



CREATIVE CHOICES

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Fall 2011

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS), a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance and a nonprofit, nonsectarian educational consumer organization that encourages and assists Central Texans in making informed, practical end-of-life decisions

Wonderful Windfall Fundraising Opportunity for AMBIS

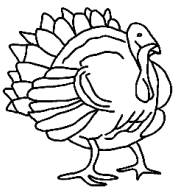
Dear AMBIS Family and Friends –

An unexpected and serendipitous opportunity arrived just in time for our fall fundraising. Linda Look, a close friend with whom I’d been out of touch for a while, wrote to ask me what I’d been up to since we last talked. With considerable enthusiasm, I sent her the link to our website, telling her that I was so taken with all the good things AMBIS does that it was almost like being in love.

The next thing I knew, AMBIS had a **matching challenge gift** from someone who doesn’t even live in our service area! What this tells me is that anyone who understands that death is not an optional event can easily see the importance of the work we do to help people make informed end-of-life decisions.

This year especially, AMBIS needs your support. We have judiciously stayed within our 2011 operating budget but our revenue, which comes solely from donations, has been down. I’m sure you won’t be surprised that printing, assembling, and mailing our quarterly newsletter is our single greatest expense. We need your help so we can continue doing that.

If your personal finances have kept you from donating in the past, we have created a special \$11.11 donation option we hope you will find affordable as 11-11-11 shows up on our calendar. The important point is that we need **all** our members to pitch in. No donation is too large or too small. In the spirit of talking turkey about difficult matters, we offer you our



heartfelt gratitude as Thanksgiving approaches and our earnest assistance all year through.

Nancy Walker
Vice President, AMBIS Governing Council

Honors for AMBIS

On November 11, The Texas Organ Sharing Alliance will honor Rodger Ericson and Nancy Walker at TOSA’s fourth annual *Thanks-for-Giving* luncheon. This celebratory event honors partner hospitals and team members in the community for their support of organ and tissue donation in 2011.

TOSA serves 56 counties in South and Central Texas. Its work extends far beyond hospitals to the more than 112,000 patients nationally who are currently awaiting a life-saving organ transplant.

Two other agencies involved in this year’s celebration are the Tissue Center of Central Texas and the Lone Star Lions Eye Bank.

Some Links We Like

Donna Terpack, AMBIS Librarian

Death Reference Desk

<deathreferencedesk.org/> ~ Run by the deputy director of the Center for Death and Society and two librarians, this site offers insights into the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of death. There are book recommendations, links to other resources and an online reference service.

Centre for Death and Society

<www.bath.ac.uk/cdas/> ~ CDAS looks at the social aspects of death, dying and bereavement on a national and international scale. The site provides links to educational and training opportunities, publications, and academic research on end-of-life issues.

Obit

<obit-mag.com/> ~ Obit is an online magazine that “examines life through the lens of death.” The site features essays on change, obituaries, and book

(continued on page 2)

From the President –

AMBIS partners and funeral consumer advocates –

Can we count on you to be an active AMBIS supporter? We do count on our dedicated volunteers who work to educate and advocate for members and non-members alike. They do this vital work for free. However, our educational materials, newsletters, and annual surveys on which so many people rely are not cost-free. To keep our message out there, we must pay for our office, paper, printing, and postage.

We have stayed within our operating budget this year but our revenue – which comes entirely from donations – is down. We are asking each and every member household to be an active member by donating \$11.11 or more this November – 11/11. Please give as generously as you can, and double your joy knowing that the matching challenge gift will double your impact. (*See page 1 for details.*)

Your donation will not only help us continue as we have but also increase the effectiveness of our website. Initial development and maintenance is costly, but the outreach is wide, and access is easy.

In addition to donations we need volunteers to help us maintain our limited but important office hours, make presentations, and provide website development expertise. We count on you to tell our

story and to urge your clubs, organizations, and houses of worship to hear a presentation.

Speaking of people we can count on, rejoice that Jim Bates, a Director of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Texas, is a legislative watchdog for us! As is his custom, Jim regularly speaks for all of us as consumers at the Texas Funeral Service Commission stakeholders' meetings.

On October 13, Jim and three of us from AMBIS sat at the table with more than 20 funeral directors, embalmers, and spokespersons for the Texas Funeral Directors Association. We listened on your behalf as several of them talked freely about the common practice of asking a family member to sign the embalming authorization at the very time a loved one's body is being taken away! Legally, they **can** do that **if** they provide a General Price List.

But how many people know that embalming is an option rather than a requirement?

Until that utopian day when consumer education and advocacy are not needed, please help us keep spreading the word by volunteering and donating!

Rodger Ericson,

President, AMBIS Governing Council

Note: If you would prefer to give using a credit card or your PayPal account, please click on the **Donate** button at <<http://fcaambis.org>>.

Some Links We Like (*continued from page 1*)

reviews. It includes an advice column, and an interactive feature called *Died on the same day*.

