



# CREATIVE CHOICES

### In this issue:

- 2023 Annual Meeting .....1
- 2023 Funeral Home Survey.....1
- Advance Planning Fun-Fest .....2
- City services for medically vulnerable .....2
- News from our National FCA.....2
- Alkaline Hydrolysis Legislation .....3
- Donated plots for sale.....4
- M&M-themed casket.....5
- Alzheimer’s/Dementia Information.....5
- Voluntarily Stopping Eating & Drinking.....6

2023 Issue 1

*The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas*

## A Greener Way to Go

Are you curious about earth-friendly alternatives to conventional burial? If so, you are not alone. Interest in alternative disposition methods is on the rise. Although two alternatives – alkaline hydrolysis and body compositing – are not yet available in Texas, **natural burial** is. Please come to our annual meeting to learn about natural burial, an earth- and wallet-friendly option that may be an appealing choice for you or a loved one.



## 2023 Annual Meeting

### Keynote Topic and Speaker

Sunny Markham, who manages Countryside Memorial Park, will talk with us about **natural burial** and answer any questions you may have.

**When:** Saturday, April 29, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

**Where:** Hyde Park Christian Church meeting hall,  
610 E. 45<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin


Refreshments will be served.  
Masks are welcome but optional.

**RSVPs  
appreciated!**

512-480-0555 or  
office@fcactx.org

## 2023 Funeral Home Survey

Our annual funeral home survey with prices for every funeral provider in our five-county service area is now available. There are several ways to get copies for yourself and anyone you’d like it share it with.

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Download from our website.                 | Go to <a href="https://www.fcactx.org/">https://www.fcactx.org/</a> and click on the blue button.   |  |
| Request the survey as an email attachment. | Email us at <a href="mailto:office@fcactx.org">office@fcactx.org</a> , or leave a voice mail at 512-480-0555. Be sure to give us your name and email address or your mailing address, so we can get the survey on its way to you. |   |
| Ask us to mail the survey to you.          |   |   |

## In celebration of National Healthcare Decisions Day

### Advance Care Planning FUN Fest!

Sunday, April 16, 12:30 - 3:00 pm

Manchaca United Methodist Church, 1011 FM1626

**Have fun while taking charge of your health now and in the future.  
It is a real gift to the people you love!**

- Join a physician at either 1:00 or 2:00 pm for a short information session and Q and A
- Visit conversation stations staffed with nurses and social workers available to answer questions
- Pick up Advance Directive forms. If you'd like to complete them while you're at the fair, witnesses are available.
- Donate blood at the Blood Mobile
- Learn about resources available in our community

Refreshments include barbeque and free snow cones; plus there will be games, a bouncy house, and other activities for the kids.

For more information about the event and its sponsors, visit [manchacaumc.org/gift-fair](http://manchacaumc.org/gift-fair), or contact Shirley Price at 737-346-9939.

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### City of Austin Utilities offers Services for Medically Vulnerable Residents

If anyone in your household is a City of Austin Utilities customer and has a medical condition that could become life-threatening during a power outage, you may qualify for the Medically Vulnerable Registry. Though customers on the registry are not guaranteed uninterrupted power or priority restoration during an emergency, they will be eligible work with a designated team member to establish a personalized emergency backup plan.

To learn more about this and other City of Austin Utilities **Customer Assistance Programs for Residential Customers Who Face Temporary or Long-Term Difficulties**, and determine eligibility, go to [www.tinyurl.com/CoACustomerAssist](http://www.tinyurl.com/CoACustomerAssist), or call Customer Care at 512-494-9400.

If you choose to call, please be ready to provide the name and number of the customer's physician, and the type of medical equipment in the customer's household.

#### News from our National FCA

With gratitude for his many years of service, Funeral Consumers Alliance has announced the December 31, 2022, resignation of Executive Director Joshua Slocum.

Until a new Executive Director is hired, FCA's Board is overseeing the organization's operations. Office Manager Nastassia Strackbein continues to provide day-to-day assistance to consumers who contact FCA for information and guidance.

