



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island

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NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN 2024

TOP CAUSES OF DEATH LAST YEAR

from a August 9th article by Tracy Swartz, NY Post

As a top cause of death, COVID-19 dropped from fourth place in 2022 to 10th place last year. The disease was listed on 49,928 death certificates in 2023 – down from 186,552 in 2022 and a peak of 416,893 in 2021.

After heart disease and cancer, the third most common cause of death is "unintentional injuries". The rate for this collection of preventable deaths spiked 26.3% from 2019 to 2023, fueled by a significant increase in fatal drug overdoses. It was the third consecutive year the number topped 100,000. A current driver of substance-related overdose deaths is fentanyl.

Stroke has replaced COVID-19 as the fourth leading cause of death with 162,639 deaths reported. Chronic lower respiratory disease, Alzheimer disease, diabetes, and kidney disease round out the top eight causes of death.

CHANGING VIEWS

Many families are looking for alternatives to what have become common funeral practices. They may be seeking burial services that put less strain on the environment or a more personalized observance in place of a religious-based funeral.

The funeral industry is changing, offering greener alternatives and end-of-life care with the assistance of death doulas. For more information, see page 9 and also the Autumn 2021 newsletter on our website!

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Copies of this newsletter have been sent to all email addresses we have on file.

SENIOR AGENDA COALITION OF RI
16th Annual Conference & Expo
October 9th at the Crowne Plaza 7:30 AM - 12 Noon
Be sure to visit the Funeral Consumers Alliance table !!



HOME FUNERALS

www.HomeFuneralAlliance.org

Home funerals are safe and are legal in every state. That's when a loved one stays or is brought back home for visits from family, friends and community, for one to three days. Clergy and Celebrants can come to the home for services, or family members may design a fitting goodbye. Embalming is not required by law. Dry ice, Techni-ice, AC — they can all keep the body sufficiently cooled. Whether a funeral business is involved or not, you can make a casket or shroud a home, purchase from local craftsmen or order online. Families have full custody and control of loved ones. Even in Medical Examiner cases as well as organ donation, the body is released back to the family, who can choose whether or not to hire a funeral director. Nine states do compel families to hire a funeral director for filing, transportation or disposition witness. Remember: the average dead body is neither dangerous or contagious.



Thank you to all of our members and friends who were able to send us a donation this year. It helps a lot and is very much appreciated.

VOLUNTEER TODAY

We are very short of volunteers. Give us a call today at 401-884-1131. Any time you can spare to help would be great!



You can:

- help encourage people to plan ahead for funerals
- help prepare articles for our newsletters
- help process new member applications & address changes
- assist with publicity for upcoming public events
- assist with group presentations around the state
- help with website maintenance and member file updates
- help collect the latest price data from local funeral homes

WEST WARWICK

Our presentation on June 11th at St. Mary's Church in West Warwick was attended by over 30 people. Dana talked about funeral options including some of the newer ones and stressed the need for planning ahead.



The group was very interested and asked a lot of questions. We also provided many pamphlets and other printed materials.

FCA NATIONAL

The new address for FCA's National office is: 629 Paris Street, Graham, NC 27253

HISTORY

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island was founded in 1980 and incorporated in Rhode Island as the Memorial Society of Rhode Island. We changed our name in 2009 to emphasize our consumer focus. Our organization is one of many similar groups across the country, supported by our national office located in North Carolina (www.funerals.org). This affiliation allows reciprocal arrangements for people who move to other parts of the country. We are run solely by volunteers and have no attachment to the funeral industry or any religious group. Member-



VISIT US ANYTIME AT:

www.funerals-ri.org for announcements of upcoming events, copies of past newsletters, links to forms and publications, our Funeral Home Price Survey, and much more.