Encyclopedia of Death and Dying

<www.deathreference.com/> ~ An online encyclopedia with articles about the biological, medical, social, psychological, religious and philosophical aspects of death and dying. It includes photos, illustrations, and references.

the digital beyond

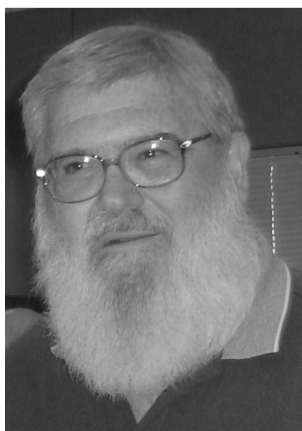
<www.thedigitalbeyond.com/> ~ A blog featuring news, podcasts, and videos to help you plan for your digital afterlife. Archival, cultural, legal, and technical aspects of dealing with your digital legacy are presented.

It's Going Good with *Gone for Good*

AMBIS recently received \$300 for items you have donated to *Gone for Good*. Our partnership with *Gone for Good* is going so well that we are planning for a silent auction in the spring. Any small portable items donated will be set aside for the auction. Furniture and large items will be part of ongoing sales at the Antique Marketplace (5806 Burnet Road) or online at <www.goneforgood.net>. To donate items that you value at a minimum of \$50 each, and arrange for pick-up, call Retta Van Auken at 657-7210 or Gail Miller at 297-6302. When making your donation, please tell "the story" that goes with each item. We appreciate your donation and want to know what these items mean to you.

VOLUNTEER IN THE SPOTLIGHT

LAMAR HANKINS



Lamar has been a leading figure in our history since joining AMBIS in 1991. From the start, he competently seized opportunities to educate and advocate for funeral consumers. Within a year, he was elected to our Governing Council. Thereafter, he served not only as Council President but also as Board President of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, to which he still provides legal counsel.

Since 1993, Lamar has consistently provided AMBIS members with quarterly newsletters with must-read funeral-related information that can affect their lives and their checkbooks. His wife, retired English Professor June Chase Hankins, has ensured that every issue of the newsletter adheres to the highest standards for concise, coherent writing as well as impeccable grammar and punctuation.

Lamar is also the person on whom we have relied to compile and format our flagship publication, the annual survey, which people look to, year after year, for essential information about prices of selected goods and services at funeral homes in our service area.

Less visible but no less important is the vast funeral industry knowledge Lamar makes available to those of us seeking precise and timely answers that often require in-depth knowledge of legislative, legal, and procedural matters. Way more than once, he has responded by creating documents such as the **Body Disposition Authorization Affidavit** and the **Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains** that are available on our website and routinely included in the hefty packets our office volunteers send to new AMBIS members.

For all the newsletters, for all the annual surveys, for all the workshops you conducted, for all the answers, guidance and wisdom you have provided, we thank you, Lamar. The many ways in which you have repeatedly inspired, educated and assisted us have kept AMBIS safe, steady, solid and strong. [] ngw

AMBIS BRIEFS

Confronting End of Life Issues, the seven-session course offered through Lifetime Learning Institute, was enthusiastically received by 33 class participants. Evaluation comments included: *“The one most helpful course I have ever taken. No marketing – just options and invaluable information. ... The entire Austin community should be educated on such an important topic.”* *“I found out answers about information I did not think I needed to know!!”* *“I enjoyed the informal atmosphere that encouraged questions and comments.”*

AMBIS' first **Volunteer Celebration Party**, held on September 25th, was a resounding success. Daesene received a lovely service award. Special thanks to Triumphant Love Lutheran Church for donating use of their meeting hall and to the Event Planning Committee who donated delicious refreshments and festive decorations.



YES! Count me in on the AMBIS Matching Challenge Gift!

I want AMBIS to continue educating and advocating for me and my Central Texas neighbors, family, and friends.

Please match my tax-deductible donation of: \$ _____

Name _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

I prefer to receive my newsletter electronically.

Please donate at <<http://fcaambis.org>>, or use the enclosed donation envelope to mail your donation to: AMBIS Treasurer, Attn: Matching Challenge, 3710 Cedar St., Box 13, Austin, TX 78705-1449

CREATIVE CHOICES is published quarterly by the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society, a nonprofit, nonsectarian consumer and educational organization formed in 1964 to protect a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral.

AMBIS is a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance, a federation of nearly one hundred similar consumer groups operating throughout the United States.

The ideas expressed in **CREATIVE CHOICES** are those of the authors and editor and not necessarily those of AMBIS.

Address changes, editorial items, letters, and inquiries about the benefits of membership should be directed to:



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Telephone inquiries to **512-480-0555**

Email: <AMBIS@grandecom.net>

AMBIS GOVERNING COUNCIL:

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- Amy Praskac, Treasurer (371-3624, Austin)
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Leon Lebowitz, Director Emeritus

Daesene Willmann, Coordinator of
Volunteers (459-6703, Austin)

Nancy G. Walker, Volunteer
Newsletter Editor

Save the Date
AMBIS Annual Meeting
February 19, 2012
2:00 ~ 4:00 p.m.

Please Help Us Keep Our Mailing List Current

To help us keep our mailing costs down, be sure to let AMBIS know if your address changes. Email <AMBIS@grandecom.net>, call the AMBIS office at 512-480-0555, or mail this form to our office.

My new or corrected address is:

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Street or P. O. Box

City, State, Zip

Phone

Email address

Help me transfer my membership to an FCA outside the AMBIS service area.

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A Funeral Consumers Alliance
3710 Cedar Street, Box 13
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