

Southwest Funeral Consumer

Spring 2009 Vol. 15, No. 1



**Newsletter of Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest
Providing Education and Information to Consumers in
Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico and environs.**

**Phone 972-509-5686 or 1-800-371-2221
FuneralConsumersAllianceNorthTexas.org
Email: info@funeralconsumersalliancenorthtexas.org**

It's Your Alliance

President Barak Obama has promised a transparency in his government. The Funeral Consumers Alliance of North Texas (FCANT) endorses that principal and always has.

This twice yearly newsletter will address that issue. It is a call for you, as a member, to attend with friends and family, the annual member's meeting Sunday, May 17th.

And just as President Obama has promised much in the way of change, your board of directors have made some monumental changes in the Alliance that we will need you to examine and vote upon.

The primary change is the changes in the Alliance by-laws that will need the voted approval of those members in attendance. The changes have been necessary so that we may continue to be exclusively an educational body 501C3 within the IRS Code. That will make any donation you make as a member tax deductible.

Attend the Annual Meeting

Sunday, May 17th

3:00 pm

First Unitarian Church

**4015 Normandy, north of Preston Road and Mockingbird
(Mapsco 35K)**

This Year's Speaker

The sale of body parts after death has become a pressing issue here in the state of Texas. One bill before the State Legislature (SB284) addresses the need for some sort of controlling laws.

The speaker at this year's Membership Annual Meeting is Ricky Morris of the LifeLegacy Foundation's Houston office. He will have the answers to such questions as : How are body parts donated? To whom? Can they be sold? Where do the body parts go once they are donated?

These are questions your family may need answered. That's another reason to bring family members with you to the meeting on May 17th.



President's Report

Our President, Jim Bates, is a busy man involved as he is with the fight to defend the rights of the consumers. This past spring he has been a guest speaker at affiliated alliances in Houston and San Antonio. It is an example of how his stature statewide is growing. His abilities are recognized not only by consumers, but by those in the Funeral Industry lobbying ranks.

There have been twelve bills introduced to this session of the Legislature on subjects related to the funeral industry. Of the dozen, four are of primary interest to your Alliance. President Jim Bates is called upon to monitor those bills when they are presented at public hearings and to continue his attention when dealing with individual legislators. So far this session he has had to journey to Austin four times.

As you learned earlier in this news letter, the growing involvement of the funeral industry with the sale of body parts holds much of Jim's attention. During the month of March he testified at a Senate hearing on a bill (SB 284) that seeks to establish laws surrounding the donation of body parts. The senate committee hearing took his advice and included additional wording in the bill that would require any packaging of tissues to include a label stating "Contents derived from donated human tissue."

The purpose of the labeling is to help families of the deceased feel more comfortable the donated body parts will be treated with respect throughout the commercial stream.

Jim's advice and testimony gave rise to a supportive article by Paul Burka, a well known and well regarded Texas journalist.

But it is not only bills having the attention of the Texas Funeral Service Commission that draw Jim's interest. He met with the **Texas Banking Commission** to discuss parts of Chapter 154 of the Finance Code. His object was to have included wording that would protect the rights of those who have entered into prepaid funeral contracts. He added language to require a website to contain consumer information. Banking industry lobbyists agreed to that language.

Another activity of President Bates was with the **Texas Health Resources** to establish some kind of policies on how long a body can stay in a hospital following death. That is time a family must use to chose a funeral home. When families are rushed in the decision making process they may find themselves forced into agreements they would not make if they were given the time to make a deliberated choice.

Bates' journeys to Austin and beyond do not come cheaply. That's another reason that we ask you consider making a tax deductible donation to the Alliance.

Just for your own information - and in case you have planned to lobby in Austin for some personal reason - you should be aware that Jim usually takes along several packages of raisin and oatmeal cookies he makes himself. Some lobbyists in Austin have been asking for the recipe. There's another reason you should come to the annual meeting in May. You might want to ask Jim for the recipe yourself.

A little old lady, aged 93, was getting married for the fourth time.

Her husband-to-be was a funeral director. A reporter asked her about her life and learned she had been married three times before.

"My first husband was a banker and he left me a lot of money," she said. "My second husband," she continues, " was an actor. My third husband was a preacher, and this new husband is a funeral director.

"It's a case of : One for the Money. Two for the Show. Three to get Ready. And Four to Go."



Keeping in Touch

You might wish to try out our new website address. It's a long one: "FuneralConsumersAllianceNorthTexas.org."

You will find much in the way of good information including:

- A copy of the re-written by laws,
- How to conduct a funeral at home,
- President's reports on action in Austin.

You will also find a place on the right side of the screen that will help you make a donation.

Volunteers Always Welcome

We need volunteers to help with the work of your Alliance. Several news stories in the press have indicated that these tough fiscal times have encouraged Americans to donate part of their forced leisure toward non-profits. We can always use your help

We always need help in the collection of information. We can always use help in the twice yearly job of sticking address labels onto the news letters. We can always use help in answering phone calls from folks who seek our help.

Here's a couple of examples of phone calls and the results:

A member who transferred to North Texas from the Alliance in San Antonio called. He

thought we handled funeral arrangements. We do not. He was referred to a low cost cremation service here which was what he wanted. He followed up with a call back thanking us for the experience.

Another call came from a man in Farmington, New Mexico who had been a member of a Funeral Consumer Alliance in Arizona. He needed some help in finding a crematory and some direction on how his mother's body could be delivered there. He got the information he was seeking, and called back to thank us for our help, and to say he had saved more than a thousand dollars in costs, and to say he had a good feeling about being helped to be able to handle the care of his mother's body by himself.

Please take a moment to fill out and return this coupon to:

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest, 2875 East Parker Rd, Plano, TX 75074-7503

We have reorganized our reply coupon to make it easier to volunteer:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number or Cell Number : _____

E-mail : _____

Can you volunteer time? : _____

Can you send us a tax deductible donation to help in our work to protect your rights?

\$10.00 _____

\$25.00 _____

\$35.00 _____

Would you prefer to receive this news letter by e-mail?



More than Price Lists

In the past we were an all volunteer organization that sought out the lowest prices of dignified funerals, made those price lists available to our membership and sought to increase our membership.

Now funeral homes are required to reveal their price lists and to itemize the services either on their web sites or on the phone when you call.

We are still an all volunteer organization with much to do and we urge our membership to ask questions when shopping for funeral services or for other end of life services such as palliative care or hospice. We encourage our membership to realize that life is finite and we should prepare ourselves and those we leave behind for the end.

Make an Effort to Attend

A greater part of our Alliance's effort is now devoted to lobbying Austin to be sure that consumers have protection in end of life issues. No matter how successful the lobbying efforts are they do not come cheaply so your tax deductible donations are still required and sought after.

The burgeoning field of the sale of body parts from the newly departed should be of particular interest. The Speaker at our May meeting, Ricky Morris, will address that issue. Added to that will be a report on how your alliance has monitored state law in this area.

The changing role of your Alliance has necessitated a rewriting of the by-laws and that is another reason why you should make every effort to attend the regular annual meeting to hear what those changes are and why they were needed.

We ask you to bring a friend or a family member to the meeting. Your attention here could affect everyone in Texas.

Read this newsletter then pass it on to a relative or a friend.

Funeral Consumers of North Texas now has a membership of nearly five thousand .

**Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest
2875 East Parker Road
Plano, TX 75074-7503**

Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG U.S. POSTAGE PAID PLANO, TX PERMIT NO. 877
--