



CREATIVE CHOICES

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2022 Issue 1

The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas

2022 Annual Meeting via Zoom

When: Saturday, March 5, 2022, 2 to 3 p.m.

Keynote Topic: Legacy Projects

When you think of non-financial legacies, don't be intimidated if hefty biographies and massive public monuments come to mind. If you would like to leave your own meaningful mark on the world but would rather work on a smaller scale, be assured that legacies can take many forms – perhaps a family recipe to be handed down for generations, a shoebox of photos waiting to be added to a scrapbook, or a cell phone video of you telling your favorite jokes. At our annual meeting, Angela Baucom will talk to us about the purpose of a legacy project and show us a variety of ways to create one with family and friends or on our own.

Keynote Speaker: Angela Baucom



Angela Baucom, MSSW, is a public health social services professional, hospice volunteer, and community organizer as well as an end-of-life doula, who received her doula training from the International End of Life Doula Association (INELDA). She specializes in bereavement group counseling and hosting thoughtful community conversations about death and life's other important topics. Angela earned a Bachelor of Education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a Master of Science in Social Work from The University of Texas at Austin. She currently lives in Austin with her spouse, two dogs, and three chickens.

To attend: Send an email to office@fcactx.org.

Several days prior to the meeting, we'll send you the Zoom link and Legacy Project handouts. For those unable to attend, a recording will be posted on our website a few days later.

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Our 2022 Funeral Home Price Survey

We're currently gathering price lists from the 55 funeral providers physically located in our 5-county service area. We will present the survey at our Annual Meeting on March 5.

How to get one or more copies on or after March 5:

- Download the survey from our web site at www.fcactx.org/. Look for the hot link on the HOME page, **OR** click on the **COSTS tab** to go to the Cost Comparisons page.
- Ask us to send it to you as an email attachment.
- Ask us to mail it to you.

} Email us at office@fcactx.org or leave us a message at 512-480-0555.

When gathering General Price Lists for our Funeral Home Survey, our volunteers carefully read the **description** under the DIRECT CREMATION section to see if the Crematory Fee is included. They also check to see if the description includes an alternative container and refrigeration for at least 48 hours. When the Crematory fee is not included, they look for the charge, which should be listed in another section of the price list.

Why don't all funeral homes include the Crematory Fee in their Direct Cremation charge? It may be because they don't own their own crematory. As a result, they have to pay a licensed crematory to perform the cremation. Charges, which may include Refrigeration, may vary, depending on which crematory they use after factoring in availability.

In contrast, funeral homes that do own and use their own crematory can determine their own Crematory Fee.

Crematories Licensed by the Texas Funeral Service Commission as of 01-16-22

Name / Location	TFSC Lic #	Expir Date
Travis County / Austin		
Austin - Peel And Son Crematory , 607 E Anderson Lane	2531	10/31/2022
Beck Crematory , 15709 RR 620	2389	04/30/2022
Capital Mortuary Services (not open to public)	2424	12/31/2022
Cook-Walden Lamar Crematory , 6100 N. Lamar	2449	02/28/2022
Cremation Service Austin , 13009 Dessau Rd., Suite M (associated with Affordable Burial & Cremation)	2469	03/31/2022
Frontier Cremations, Llc. , 4435 Frontier Trail (associated with Harrell Funeral Home)	2383	09/30/2022
Heart Of Texas Cremation & Burial Service Crematory , 12010 US W. 290	2407	08/31/2022
Onion Creek Memorial Park , 11610 Chapel Lane	2521	08/31/2022
Superior Crematorium Services, Inc. , 5513 Cadillac Drive (associated with Mission Funeral Home)	2309	03/31/2022
Weed-Corley-Fish Crematory , 2620 S. Congress Ave.	2522	08/31/2022
Williamson County		
The Gabriels Crematory , 393 N. IH-35, Georgetown	2412	12/31/2022
Ramsey Funeral Home & Crematory , 5600 Williams Dr., Georgetown	2410	11/30/2022
Bastrop County		
Providence Crematory , 604 Hwy 95 North, Elgin (associated with Providence-Jones Funeral Home)	2456	08/31/2022
Hays County		
Central Texas Crematory , 2001 RR 12, San Marcos (associated with Thomason Funeral Home)	2376	03/31/2022
Caldwell County		
None	N/A	N/A

HOW IS SCI DOING DURING THESE PANDEMIC TIMES?

Over the years, our members have expressed concern about the growth of corporate-owned funeral homes and cemeteries across the country and in our service area. Service Corporation International (SCI) has been of particular interest because of their expanding local presence as well as their national and international reach.

Page 5 of SCI's **December, 2021, Investor Presentation** (<https://investors.sci-corp.com/investors>), provides an overview of their holdings, as of September 30, 2021:

1,938 Locations as of 09-30-21	Stand-Alone Funeral Homes	Stand-Alone Cemeteries	Combo
U. S. (44 states)	997	183	290
Canada (8 province)	158	4	8
Total	1,155	187	298

Page 5 of the **Investor Presentation** also includes a “footprint” map of their holdings:



How Does This Deliberate Expansion Happen?

