



# CREATIVE CHOICES

## In this issue . . .

- Biennial 1
- Donna & Rich (pict.) 1
- AMBIS Briefs 2
- Body donation 2
- Providing lower-cost goods and services 3

Summer 2006

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), a nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational and consumer association organized to encourage informed planning about end-of-life issues. AMBIS is a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

## FCA Biennial called best ever by many

By Josh Slocum, FCA Executive Director

If you didn't attend the 2006 Funeral Consumers Alliance Biennial Conference in Austin, you missed what dozens of participants called the best national conference FCA has ever put on. It's not the same as being there, but here's a recap of the presentations. Several presenters made their remarks available electronically — check them out on our Web site at <[www.funerals.org/biennial06](http://www.funerals.org/biennial06)>.

The lion's share of credit for this conference goes to the wonderful folks at the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), our Austin affiliate that hosted the conference. From the initial planning last year right up through the end of the conference, the volunteers were well-organized, tireless, and resourceful. We never could have pulled it off without their help in planning, assembling registration packets, name tags, signs, book sales, and a hundred other tasks. Our special thanks go to Donna Belk, Daesene Willmann, Sandra Booth, Lamar Hankins, Ed Salisbury, and too many others to name. Thank you!

### Plenary Sessions

*Joshua Slocum, FCA Executive Director — FCA: Who We Are, What We Do, and Why You Should Care*

Slocum described the past 67 years of the funeral consumer movement, from the founding of Peoples Memorial Association in 1939, the formation of the Continental Association of Funeral and Memorial Societies in 1963, to Funeral Consumers Alliance today. From the movement's beginnings as a collection of cooperative funeral buying clubs to its function today as an industry watchdog and consumer lobbying force, Slocum challenged the audience to find new ways to ensure families everywhere have the right to funerals they want at prices they can afford.

*Gere Fulton, FCA Immediate Past President — State of the Alliance: FCA's Finances*

Stepping down after eight years on the FCA Board, Fulton discussed the ups and downs of the organization's budget. Important highlights included the nearly half-million dollars raised in 2000 and 2001 from the organization's "Before I Go" end-of-life planner and FCA's work to boost fundraising to keep the organization on solid footing.

*Kerin Coughlin, Attorney at Law, Constantine-Cannon — FCA*

*vs. SCI, et. al: A Class Action Lawsuit*

Coughlin illuminated the complex antitrust lawsuit FCA has filed against the three largest Wall Street funeral companies and the largest casket maker in the U.S. She described how the consumer class action should stop corporate "deathcare" from keeping casket prices astronomically high and costing families millions — perhaps billions — more than they should have to pay.

*Continued on page 3-Biennial*



Pictured above at his last meeting of the AMBIS Governing Council is Richard Thompson, outgoing President. To his right is Donna Belk, the newly-elected AMBIS Governing Council President, who is holding a copy of the book *Famous Last Words*, presented to the Governing Council by Rich as a departing gift. Rich has moved to Colorado.

## AMBIS BRIEFS

### Receive newsletter electronically

If you would like to receive *Creative Choices* by email, please send the request to <mail@ambis.info>. A copy will be posted on the AMBIS website, also. If you would like to receive both a hard copy and the electronic copy, please tell us to leave you on the newsletter mailing list. Those who receive the newsletter electronically will also receive periodic notices of interest.

### Belk new President of Governing Council

Donna Belk has been elected President of the AMBIS Governing Council to replace Richard Thompson, who has moved to Colorado.

### Board member vacancies filled

Edward Salisbury was elected to fill Richard Thompson's term, which expires in 2008. Edward has been interested in end of life issues for decades, especially in churches setting up funeral committees. He has written for the *Senior Advocate*, is a certified Toastmaster speaker, and is a long-time AMBIS member.

Chauncey Ashburn was elected to fill Rebecca Melancon's seat, which expires in 2007. Chauncey has been an AMBIS member for years and recently became a volunteer in the AMBIS office. She has been trained to substitute for Cris Cunningham picking up the mail, recording contributions and processing new memberships. She is eager to learn and do more for the organization.

One other position on the Governing Council is scheduled to be filled at the Council's August meeting.

### Central Texas Veterans Cemetery

A new Veterans Cemetery is now open in Central Texas:  
Central Texas State Veterans cemetery  
11463 South Highway 195  
Killeen Texas 76542

For additional information, contact Jack Slayton, State Cemetery Program Director in Austin at 512-463-5977.

### 2007 Annual Meeting date is set

The date for the 2007 AMBIS Annual Meeting is set for February 7, 2007. Details will be included in the Fall and Winter newsletters.

