

Southwest Funeral Consumer

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**Newsletter of Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest
Providing Education and Information to Consumers in
Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico and environs.**

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“These are the times that try men's souls.”

- Thomas Paine “The Crisis”

Truly these are times that test us all but out of adversity comes remarkable opportunity for your Alliance.

In the beginning, more than thirty years ago, this funeral alliance, Funeral Consumers Alliance of North Texas (FCANT) came into being to provide cooperative buying of funeral services. Members were afforded a reasonable charge by cooperating funeral homes when it came time to make those final arrangements. Members received something of value for their life time membership fees and so could not make a tax deduction claim for the fee, and any subsequent donations, as going to a charitable organization.

Time brings many changes.

Because of the Internet you are now able to check with any mortuary for their itemized price lists at any time and you certainly should shop around for the best fees and services when you are forced by the death of a loved one to seek those services.

Because more and more independent funeral parlors are being bought up by national operators there are fewer that will agree to lower prices for Alliance members. Because there are fewer, but bigger, mortuary companies, they are able to turn their backs or ignore earlier agreements. Most importantly they are, by the economies of scale, able to afford larger lobbying operations before State and National legislative bodies.

**“The price of freedom
is eternal vigilance.”**

- Thomas Jefferson

Simply stated : In the halls of government about the only voice FOR the consumer position on end of life issues is the Funeral Consumers Alliance.

New York, California, Florida and Texas are the most populous states and Consumer Alliances in those states are the most active in seeking legislative protection for those who will be buying what can be an outrageously expensive final expense.

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...Our Lobbying Efforts

(Continued from page 1)

So what happens in the sessions of the Texas legislature every other year thus becomes an object of interest and direction in all fifty states. Members of North Texas Funeral Alliance thus help to guide the laws that govern final rites in this state and by extension in all fifty states.

The role of "lobbyist for the consumer" is one that has been accepted by your Alliance.

In the recent year a legislative fact-finding commission held nine public hearings in all areas across the state of Texas seeking information to write new legislation to cover the question of the donation of body parts after death.

You may not be aware that a very healthy industry exists which makes a business of selling the body parts of the newly departed (usually harvested within 15 hours of death) It can be a considerable amount of money that could go the surviving family and might well off set any costs of a funeral. Whole organs, such as heart, lungs and eyes CANNOT be sold. Body parts such as ligaments, and bones may.

There are a few responsible companies that perform the service of providing those body parts to the medical industry. But there is **very little** law covering this at present. The next Legislature will write one for Texas. The consumer's rights will be protected because your Alliance, in the person of President Jim Bates attended five of those meetings so the rights of the consumer would be considered.

The next session of the Texas legislature will begin in January 2009. The laws that will cover body part donations is one of four bills to be considered. Jim will be back in Austin to perform his lobbying duties you can be sure.

Another of the four bills will be one concerning prepaid funeral contracts. These contracts have been deemed, by no less an authority than AARP, as a massive rip off and scam. They are still legal in Texas however. Now the collapse of much of our financial system is going to put many of those existing contracts at risk. There needs to be a law that will change that system, if it is not deemed to be illegal all together, to work in YOUR favor.

The two other bills that will be brought before the next session of the Texas Legislature in Austin in January will deal with charges for funeral services and the continuing controversy that surrounds the action of commercial funeral companies buying up community cemeteries.

The latter is of concern to many because heretofore community cemeteries had been for the express use of community residents. They were operated as non profits and some even had serious bank accounts. The major commercial companies have been buying these cemeteries and ignoring any restrictions on community only interments.

For the first time the various issues of interest to the funeral community have been lumped into one single bill that would be voted up or down by the members of the legislature. The industry had found that method to be counter productive to their wants and needs - thanks to the lobbying efforts of your Alliance. At this session each of the four issues will be regarded and dealt with in separate bills.

That separation of the usual one bill into four separate bills, by the way, was the suggestion of our Jim Bates and was quickly agreed upon by the industry representatives. A first time indication of real cooperation.

Part of the new clout must go to **You**, our members. This turning of the corner in the relationship with the funeral industry has come because of your Alliance's ability to provide up-to-the-minute information on voter preferences. So many of you have registered for e-mail information and have responded to requests for opinion polls that legislative policy makers and government agencies have come to depend on FCANT's polls for their accuracy. That's another indication of the new respect we have in Austin.

The result of this lobbying attention has been a funeral industry and a legislative membership that is more attentive and responsive to the needs of the consumers - but - These results do not come cheaply. It requires money to travel to and attend government meetings.



...Possible Combining of Organizations

(Continued from page 2)

Once we were a community-buying organization. That has changed. Now we are an organization that lobbies for the rights of consumers and does its best to communicate those rights and changes in procedures to a supportive membership and to the community at large which we hope will see the wisdom of supporting our efforts.

With that view in mind, your Board of Directors is giving consideration to combining : The North Texas Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCANT), which had been the buying cooperative and lobbying entity, with Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest (FCASW), the educational, and informational organization.

Dues paid to FCANT were NOT tax deductible because you got something for your money. Donations made to FSCSA were tax deductible because they supported an informational alliance. If the amalgamation of the two bodies is successful, all monies donated will be tax deductible.

This will be a matter that will occupy most of your concern at our annual membership meeting this coming spring. More on that in the Spring Newsletter.

In the meantime, we still need your support in the form of a check. Please make the check payable to "Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest" if you wish a tax deduction. The amalgamation is still in the future.

Also you should be aware we have three vacancies on the board of directors. We could stand to have directors with some interest and experience in the fields of accounting and the law. You will notice the usual form in this news letter. Take a day or two to consider how you could be of help to your Alliance and then take another fifteen to twenty minutes to fill in the form and return it.

We need your participation. The work does not get any easier, but it may become a lot more interesting and be effective nation-wide.

Please pass this news letter on to an interested friend or relative.

Please take a moment to fill out and return this coupon to:

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest, 2875 East Parker Rd, Plano, TX 75074-7503

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Do you contribute to Funeral Consumers of the SW? (income tax deductible donation) Yes No

Would you like to make an annual donation? Yes No

How would you prefer to receive this Newsletter? Print Only Email Only Print AND Email

E-mail address :- _____

Would you have time to volunteer for light duties with your Alliance? Yes No

Would you have an interest in serving on the board? Yes No

What talents, or abilities, or experiences would you bring to the board if you were nominated?

Are you fluent in Spanish? Yes No

Please make a tax deductible donation now to Funeral Consumers of the Southwest \$ _____

Thank You



Staying in Touch

The mark of any successful organization is its ability to communicate both with its members and the general public. This becomes even more necessary as your Funeral Consumer Alliance moves from being a buying cooperative to an instrument of advocacy. This makes it even more important for our continued success that you fill in the return coupon in this news letter.

Board members have developed a new website for FCANT. We invite you to visit the site to discover its new design and its ease of navigation. The information you need is there :

Legal Forms, Shopping guidance, Information on our lobbying efforts in Austin, and copies of all our brochures. It makes it easier to share the information with interested friends and relatives.

Visit:

FuneralConsumersAllianceNorthTexas.org

(Capitalization is not needed - it is used here to make for easier reading.)

If you would like this news letter via the Internet you can indicate your choice on the coupon.



Read this newsletter then pass it on to a relative or a friend.

Funeral Consumers of North Texas now has a membership of nearly five thousand .

**Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Southwest
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Plano, TX 75074-7503**

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