OUR MISSION

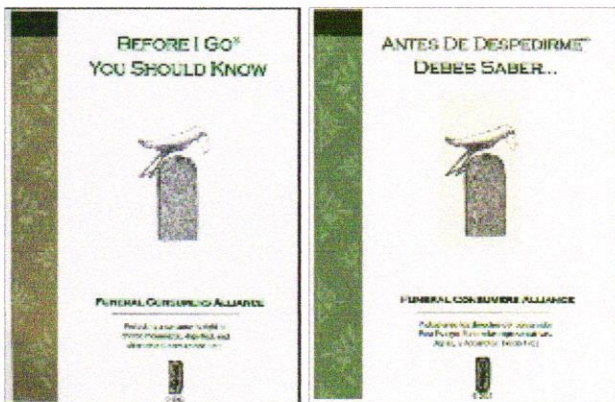
The mission of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island is to protect the right to choose meaningful end-of-life options. We educate consumers, provide state-wide price information and supply resources and encouragement for preplanning.

SHOP AROUND

Consumers shouldn't be afraid to "shop around" for a funeral home that will meet their needs. Doing so in advance, when they are not grieving a death that just occurred, enables families to make thoughtful, fully-informed decisions. Families should look for a funeral home that has a strong reputation with licensed funeral directors who understand all of their needs and concerns.



BEFORE I GO, YOU SHOULD KNOW



Our comprehensive end-of-life planner is now available for \$15 in either English or Spanish. Don't take your last wishes to the grave.

Before you go, they should know:

- your funeral plans
- where your important papers are
- who should take care of your pets
- who to call when the time comes

To order, send your check to:

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island
119 Kenyon Ave., East Greenwich, RI 02818

Be sure to specify English or Spanish !

FREE PAMPHLETS

How to choose a Funeral Home
How to Arrange a Home Funeral
How to Plan a Memorial Service

Green Burial: An Environmentally
Friendly Choice
Ten Tips for Saving Funeral Dollars

PLANNING AGENT

Who will be responsible for making all of the arrangements and decisions regarding your funeral preparation and planning, and burial or disposition of your remains ? You can appoint someone to have sole responsibility for the task by preparing the Rhode Island Planning Agent Designation Form. The form may be found online at: →

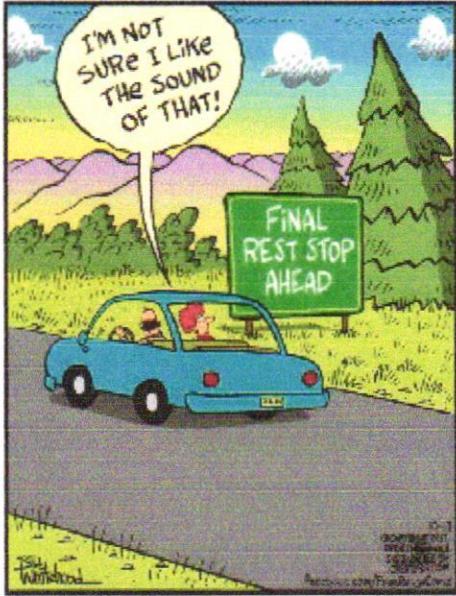
www.health.ri.gov/forms/legal/FuneralPlanningDesignation.pdf

www.health.ri.gov/forms/legal/DurablePowerOfAttorneyForHealthCare.pdf ←

POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE

A Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care gives legal authority to someone to make decisions and give consent for medical treatment on your behalf while you are LIVING and only when you are unable to do so yourself. A form to use to prepare the document may be found online at:

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NJ GRIEVING CAMP

From the Bergen Record NJ 5-30-24 by Gene Myers

In mid-May, about 55 teens who have faced the ultimate loss, attended a free 'bereavement camp' to hug, play, talk and bond with one another. This annual retreat was designed with the knowledge that young people cope with their loss differently from adults, said founder Lynne Hughes. "Kids are not going to wear black and mourn 24/7", said Hughes. "Even right after a funeral, they might be playing ball in the yard with their cousins. Then they fall and skin their knee and all of a sudden, they're crying because they miss their mom who died". she continued. "Then you put a Band-Aid on and they're off playing again. If you blink, you miss it, but they grieve".