### Cemetery survey volunteers needed

Volunteers are needed to gather information for the next periodic cemetery survey. The last one was completed two years ago. A volunteer is needed, also, to coordinate the project. The costs of cemetery goods and services are taken from a sampling of cemeteries in Bastrop, Hays, Travis, Caldwell and Williamson counties. Please contact Donna Belk if you are interested in participating in this vital survey work at <dbelk@austin.rr.com> or by phone at 922-8043, or leave a message at the AMBIS office at 480-0555.

### Membership and Outreach Committees

Membership and Outreach functions have been divided between two committees. Daesene Willmann, Chauncey Ashburn, and Edward Salisbury are members of the Outreach Committee. The Membership Committee will be constituted at a future meeting of the Governing Council.

### New Volunteer Coordinator named

Alana Carpenter-Moore has been named AMBIS' Volunteer Coordinator, succeeding Barbara Sell in that position.

## Texas Institutions With Whole Body Donation Programs

Contact any of the following medical institutions for specific information on their requirements for whole body donation. It is important to have alternate disposition plans in the event whole body donation is not possible. Donated bodies are cremated after their use for teaching or research. Arrangements can be made to have cremated remains returned to the donor's family. Tim Schneider updated this information for AMBIS.

Texas Tech University  
Health Science Center-School of Medicine  
Lubbock, TX 79430  
806-743-2700

University of Texas (\*100 miles)  
Health Science Center at San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX 78284-7762  
210-567-3900

Texas A & M University (\*100 miles)  
Health Science Center, College of Medicine  
College Station, TX 77843-1114  
979-845-4913

University of North Texas (\*50 miles)  
Health Science Center at Fort Worth  
Fort Worth, TX 76107-2699  
817-735-2047  
(charges \$125 for final disposition by cremation)

University of Texas (\*75 miles)  
Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX 75235  
214-648-2221  
(unplanned donations are charged \$200 for body removal)

Baylor College of Medicine (\*100 miles)  
Houston, TX 77030  
713-798-3858

University of Texas (\*300 miles)  
Health Science Center-Medical School,  
Houston, TX 77225  
713-500-5603

Baylor College of Dentistry (\*250 miles)  
Texas A & M University System HSC, Dallas, TX 75246  
214-828-8270

Parker College of Chiropractic  
Dallas, Texas 75229  
214-902-3473

Texas Chiropractic College  
Pasadena, Texas 77505  
281-998-6025

\*Distance from place of death to institution to receive free transportation. Beyond this distance, charges may apply.

*Biennial - continued from page 1*

*Billy Campbell and Joe Sehee, Ramsey Creek Preserve and the Green Burial Council — Green Burial*

Campbell and Sehee are the foremost U.S. experts on green burial, disposing of the body naturally without embalming, coffins, vaults and other products that interfere with the natural process. Campbell founded the Ramsey Creek Preserve, the first green burial ground in the U.S. dedicated to conserving the land in a natural state. Sehee has worked to develop standards for green burial and conservation-based cemeteries in several states, and is the executive director of the Green Burial Council. See [www.decentburial.org](http://www.decentburial.org).

*Steve Wolens, Attorney at Law, Baron and Budd: Taking on Wall Street 'Deathcare'*

An experienced lawyer and a Texas lawmaker for 27 years, Wolens wowed the audience with the details of his consumer lawsuit against what he calls “the largest funeral home chain in the galaxy,” corporate funeral giant Service Corporation International (SCI). Wolens accuses the company of defrauding consumers for failing to disclose the giant markups the company takes on caskets, among other things.

*Gere Fulton and Lamar Hankins (FCA Past President): Buyer's Club, Consumer Advocacy, or Both?*

Fulton and Hankins debated the pros and cons of funeral consumer groups focusing on bargaining for discount funerals, or on educating the public to shop around on its own. Fulton believes FCA groups should move away from working with “cooperating” funeral homes altogether, while Hankins thinks there’s a place for co-op buying power and public education.

*Robert Falcon, Funeral Director— Competition Comes to the Funeral Industry*

Falcon’s presentation was a big hit. With candid humor he took aim at the “traditional” funeral industry with its overpriced offer

ings, and described his ideas about the future of funeral service. Instead of focusing on a few high-priced funerals per year, Falcon said, funeral homes should concentrate on building a larger volume of customers in order to offer more moderate prices.

