



CREATIVE CHOICES

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Summer 2012

The newsletter of the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society (AMBIS)

Readership Reality Check: Part 2

When AMBIS sent our spring newsletter with its “Readership Reality Check” to 2,858 AMBIS households, we asked our members to help us trim printing and mailing costs by switching to the electronic newsletter. Sincerest thanks to all 68 of you who volunteered to do so. We also asked you to contact us if you wanted to continue receiving the print newsletter. Two members called to say, “Keep sending it.” Seven members made donations to help with the costs.

To honor our responsibility to examine expenditures and eliminate unnecessary spending, the AMBIS Council has had to evaluate the fact that 29.5% of our operating budget is being spent on our print newsletters.

Right off the top, **we are absolutely certain that we want to mail the AMBIS newsletter to anyone who asks for it.** Donations are appreciated but **never** required.

We think it makes sense to provide newsletters—by mail or electronically—to every one of you who volunteers your time, makes financial or in-kind donations, or actively supports AMBIS in other identifiable ways. Your support and involvement show us you actively care about AMBIS.

Among the newsletters we’re not sure about are those (125) being mailed out-of-state. Is information about our local funeral industry still useful and relevant?

We are also not certain about the complimentary newsletters being mailed to people and organizations who would logically care about the work we do. Is our message getting through?

Finally, when undeliverable newsletters are returned to our office, we no longer know where you are, or even if you are, because families seldom notify us when an AMBIS member has died.

How you can help ...When you mail in the coupon on page 3, send us your suggestions about ways we can trim costs while still mailing the print newsletter to members who want and prefer it. As always, we are here to serve you.

Annual Fundraising Focuses on Spreading the AMBIS Message Far and Wide

If you are a longtime AMBIS member, you know AMBIS has traditionally placed its annual fundraising appeal in the fall newsletter, which arrives just when other organizations are asking for financial support. So many positive changes are waiting to happen at AMBIS that we are moving our once-a-year appeal to the summer newsletter. This is it!

Up until now, we have used a large portion of your donations to print and mail our newsletter four times a year. More than one AMBIS member at our 2012 annual meeting was shocked to learn that the print newsletter requires nearly 30% of our annual operating budget. Even so, if we know that you want and prefer the print newsletter, we feel it is money well spent. Now, as always, we want you to be informed, empowered consumers with an array of useful information about end-of-life topics.

Our big challenge is finding the funds needed to reach people who have never heard of AMBIS. As you know, we are the **only** organization in our community that dedicates its every activity to helping people who – ready or not – will inevitably have to make major end-of-life decisions. Our annual price survey alone has saved families thousands of dollars.

Unfortunately, many people and media outlets are still not aware of us or our work. That is why we need to begin publicizing AMBIS in places – such as the widely circulated **Senior News** – that we have not yet been able to afford.

This year we ask that you donate as generously as you can, not only to support the newsletter and other educational materials but also to help us spread the AMBIS message far and wide.

Confronting End-of-Life Issues

AMBIS and Lifetime Learning Institute (LLI) offer popular 8-session course on end-of-life issues

Topics: Ways to reduce funeral costs; advance planning documents; hospice care; organ, tissue and body donation; family-directed funerals; natural, “green” burial; veterans burial benefits; and suggestions for writing memorable obituaries, eulogies and legacy letters. Ample time will be allotted for discussion.

When: Wednesdays, September 19 to November 7, 2012, 10 a.m. to noon

Where: Triumphant Love Lutheran Church, 9508 Great Hills Trail, Austin, TX 78759

Cost: \$20 for all 8 sessions + \$10 at the first session for handouts.

Class limited to 35 participants.

Register early by calling LLI at 512-206-4232, or downloading the class application at <www.lliaustin.org>.

The FCA: Supporting Consumers from Sea to Shining Sea

Although AMBIS is one of the largest and most active funeral consumer alliances in the country, no local FCA affiliate can reach across America the way our national Funeral Consumers Alliance can. Take, for example, FCA's key role in revealing to more than a million viewers of *60 Minutes* the urgent need for cemetery regulation in this country. Every AMBIS member can feel proud that investigative reporter Anderson Cooper interviewed FCA Executive Director Joshua Slocum.

Since the *60 Minutes* program aired on May 20, FCA has continued, on a daily basis, to provide accurate and timely information about a variety of end-of-life topics – on its website (www.funerals.org), on its Facebook page (www.facebook.com/funerals.org), and on its very active and thought-provoking Deathcare Discussion List, where FCA affiliate members from all over the country can join the discussion, not only to read a variety of informative (and sometimes humorous) posts but also to get in-depth insight into sometimes complex questions. BRAVO FCA!

If you missed the program on *60 Minutes*, or would like to see it again, go to www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57436612/cemeteries-draw-complaints.

2012 Cemetery Survey



As in years past, this year's cemetery survey lists the larger Travis County cemeteries that still have plots available. The survey also includes a sampling of smaller cemeteries in Bastrop, Hays, and Williamson Counties.

Of the hundreds of cemeteries in our service area, the selected sampling is intended to give you a basis for comparing features and prices when you begin looking on your own.

What's New?

Because of the growing trend towards cremation, this year's survey includes Triumphant Love Lutheran Church's Resurrection Garden because niches in their niche wall are available to the general public.