When the Comfort Zone Camp was founded 26 years ago, it was the first bereavement camp for children. Since then, it has served 24,000 people and similar camps are now held in 12 states.

At the camp, attendees spend the weekend alternating between physical activities and events designed to foster recovery and connection. Campers share their stories in "healing circles" and hold memorial services with friends. There's a group of eight kids who are just inseparable every time they go to camp and attend every year.

See the full article in the Bergen Record for more details and to hear some of their stories.

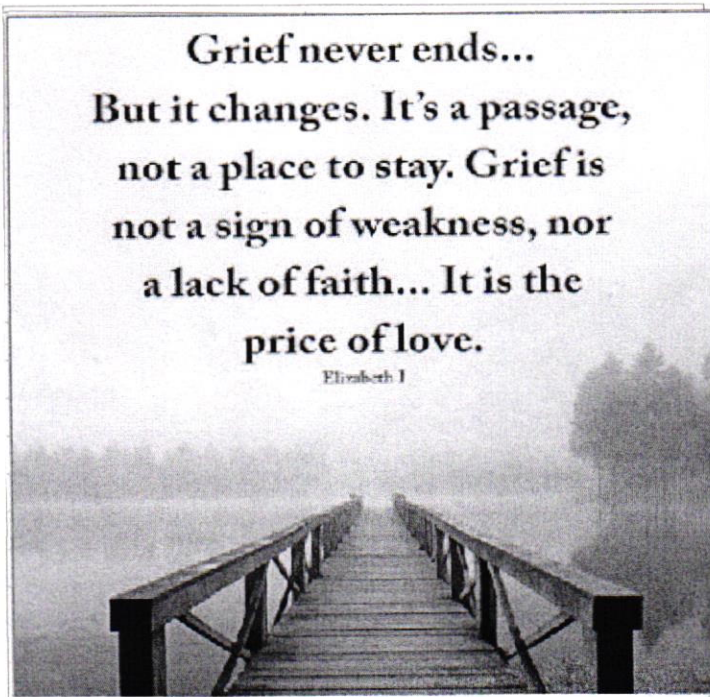
US CREMATION RATE

According to the National Funeral Directors Association, the US Cremation Rate is projected to increase by 1.3% since last year to 61.9% for 2024.

ON THE ROAD

Our presentation on funeral planning at Laurelmead Cooperative on August 27th was attended by about 25 people. They learned about death doulas, as well as some of the newer non-traditional methods for body disposition. Attendees were encouraged to plan ahead for their funerals. They learned how the FTC's Funeral Rule protects their rights when buying funeral services. Many booklets, pamphlets and other printed material was also made available.

Contact us at 401-884-1131 to schedule a presentation !



