

CREATIVE CHOICES

The Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas
(formerly AMBIS, the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society)

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Spring 2014

It's Official: We have a New Name!

On February 24, 2014, AMBIS filed all the required paperwork with the Texas Secretary of State and the Internal Revenue Service to change our name from the Austin Memorial and Burial Information Society to the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas. Here is why we changed our name:

We removed three words from our old name, **Austin** Memorial and **Burial** Information **Society**, because:

- Our **5-county** service area now extends well beyond Austin.
- With the rising popularity of cremation, **Burial** might mislead people to think we don't have useful information for them if they prefer cremation to burial or wish to donate their bodies.
- **Society** (a term popularized in the 1930s) does not convey our 21st Century purpose as well as **Alliance**, which has a unifying, proactive feel to it.

We included two highly relevant and powerful words in our new name, Funeral **Consumers** **Alliance**, because:

- **Consumers** announces right up front that our activities are on behalf of consumers.
- **Alliance** conveys that we are united around a common cause, which motivates action.
- **Funeral Consumers Alliance** visibly aligns us with the national FCA and the other FCA affiliates around the country, nearly all of whom now call themselves Funeral Consumers Alliances.

Our New Logo

As you see in our newsletter masthead, we have a new logo to go with our new name. Typically, the owl represents education, learning, and wisdom. To affirm our connection with national FCA and all its affiliates, our previous flower logo rests in the heart of our new logo.

Win-Win Card Games and More to Help You Start “The Conversation”

It's not easy to talk about how we want the end of our lives to be. But it's one of the most important conversations we can have with our loved ones because too many people are dying in a way they wouldn't deliberately choose, and too many of their loved ones are left feeling bereaved, guilty, and unsure of the decisions they made on behalf of the deceased.

According to researchers at *The Conversation Project*, 60% of people say that making sure their family is not burdened by tough decisions is “extremely important.” Yet 56% have not communicated their end-of-life wishes. Researchers at *Death Over Dinner* report that “nearly 75% of all Americans want to die at home; yet only 25% of them do.”

Clearly it is time to have the conversation with our loved ones and our medical caregivers.

The following resources will give you a solid start.

Go Wish (a **card game** available on the *Go Wish* website or from our FCA~CTX library)
<http://www.gowish.org/>

The cards in the **Go Wish** game give you an easy, even entertaining way to talk about what is most important to you. Playing the game with relatives and/or close friends can help everyone understand what is important to you and why.

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President's Message

At our Annual Meeting on February 22, AMBIS celebrated 50 years of steady successes. Now, as we move forward as FCA of Central Texas, an energizing sense of renewal and revitalization is promising that 2014 will continue to be a year of significant change and extraordinary growth. Our Board members are knowledgeable, skilled and strongly committed to increasing our visibility in the community, serving our members and the general public more proactively, and building mutually beneficial relationships with organizations that serve seniors and their caregivers. On the front lines, our dedicated office volunteers are as eager as ever to assist anyone who calls, writes, or comes by our office in the historic AGE Building.

Encouragement is all around us! Even before our name change was official, we received a grant award from **Gone for Good** to design and print a four-color brochure that people will actually pick up and read, even though the information we are offering concerns an enormously difficult topic.

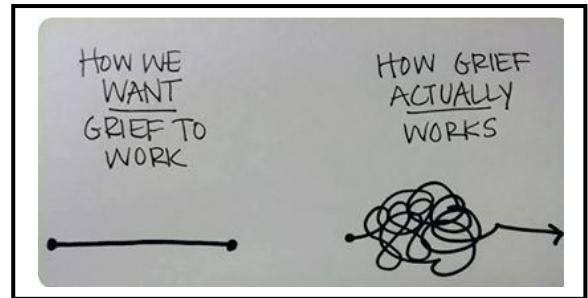
Thanks to you, our members, we are receiving a steady stream of invitations to speak to organizations of every size and kind. Keep opening those doors for us because – ready or not, like it or not – the day will come when nearly everyone will have to plan a funeral while grieving for someone dear.

In closing, let me share with you a heartfelt farewell to George Hawkins, who served AMBIS for countless hours over the years, generously using his skills to manage our database and a whole lot more. We offer our condolences to George's family, including his wife, Carole, who, like George, served AMBIS for many a year with an array of exceptional skills and a compassionate heart.