## Texas Legislature Grapples with Growing Interest in Alkaline Hydrolysis

Here in Texas, and across the nation, people are expressing a growing interest in human composting and alkaline hydrolysis as alternatives to conventional body burial and “fire” cremation.

**Human Composting**, also called “natural organic reduction,” involves placing a body in a reusable vessel with biodegradable materials that foster the transformation of the remains into nutrient-dense soil that can be returned to loved ones or donated to conservation land.

Human composting is currently legal in Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont, California and New York.

To learn more about this disposition method, search “Human Compositing” on the internet. Companies that provide human composting include [Recompose](#) and [Return Home](#).

\* \* \* \* \*

**Alkaline Hydrolysis** has gained approval in well more than a dozen states and is now under consideration in Texas. Two bills – SB105 and HB 2895 – have been filed for consideration by the 88<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature.

Although Alkaline Hydrolysis bills submitted to the House during the 86<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> legislative sessions died in committee, the current companion bills indicate that the desire to have this disposition option available in Texas is far from dead.

You can check the status of these two companion bills:

**SB105:**

<https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=SB105>

**HB2895:**

<https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB2895>

Should you speak out on this issue, we encourage you to let your legislators know if you think Alkaline Hydrolysis is an option that should be made available to all Texans. You’ll find information on how to contact your legislators at <https://capitol.texas.gov/resources/contacttext.aspx>.

### What is Alkaline Hydrolysis?

The process begins by placing a container with human remains in an airtight, leak-proof chamber, typically shaped like a cylinder. The chamber is then filled with a customized mixture of water and potassium hydroxide, and heated to a temperature above 300 degrees. The pressure in the chamber is elevated to prevent boiling. During the process, the remains are rotated and vibrated.

A body of average size and weight is reduced to sterile chemical components in four to six hours. Larger, heavier bodies may take up to thirteen hours.

### Other terms for Alkaline Hydrolysis:

- Aquamation
- Resomation
- Flameless Cremation
- Water Cremation

Since 2005, Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, has used alkaline hydrolysis as their disposition method.

Alkaline Hydrolysis was also the disposition method of choice for Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who died on December 26, 2021.

Alkaline Hydrolysis chambers, also called **Resomators**.



# Reminder

Plots donated to our FCA are available at discounted prices!

**Austin Memorial Park**  
2800 Hancock Drive  
Austin (78731)  
512-978-2320

**One Plot Available**

Block: 9  
Lot 335  
Plot 4



Look for Section 9/10 marker.



Plot is to the left of the marker for Docia Perry George.

Austin Memorial is currently selling adult plots for **\$3,191.25** (\$2,775 + 15% maintenance fee) FCACTX is offering the donated plot for **\$2,000**. (Interest-free monthly payments can be arranged.) After the deed is transferred, buyer will pay a \$34 deed registration fee at the Travis County Tax Office.

\* \* \* \* \*

Photos courtesy of FCACTX board officer, Sanford Wyatt

**Cook-Walden Capital Parks**  
14501 North IH-35  
Pflugerville (78660)  
512-251-4118

1 Plot Available in Section H  
**Block 90-D**, Grave 1

4 Plots Available in Section H  
**Block 90-C**, Graves 1,2, 3, 4

2 Plots Available in Section H:  
**Block 192-D**, Graves 3, 4

Ask cemetery staff to show you exact plot locations.



Plots in Section 90-C, 90-D, and 192-D all have views of Garden of Gethsemane statuary.



Look for Toungate Bench, which has Block 192-D plots behind it.

Cook-Walden is currently selling adult plots in Section H for **\$9,995** each. FCA is offering each donated plot for **\$5,000**. (Interest-free monthly payments can be arranged.) During the deed transfer process at the Cook-Walden Cemetery Office, buyer will pay Cook-Walden's \$395 transfer fee for each **transaction**. (One transaction may include a single plot or multiple plots.)