The survey also includes Riverbend Church's Remembrance Gardens, which has a niche wall and a wall for memorial plaques; however, the vast majority of urns are interred in the ground.

Discounts for AMBIS Members

The following cemeteries offer AMBIS members a **15% discount on plot prices:**

- Eloise Woods (Cedar Creek)
- Our Lady of the Rosary (Georgetown)

Because the cemetery survey is widely used throughout our service area, the price chart does **not** show the discounted figures for AMBIS members.

As you compare prices at the cemeteries surveyed, the costs for opening and closing a gravesite are worth noting. At \$1,495 on weekdays, the three Cook-Walden cemeteries—owned by Service Corporation International—charge at least 50% more than other cemeteries. The cost of a Cook-Walden plot is the same for an urn as it is for a casket.

A Special Savings Opportunity

If you know anyone who is interested in purchasing one or more plots at Cook-Walden Capital Parks in Pflugerville, compare their prices to what AMBIS is asking for the plots donated to us by Maurine Kocurek.

Four of the donated plots are Graves 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Section H, Block 90-C. The fifth plot, located across a walkway, is Grave 1 in Section H, Block 90-D.

Each plot is available from AMBIS for \$2,000, a 50% savings over what Cook-Walden charges for plots in this section of the cemetery. For more details, contact Lamar Hankins at 512-396-0317 in San Marcos.

How to Get Your 2012 Cemetery Survey

To request one or more copies of the 2012 AMBIS Biennial Cemetery Survey, call us at 480-0555

or email us at office@fcaambis.org.

Let us know if you want the survey mailed to you or sent as an email attachment.

AMBIS Offers Free Community Education Events Bring Your Questions, Your Family and Your Friends!

Wednesday, September 12

7 to 8 p.m.

Hospice Care

Wednesday, October 10

7 to 8 p.m.

Organ and Tissue Donation

Both sessions at Windsor Park Public Library, 5833 Westminster Drive, Austin

Spread the Word!

In the Spotlight: New Council Members



Please join the AMBIS Governing Council in welcoming Monika Cavazos and Jake Lorring to the Council.

For several years, Monika, who works for the Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas (www.inyourhands.org/), has shared her expertise with us at AMBIS workshops and our Lifetime Learning Institute classes on organ, tissue, and whole body donation. Monika will also be helping us continue our outreach to Spanish speakers in our community.

Jake's photography (at <http://goslowphotos.com>) is just one expression of the creativity he brings to the Council. An active leader at the Austin Shambhala Center (www.austin.shambhala.org/), Jake has invited AMBIS to speak to his community on several occasions. Since last November, he has been actively involved in addressing death, dying, and grieving in ways that will help people at the Center handle both the practical and the practice aspects surrounding the loss of community members.

Jake and Monika are filling the seats of Mickey Michaels and Kristi Curry, who were unable to complete their terms on the Council. We wish to thank Mickey and Kristi for the knowledge, talents and skills they shared with us. We especially appreciate the work Kristi did to lay the foundation for our new website, which is being expanded to provide even more information than our current website.

We also wish to thank Eileen Moe and Tom Twiss for their commitment to AMBIS as at-large members of our Nominating Committee.

AMBIS Launches New Facebook Page!



Thanks to AMBIS member Marilee Parsons for her skill and creativity, AMBIS has an outstanding and completely revitalized Facebook page at www.facebook.com/pages/Austin-Memorial-Burial-Information-Society-AMBIS/418846914813618.

You **don't** have to join Facebook to see all the information there. If you **are** a Facebook member, please help us reach **30 Likes**, so we can enjoy more Facebook benefits.

From the President ~

As explained on page 1 of this newsletter, the AMBIS Council is evaluating our expenditures to ensure that we are using your donations in the best possible way to achieve our mission.

Since the print newsletter accounts for nearly 30% of our operating budget, we hope you agree it makes sense to stop printing and mailing newsletters that are not read, wanted, or even received.

Be assured, we **do** want to continue providing a newsletter to anyone who finds it informative and

empowering. Equally important, we **do not** want or intend to remove anyone from our membership list.

So! If you prefer to have the Post Office deliver your newsletters, that's fine. We don't want anyone to feel pressured to change to the electronic version.

Friends of AMBIS, we thank you for continuing to stand with us as we seek to serve, expand and grow. In 2014, we will be celebrating our 50th Anniversary because you have kept us motivated, grateful, and energized.

Nancy Walker, President
AMBIS Governing Council

Yes! I want AMBIS to continue working for me and my Central Texas neighbors, family, and friends.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation of: \$ _____

My suggestions for reducing print newsletter costs are enclosed.

**PLEASE
PRINT**

Name _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

I prefer to receive my newsletters electronically.

Please mail my newsletters to me.

I'm unable to donate right now but please mail my newsletter.

Please mail your donation in the enclosed envelope to:
AMBIS, 3710 Cedar St., Mailbox 13, Austin, TX 78705-1449
OR

Use your credit card or PayPal account to donate online at www.fcaambis.org



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

Summer 2012

AMBIS Mission Statement

AMBIS, a member of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, educational consumer organization that encourages and assists Central Texans in making informed, practical end-of-life decisions.



Send address, email and phone number changes, editorial items, testimonials, letters, and inquiries to: <office@fcaambis.org>

~ OR ~



Mail to:
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Visit us online at <www.fcaambis.org> ...



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

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