Acquiring Other Funeral Industry Corporations

In the last 16 years, SCI has acquired other high-ranking funeral-related corporations.

- In late 2006 ... SCI acquired the then **second largest company in the North American deathcare industry, Alderwoods Group.**
- In early 2010, they acquired the then **fifth largest company in the North American deathcare industry, Keystone North America.**
- In June of 2011, they acquired **70%** of the outstanding shares of **The Neptune Society, Inc.**, the nation's largest direct cremation organization.
- Subsequently, in 2013 and 2014, they acquired the remaining **30%** of the outstanding shares of **Neptune.**

- In December 2013, they purchased **Stewart Enterprises, Inc., the then second largest operator of funeral homes and cemeteries in North America.**

Source: **SCI’s 2014 Annual Report, which is no longer available on the SCI website. When it was, the data was included on page 7 of FCACTX’s Creative Choices newsletter, 2015, issue 2, [available on our website.](#)**

Acquiring Funeral Homes One-by-One

On their Partner page (<https://www.sci-corp.com/partner>), SCI presents what they consider to be benefits of “partnering” with the corporation. For example:

Developing Your Succession Plan

Our team can help you determine the future of your business. Fill out the form below to speak with one of our associates about the following:

1. Is now the right time to sell from both a personal and business/market perspective?
2. What should I expect from the acquisition process?
3. Is my business a good fit for SCI?
4. Which buyer will provide the greatest legacy for my business?
5. What’s the value of my business?
6. What happens to my team and family members in the business?
7. What role will I play after the acquisition closes?

On SCI’s [Partners page](#) we currently see a testimonial by Laurens Fish, whose four Weed-Corley-Fish funeral homes were acquired by SCI in 2017.



Note: Read Lamar Hankins’ commentary about this acquisition, “Who is Weed-Corley-Fish?”, [Creative Choices, 2019, Issue 1.](#)

Turning our focus to the FCACTX service area, our 2022 Funeral Home Price Survey – which will be available on March 5th – lists 55 funeral homes in the price chart. Thirteen of those funeral homes are associated with Service Corporation International (SCI):

- Cook-Walden (5 locations)
- Fuller-Sheffield
- Austin Cremations
- Weed-Corley (4 locations)
- Neptune Society
- Condra

SCI’s website lists their holdings by brand-name. However . . .

- East Austin’s **Fuller-Sheffield**, whose materials identify it as a Dignity Memorial Funeral Home, is not listed as a Dignity Memorial Funeral Home, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/>
- **Austin Cremations** in Round Rock, which would seem to fit under the National Cremation brand [<https://www.nationalcremation.com/>], is not listed under any brand.

A SIMPLE COFFIN FOR ANOTHER GREAT MAN

Upon seeing the no-frills coffin in which Archbishop Tutu was honored and buried, an article shared by AMBIS members in years past immediately came to mind. The article -- SIMPLE AND CHEAP, MY FATHER SAID -- was written by Josephine Black Pesaresi, daughter of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, who died in 1971 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



Simple and Cheap, My Father Said

by Josephine Black Pesaresi, daughter of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black

My father, Hugo L Black, died in 1971. At that time he was 85 years old and the second-longest sitting Associate Justice in the history of the United States Supreme Court, having sat on the Court for nearly 35 years. An avid tennis player, he served on his two beloved courts — the Supreme Court and the tennis court — until a few months before his death. He gave up both reluctantly but died at peace with his life and his death.

He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, not as a Supreme Court Justice but as a Captain in the Cavalry during the First World War. His grave is next to my mother, Josephine, who died in 1951 and had been a Yeomanette in the Navy during the same war. Their grave markers are standard government issue, and they note only the dates of birth, death, and service in the armed forces.

A funeral service was held for my father at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Over 1,000 people attended, including the President of the United States, the Supreme Court, judges, and many Congressmen and Senators. The Bishop of the Cathedral, Dean Francis Sayre, oversaw the arrangements and delivered a eulogy.

In making the funeral arrangements, we had only three directives from my father: 1) simple, 2) cheap, 3) no open casket.

These were not last minute orders. Our family had heard my father's views about funerals for many years. Appalled by the high costs, he felt that “funeral merchants” often took advantage of grieving families when they were at their most vulnerable. Coming from a humble background, he had seen families spend themselves into debt. He was equally appalled by any person who wished an elaborate and expensive funeral, seeing this as evidence that the person was “puffed up about his own importance in the scheme of things.”

With my father's directives firmly in mind, we planned our trip to the funeral parlor to pick out a coffin. We had chosen Gawler's Funeral Home in Washington, D.C., recommended as a place used by many government officials. Our group included three family members—my brother, my stepbrother, and myself — and two Supreme Court Justices — Byron White and William Brennan.