\* \* \* \* \*

**If interested in purchasing one or more plots:**

1. Visit the cemetery to make sure you like the plot location. While there, check with the cemetery staff about any additional costs, as well as any restrictions about how you use the plot.
2. If you decide to purchase the plot(s) from FCACTX, contact Nancy Walker, Executive Director, at [execdir@fcontext.org](mailto:execdir@fcontext.org), or call 512-480-0555.
3. Upon completion of payment to FCACTX, meet with Nancy at the cemetery office to **complete the necessary paperwork** to transfer the deed from FCACTX to you and – if purchasing a Cook-Walden plot -- to pay the Cook-Walden deed transfer fee.

# Arizona grandmother's M&M-themed funeral casket goes viral

Mary Stocks Martin of Snowflake, Arizona, was buried in a casket she built and modeled after the blue M&M

By Cortney Moore, Fox 10 Phoenix

A grandmother in Arizona made sure her funeral would reflect her colorful and fun personality with an M&M-shaped casket.

Mary Stocks Martin, a retired teacher from Snowflake, Arizona, died on Feb. 9, at the age of 86, according to her [obituary published](#) by the Silver Creek Mortuary, a local funeral home and cremation provider.

Her funeral was held at the LDS Love Lake Chapel in Taylor, Arizona, on Feb. 18, where guests were able to see Martin's unique casket during the wake and graveside service.

Billy Martin, one of Martin's grandsons, told FOX 10 Phoenix that Martin worked as a schoolteacher for 30 years.



Photo credit: Julia Martin, FOX 10

"She used to initial everything 'MSM,' but that 'S,' in cursive of course, looks like M&M," he said. "The students started bringing her M&Ms, memorabilia and it just turned into something that she reflected on as part of her success as a teacher."

Martin reportedly built her M&M-shaped casket, with help from her son, years before her death.

The Martin family said the casket was modeled after one of Martin's favorite M&M spokescandies – the blue almond M&M which has been aptly named "Blue" by Mars, Inc.

Blue was introduced as an M&M spokescandy in 1995. He has an ellipsoid-shaped body due to his almond core and has been branded as having a calm and cool personality, according to advertising materials.

Martin's casket captured the essence of Blue, which featured the close-eyed M&M while his hands held miniature candles that had the names of Martin's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren etched onto each.

Snippets of the M&M-themed funeral were shared in a video slideshow that was [uploaded to TikTok](#) by Martin's grandson, Scott Roundtree, on Feb. 19.

The video has been viewed more than 9.2 million times and has received more than 1.4 million likes.

<https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/arizona-grandmothers-mm-themed-funeral-casket-goes-viral>

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## Information about Alzheimer's and Related Dementias

### NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center

800-438-4380, [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers)

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answers telephone, email ([adear@nia.nih.gov](mailto:adear@nia.nih.gov)), and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

[Alzheimers.gov](http://Alzheimers.gov), [www.alzheimers.gov](http://www.alzheimers.gov)

This website provides information and resources from across the federal government.

## Voluntarily stopping eating and drinking

Our FCA members continue to express an interest in VSED, Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking, a legal alternative to Medical Aid in Dying, which is not an approved option in Texas. This lightly-edited article by Martha McClellan, provides some basic information about VSED.

Sometimes conversations with other elders are about how we want our deaths to be. We want them gentle, peaceful, surrounded by loved ones (or not). Many friends of mine have died recently. One had a beautiful and loving end surrounded by family. Another, a sudden heart attack at home with no warning. One, in a hospital with a long, drawn out, excruciating yet courageous, few weeks. Another, from taking his own life – he was ready.

We have accidents, illnesses and our bodies just wear out.

A 2018 Stanford University School of Medicine study found that 80% of us prefer to die at home. However, about three-quarters of older Americans die in nursing homes or hospitals. Leading causes of death for people over age 65 are: 1) heart disease, 2) cancer, and 3) lower respiratory disease. We can see that the hospital scenario is obvious for many of us.