INDIANA RESIDENTS REVEAL A GROWING INTEREST IN NON-TRADITIONAL BURIALS

March 6, 2024

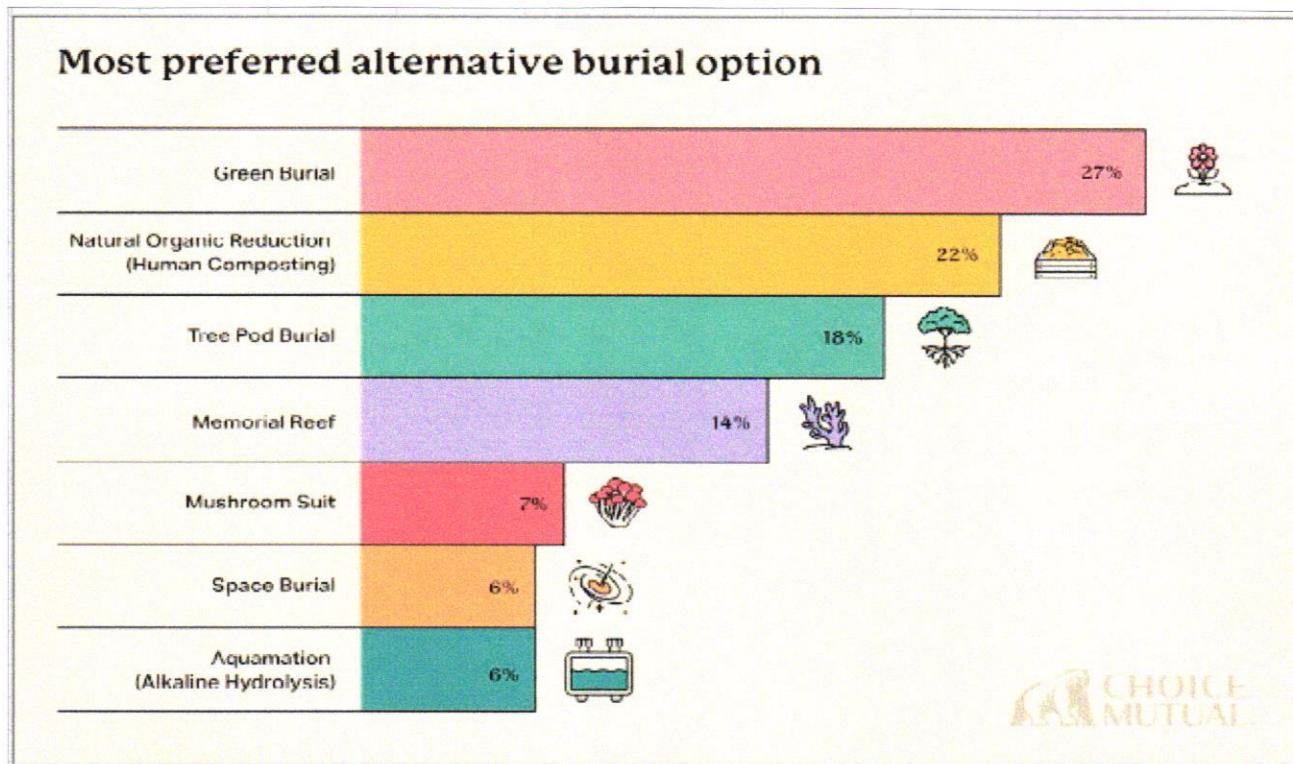
For ages, contemplating one's funeral has been an inherently awkward yet unavoidable aspect of life. Traditionally, the decision seemed straightforward: BURIAL or CREMATION. But as our society's values shift, so do the ways we consider for our post-mortem journey.

The trend toward environmentally conscious funeral options is rising as awareness spreads. In response to this shift, Choice Mutual surveyed 6,000 people in Indiana to gauge preferences for non-traditional burial methods. The findings were revealing, highlighting a growing interest in eco-friendly funeral alternatives. (See chart below)

Choice Mutual then decided to delve deeper into people's options about alternative burial methods.

With personal debt in America soaring, 45% cite high costs associated with traditional funerals — typically between \$7,000 and \$12,000 — as the primary concern. These expenses often cover a range of services, including casket purchase, service fees, burial vault, and costs for the gravesite and its preparation, not to mention headstones and funeral ceremonies.

Environmental impact is another significant concern, with 12% of those surveyed prioritizing it, closely followed by the issue of cemetery space, which concerns 11% of respondents. (See chart next page)