The casket room was elegantly appointed. The carpeting, wall paneling, and piped-in music set a tone for coffin shopping in undisputed good taste. On entering, one's eye was immediately drawn to the extreme left wall where a superbly crafted dark wood coffin, softly spot-lighted to show the fine wood grain, was perched high on a velvet draped dais. It looked like a throne coffin. However, we were steered counterclockwise, starting our search at the right. The caskets were arranged head to toe in a semi- circle leading up to the throne coffin, and it was obvious that we were going from least to most expensive.

The first coffin we came to — the cheapest — was covered with pink organza, pink satin bows, with a pink ruffled skirt around the bottom. Tasteless and frilly, it seemed totally out of place.

The next ones were also cloth-covered, but the cloth looked increasingly more expensive. Our salesman was surprised that we even glanced at these, let alone asked their prices, and indirectly dismissed these as a final resting place for a man of importance. He began to hurry us on until we came to the throne coffin.

We stood in front of this masterpiece of craftsmanship with heads slightly bowed reverently. “This,” the coffin salesman said, “is the worthy resting place for a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.” When we asked the cost of the throne coffin, he did not immediately give a dollar amount. He noted that while it was the most expensive, he knew that the price was not our main concern when burying a man of my father's stature. Cost considerations would be unworthy. This response was a big mistake and backfired immediately.

Suddenly, almost simultaneously, we looked at each other, smiling as my father's directive hit us full force — cheap. We moved to another emotional dimension — common at wakes — going from a deep grieving sadness to an almost playful mood. Right there, in that elegant room, we knew that together we could do one last thing for my father. No one was going to talk us out of cheap! When pressed, the coffin salesman allowed that the throne coffin cost thousands of dollars. That settled that.

We dispersed, zigzagging around the room, separately appraising the caskets and asking prices down to the penny. All of the polished wood caskets were soon dismissed as too expensive. It had to be a cloth-covered one. To the salesman's horror, Justice White began to scrutinize the first pink organza coffin and then asked what was under the frills. The salesman said it was just a plain, unfinished pine box. Then someone asked about the most expensive cloth-covered casket. That, too, was a plain pine box. When asked the difference between the boxes, the salesman — now completely befuddled — whispered that the more expensive had a “better shape.” We looked and thought the shapes were identical.

Huddling for a final conference, someone asked, “Shall we get the pink, the cheapest?” and we all gave a resounding “YES.” We said we would buy the pink for \$165 with the cloth stripped off. The salesman said that was impossible, it would look terrible. We, however, wanted to see for ourselves since this was our coffin of choice. First one of us pulled away a little cloth to take a peek, then another ripped more forcefully, and finally we all started ripping off the fabric with careless abandon. Off came the bows, the coffin skirt, and all but a few patches of stubbornly glued pink organza. There stood a perfectly fine plain pine box. The debris littered the elegant carpet, but we were practically euphoric. We had followed my father's directive almost to a tee, with added bonus of deflating pretensions in this very pretentious room (though my father would have felt some compassion for the poor coffin salesman).

When we went into the office to settle the bill, the funeral home director — now understanding our zeal for cheap — asked timidly about filling in the nail holes and sanding down the glue spots. With a closed casket visitation at the funeral home and a display at the cathedral, they felt their reputation was at stake. We agreed, if nothing was added to the bill and were assured nothing would be.

Dean Sayre of the National Cathedral made a final request in the spirit of my father's wishes. He asked that at the funeral we have the casket displayed without the American flag or flowers on top of it. He, as my father, had long been concerned about the excessive cost of burying the dead and the financial burden this put on living loved ones. He wanted people to see that the cost of a coffin did not symbolize the abiding love of the living for the dead, nor did it reflect the stature of a man.

The FCA of Central Texas Board of Directors recognizes that our mission *would not be possible* without our dedicated volunteers.

Heart-felt thanks for donating your time, your skills, and your talents – serving on our Board, managing correspondence, providing guidance by phone and email, sharing information via Zoom sessions, collecting price lists for our annual funeral home price survey, and more –

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Sincerest thanks to 203 member households whose donations supported our work in 2021.

Another round of thanks to 60 member households who donated \$100 or more and to 11 member households who donated two or more times.

Again this year, we are delighted to thank Chuck and Sue Howe, who donate monthly, even though their home town is outside our five-county service area.

WE'RE HERE TO SERVE YOU



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(If no one answers, leave your name and number. We check for messages at least once a day.)



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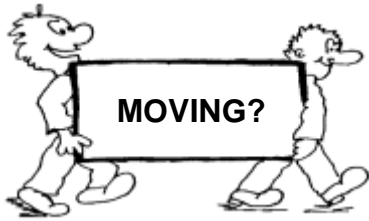
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2022 Issue 1



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*The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance
of Central Texas (formerly AMBIS)*

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