Nancy Walker, President (512-480-0251, president@fcactx.org)

Hospice Benefit for the Bereaved

A distinctive feature of hospice care is the coordination of medical, psychological, and spiritual support for both dying persons and their families. **By law, hospice programs must also provide bereavement counseling for up to a year. The Medicare hospice benefit, which in many respects sets a national standard, covers up to 13 months of bereavement counseling.**



Conversation Tools (continued from page 1)

My Gift of Grace (a card game available on the *My Gift of Grace* website or from our FCA~CTX library)
<http://mygiftofgrace.com/>

My Gift of Grace is a conversation game for living and dying well. The questions help you discuss your views and values about life, death, and dying. Most people who have played the game have told its creators that it is fun to play. It can also be sad, challenging, surprising, and uplifting. The game can be played by one, two, or more people.

The Conversation Project (free downloadable toolkit available on *The Conversation Project* website or from our FCA~CTX library)
<http://theconversationproject.org/>
The Conversation Project helps people talk about their wishes for end-of-life care. The Project's founders believe

that the place for this to begin is at the kitchen table — not in the intensive care unit — with the people we love, before it's too late. Their free starter kits, in English and Spanish, give you specific steps for talking with your family and then with your medical caregivers.

Death Over Dinner (interactive website with steps for planning a unique dinner gathering)
<http://deathoverdinner.org/>

How we want to die represents the most important and costly conversation America isn't having. This website guides you through each step of planning a test dinner. It is called a test dinner because trying out the process in no way commits you to follow through with an actual dinner.

Remember: The card games and toolkit described above are available for checkout from our FCA of Central Texas library. Call us at 512-480-0555.

The FCA: Supporting Consumers from Sea to Shining Sea

Great news! The May 2014 issue of *Consumer Reports Money Adviser* has a full-page article warning readers that they could easily end up spending far more on a funeral than they ever intended or could reasonably afford. In search of a textbook example, an Associate Finance Editor conducted an extensive interview with a woman who paid an SCI funeral home in Austin more than \$18,000 for her husband's immediate burial. How did that happen? The funeral home showed her one General Price List package after another until she wearily accepted one, even though it included items she told them she didn't want.

Yes, this happened in Austin; but *Consumer Reports* publishes articles for a national audience. Fortunately, their interviewer knew he could rely on our national FCA to give him trustworthy facts. In his article, he quoted Lisa Carlson and Joshua Slocum, co-authors of *Last Rights*, the undisputed follow-up to Jessica Mitford's classic funeral industry exposé, *The American Way of Death*.

Besides being the go-to experts in their field, Lisa and Josh know first-hand what it takes to run the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, which has more than 85 local affiliates across our country. Unlike the local affiliates, which have members to support them directly, the national FCA does not have an extensive roster of individual and family members. This is why they need your support. Please donate now, as generously as you can, so they can continue advocating for you, your family and friends, and every American from sea to shining sea. Not only will you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are actively supporting the **only national nonprofit organization that promotes and defends the rights of funeral consumers** but, with a gift of \$35 or more, you will receive a full year's subscription to *The Grim Reader*, their no-nonsense consumer advice newsletter.

Please donate online at www.funerals.org; or send your donation directly to:

Funeral Consumers Alliance, 33 Patchen Road, South Burlington, VT 05403

Our Fabulous New Board Members

With great pleasure, we welcome to our 2014 Board four new directors (three of whom are familiar faces if you have attended one of our End-of-Life Options classes offered through Lifetime Learning Institute):



Clockwise from the left: Penny Whiting; Sherman Lemuel Bradshaw, Hilary Martinez, Betsy LeClair

Sherman Lemuel Bradshaw: Educator and advocate for the Tissue Center of Central Texas

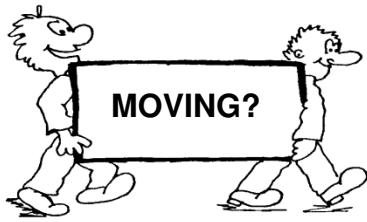
Betsy LeClair: Web developer, graphic artist (who designed our owl logo, new letterhead and handsome name badges)

Hilary Martinez: M.A., Medical Anthropology from Texas State University; keynote speaker at our 2014 Annual Meeting; now with the CSI Unit at the Austin Police Department

Penny Whiting, R.N.: Director of Hospital Development at the Lone Star Lions Eye Bank

We also gratefully acknowledge the outstanding contributions of continuing Board members **Sabiba Bandali, Don Harris, Jake Lorfing, Jesse South, and Nancy Walker**.

This nine-person Board is ready, willing and able to take FCA of Central Texas to the next level of service to our community!



Email office@fcactx.org, call 512-480-0555, or clip and mail this form to our office.

My new or corrected contact info:

Name _____

Street or P. O. Box _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Email address _____

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



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Spring 2014

Mission Statement

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Central Texas, 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@fcactx.org

~ OR ~



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

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