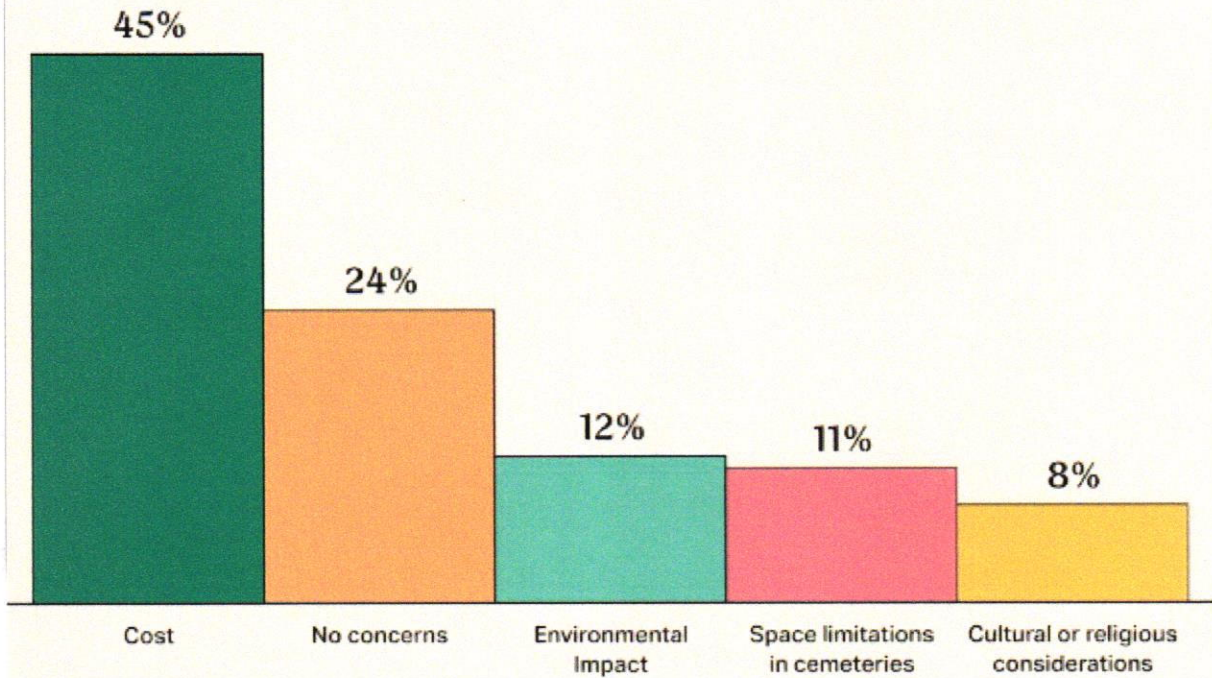
Residents were queried about their likelihood of choosing a cost-saving alternative burial method over traditional ones, with many indicating a propensity to switch to reduce expenses.

Discussions about funeral plans, especially with older family members remain a sensitive subject, with 39% feeling uneasy about it. Yet, a striking 72% would back a relative's decision to choose an alternative method, although 9% might dissuade them, and 19% would remain neutral.

Regarding funeral funding, 39% of respondents expect life insurance to cover the costs. Personal savings are the anticipated source for 29%, while 11% may rely on family contributions. A small fraction, 3%, even consider crowdfunding as an option.

In a notable reflection of celebrity influence, nearly one-third of Indiana residents polled concede that endorsement by a celebrity could sway their decision towards an alternative burial, underscoring the power of social media promotion, a tactic more commonly seen in industries far removed from funeral services. (See also chart on next page)

Concerns about traditional funerals

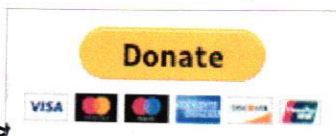


HUMAN COMPOSTING BILL MEETS RESISTANCE IN CONNECTICUT

Catholic bishops expressed concern about human composting, saying, "The end result of the human composting process is disconcerting, for there is nothing left but compost, nothing that one can point to and identify as remains of the body Like alkaline hydrolysis, human composting is not sufficiently respectful of the human body. In fact, the body is completely disintegrated. There is nothing left of the body to be placed in a casket or an urn and laid to rest in a sacred place where Christian faithful can visit for prayer and remembrance.

