolf. Nothing in HR3655 would interfere in any way with the religious burial rites or practices of any faith tradition. It would merely:

- Require all cemeteries to give grieving families printed price lists before they buy
- Require all cemeteries to give families copies of cemetery rules and regulations on permissible monuments, maintenance, etc.
- Give all cemetery consumers the right to buy only the merchandise they desire, and allow them to buy cemetery goods from third party vendors
- Prohibit cemeteries from lying about legal requirements (claiming, for example, that grave vaults are required by law)

How would this interfere with any religious ritual? What religion holds an an article of faith that members who pay for church-run cemetery services should be denied price and rule information? None, of course, and we can't imagine why any religiously operated cemetery would object to rules that require ethical, honest, transparent treatment of vulnerable consumers during a difficult and costly transaction.

Funeral Consumers Alliance pushed back with a letter correcting the misinformation and fear-mongering. They noted:

- The bill imposes next-to-no costs, just the price of a few sheets of paper and the time it takes to alert staff of consumer rights
- The nation's 21,000 funeral homes have been subject to these same rules for 26 years and no harm has come to the mortuary business
- Families who choose burial in religious cemeteries deserve the same basic consumer protections as all other families

Donations

Your contributions make it possible for The Bay Area Funeral Society to do the following:

- Produce a biennial funeral price survey
- Provide free advice on burial and cremation options over the phone and through email
- Offer educational presentations to hospices, senior centers, church groups and other interested assemblies
- Conduct a cemetery survey which will allow consumers to compare plot/niche prices (in progress)
- Improve our literature and website
- Hold annual meetings
- Screen documentaries on funeral-related topics

Did you know that you can donate online?

Please visit our website at <http://www.bafsweb.org> and click on the purple "Donate Now!" button at the top of any page.

Any amount would be greatly appreciated!

My special gift of \$ _____ is enclosed

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

My group would like to have a BAFS speaker. Call me at _____

Please return your donation and this tear-off slip to:

Bay Area Funeral Society
P.O. Box 264
Berkeley, CA 94701

BAFS is a 501 [c] [4] nonprofit; gifts are not tax-deductible