### **Breakout Sessions**

*Ray Gurney, Legislative Liaison for FCA of Greater Milwaukee — FCA Affiliate Lobbying: Yes It's Legal, Yes You Can, and Yes You Should!*

Gurney, a former FCA National Board Member, described how Wisconsin almost lost the option of using lower-cost, nontraditional funeral homes last year when industry trade associations lobbied to outlaw them in the Dairy State. The experience convinced him of the need for FCA groups to stay on top of legislative developments and ensure lawmakers don’t fall for protectionist law proposals started up as “consumer protection” by entrenched funeral industry trade guilds.

*Jessie Zander, Chairwoman of the Speaker's Bureau of the FCA of Southern Arizona: Forming an Effective Speakers' Committee for your FCA*

A former school teacher and administrator, Zander stressed the

importance of any active speakers’ committee to spread the word about FCA affiliates’ service to the community. Zander shared tips on finding community groups for educational seminars, and funeral-related topics that generate audience interest.

*Joshua Slocum, Executive Director, Funeral Consumers Alliance — Funeral Home Price Lists Demystified: How to Detect Funeral Rule Violations on Mortuary Price Sheets*

Slocum explained what the Federal Trade Commission’s Funeral Rule requires, and how FCA affiliates can judge whether funeral homes are complying with these consumer protection regulations. He stressed the importance of making sure funeral home price lists contain accurate information and legally required disclosures so families understand what they’re buying.

*Jerri Lyons and Donna Belk: Home and Family-Directed Funerals*

Nationally recognized home funeral expert Jerri Lyons introduced the audience to the basics of home funerals, legal requirements, and encouraging family participation in funeral arrangements. Donna Belk of Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society described how she formed Crossings Care Circle <[www.crossingscircle.org](http://www.crossingscircle.org)>, a local volunteer organization that helps families take control of their own funerals. Jerri’s website is <[www.final-passages.org](http://www.final-passages.org)>. Ω

## **Should AMBIS offer discounted funeral and cremation prices?**

This is a question that the Governing Council will be discussing over the next several months as it considers the need for special funeral and cremation prices for members. On one side of the argument is that anything that saves people funeral costs is good and attracts members to AMBIS. On the other hand, a quick look at what AMBIS does demonstrates that AMBIS provides more than lower-cost deathcare goods and services.

AMBIS also assists the community by providing:

- Information and education regarding requirements and options in making after-death arrangements.
- Forms to pre-plan your wishes regarding after-death arrangements.
- Quarterly newsletters covering funeral consumer issues and organizational activities consumer issues
- An annual price survey of local funeral homes
- A Speakers Bureau to provide presentations to churches, civic, and professional Groups
- Consumer protection through education, legislation and action
- Transfer of benefits to the nearest Funeral Consumers Alliance or Memorial Society if you move from this area
- Annual Meetings to continue the education process and provide an opportunity to meet other members
- The “Before I Go” kit, as discussed in Dear Abby, which includes Texas advance planning documents.

What do you think AMBIS should do about offering lower-cost funeral and cremation goods and services? Let the Governing Council hear your views on this question. Ω

## Please Help Us Keep Our Mailing List Current

Be sure to let AMBIS know if your address changes. It will help us keep our mailing costs down. If you move out of the area, we can help you transfer your membership. Send changes by email, call the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555 or send this form with the old address to AMBIS

My new or corrected address is:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

New or correct address

\_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone

\_\_\_\_\_

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Summer 2006



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If mailing an address correction, please clip and mail to AMBIS at P.O.Box 4382, Austin, TX 78765, or take to AMBIS office in the Austin Groups for the Elderly Bldg. at 3710 Cedar St., Room 112 (at 38th Street). Email an address change to <mail@ambis.info>.

### AMBIS CONTRACTED FUNERAL HOMES

The following funeral homes offer to AMBIS members a 15% discount off of the costs shown on their General Price List:

- All Faiths Funeral Services  
8507 North IH 35 (512-339-8878) and  
4360 South Congress Ave. (512-326-8878)
- Austin-Peel & Son Funeral Home  
607 E. Anderson Lane (512-419-7224)
- Harrell Funeral Home  
4435 Frontier Trl. (512-443-1366)
- King-Tears Mortuary  
1300 East 12th Street (512-476-9128)
- Wilke-Clay-Fish Funeral Home  
2620 S. Congress (512-442-1446)
- Weed-Corley-Fish Funeral Home  
3125 N. Lamar (512-452-8811)

When contacting one of these funeral homes, please provide proof of your AMBIS membership by showing a copy of this newsletter addressed to you or your new membership letter. Membership can be confirmed also by calling the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555.

**www.ambis.info**

### CREATIVE CHOICES

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