Another choice we have has recently come to my attention. If we get to a place that is unacceptable to us as far as pain, quality of life issues and never-ending suffering, there is something called Voluntarily Stopping Eating and Drinking – VSED. It is a way to end suffering in a fairly gentle, peaceful and predictable way. Animals sometimes wander off and die this way.

This choice has been used by terminally ill people throughout modern history. Many on the verge of death come naturally to this process – they no longer want to eat, although they do desire water. One of my friends died recently in this manner and it was all just so instinctive and spontaneous.

I've just read "The VSED Handbook," by Kate Christie. Her mother had early onset Alzheimer's and was determined not to end up in a memory care facility. They worked together while she was still lucid, along with others in her family, a care team headed by a death doula, a doctor and a lawyer to enable her to go through this process smoothly, and avoid the horrors of late-stage Alzheimer's.

This book offers an actionable plan emphasizing the importance of planning, palliative care and a network of support. It is a fascinating account of how one person stayed out of a memory care center. Christie also describes what to expect from each stage of the VSED process, and the highlights and challenges, and unexpected gifts of accompanying her dying mother on her final journey.

Some acquaintances have mentioned wanting "something in the closet" in case they need it eventually, depending on how their later years go. VSED seems to be it. While Medical Aid in Dying is the law in Colorado if you have a six-month fatal diagnosis, VSED is not authorized by state statute or by court ruling. But that doesn't mean it's illegal.

VSED is legal nationwide. The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Cruzan v. Missouri*, 1990, said a "competent person would have the right to refuse lifesaving hydration and nutrition." VSED is legal for a person nearing the end of life who has the mental capacity to make their own medical decisions.

*(continued on page 7)*

It may be more difficult for people who are not terminally ill to receive health care support through the VSED process. However, Hospice assures me that they would support someone midway through the dying process or if they are comatose, with a doctor's order. They have always been on the compassionate side of the dying and have assisted with many cases similar to this.

More information available at [CompassionandChoices.org](http://CompassionandChoices.org) and [vsedresources.com](http://vsedresources.com).

<https://www.durangoherald.com/articles/voluntary-stopping-eating-and-drinking/>

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## On the Light Side



Three friends die in a car accident and they go to an orientation in heaven. They are all asked, "When you are in your casket and friends and family are mourning you, what would you like to hear them say about you?"

The first guy says, "I would like to hear them say that I was a great doctor of my time, and a great family man."

The second guy says, "I would like to hear that I was a wonderful husband and school teacher which made a huge difference in our children of tomorrow."

The last guy replies, "I would like to hear them say ... Look, he's Moving!"

### Call for Volunteers

If you would like to spend a few hours a month helping our FCA with administrative tasks, website development, or social media, please contact us at [office@fcactx.org](mailto:office@fcactx.org), or leave us a voice mail at 512-480-0555. We're confident we can line you up with the kind of work you enjoy. Access to the internet and email is required.

2023 Issue 1

FCA of Central Texas  
3710 Cedar Street, Mailbox 13  
Austin, TX 78705-1449

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## We're here to serve you!

Call us at **512-480-0555**

Please leave a voice mail message with your name and phone number. We check for messages at least once a day.

Email us at [office@fcactx.org](mailto:office@fcactx.org).

Send mail to

**FCA of Central Texas**  
**3710 Cedar Street, Mailbox 13**  
**Austin, TX 78705-1449**

Visit us online at [www.fcactx.org](http://www.fcactx.org)

- \* To join or donate to FCACTX
- \* To download advance-planning forms, newsletters, surveys, and other items of interest



# **CREATIVE CHOICES**

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

## **Inside this issue . . .**

- 2023 Annual Meeting focuses on Natural Burial
- 2023 Funeral Home Survey
- Advance Directives Fun-Fest
- City of Austin Services for Medically Vulnerable Residents
- Alkaline Hydrolysis Legislation
- Donated plots for sale
- M&M-themed casket
- Alzheimer's/Dementia Information
- Voluntarily Stopping Eating & Drinking

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