CONSIDER A DONATION TO FCA-RI

Donations from our members and friends are the primary source of income for FCA-RI. These funds allow us to publish this newsletter twice a year, provide our Funeral Home Price Survey, maintain a telephone line for consumers to ask questions, hold group presentations with guest speakers and conduct educational workshops. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are fully tax-deductible and any size donation will be greatly appreciated. You may send us a check or use the Donate' button on our website's Home page to donate by credit card. ----->



ADVANTAGES OF PLANNING AHEAD

- You may choose the type of funeral service you desire.
- You will save your survivors from making choices during the stress of bereavement.
- You can do comparison shopping at available funeral homes.
- You can make knowledgeable and thoughtful decisions.
- You will be stimulating family discussion, sharing, and decision-making.

FINANCE

We depend on financial support from members to be able to continue our mission and to provide much needed resources to consumers. Our expenses (which have increased in recent years) include:

- quarterly dues paid to FCA National
- maintaining a telephone line for inquiries
- postage, envelopes, paper, ink etc.
- printing of newsletters, labels, pamphlets, price surveys and other materials
- maintenance of our website
- hiring of guest speakers for public events
- room rental charges for public events
- table rental fees at the yearly SAC expo

You can help cover some of these costs with a tax-exempt donation to FCA-RI. Donations of any size will really help. Thank you !

THE MUSHROOM SUIT

The Mushroom Suit referenced in the chart on page five is a biodegradable burial shroud also known as the Infinity Burial Suit. It is made by Coeio, a company founded by Jae Rhim Lee. During her graduate studies, she visited a green cemetery which sparked an interest in funeral practices. She then began to look at how mushrooms can be used as a vehicle to reimagine people's relationship with death.

The first person buried in the burial suit was Dennis White, a 63-year-old carpenter who lived in Woodburn MA. He was suffering from a terminal illness and was interested in an eco-friendly unconventional burial. Since then, the mushroom suit has garnered the interest of celebrities and famous zero waste fashion designer Daniel Silverstein who worked with Coeio to design the latest version of the suit.

The Infinity Burial Suit is a handmade burial garment made with a mix of mushrooms and other microorganisms that aid in decomposition, help to neutralize toxins and provide nutrients to surrounding plant life. At the time of burial, the deceased person is dressed in the suit and it should be buried within 24 hours to help ensure the mushrooms germinate correctly. The company advises that the suit should be buried at a

PLAN IN ADVANCE

Have you considered what immediate decisions must be made by your family when you or they die ? When a death occurs in a family that has done no advanced planning, the survivors may accept conventional and costly funeral arrangements because of social pressure, emotional stress, or lack of time.

DIGITAL GRAVESTONES

Tombstones are likely one of the last products you'd expect to be digitized, but they are real and are likely to become more and more common in the future. A QR code that's inscribed on the stone links to an online memorial website where visitors can learn more about the deceased. Digital gravestones can be custom made by a gravestone company engraving the QR code directly onto the stone itself. Some vendors offer this service for as low as \$99. If you choose a gravestone that can't have a QR code directly on it, or are looking to digitize a gravestone that you already purchased, there are companies that make small QR code attachments. The QR code is engraved onto a piece of wood, stone, or metal and can be obtained for as little as \$29 which will help you turn the traditional gravestone into an digital one for an affordable price. Setting up a digital gravestone is an excellent way to start sharing your family's story and history.

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depth of 4 feet; this is a typical burial depth in green cemeteries. After the burial, the mushroom and microorganisms begin to germinate. As they grow, they release enzymes that decompose the body and help breakdown and neutralize toxins such as lead, mercury, pesticides, and BPA. This process helps to provide nutrients to the soil while avoiding contamination to plant life, making it an environmentally sustainable disposition option.

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A FCA-RI MEMBER

Please complete this form and mail with your check to:

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island
119 Kenyon Avenue
East Greenwich, RI 02818

Date: _____

Name(s): _____

() \$25 - Individual Membership Donation

() \$50 - Couple's Membership Donation

() \$___ Additional contribution to support
consumer education programs

Address: _____

email address: _____

telephone #: _____ City: _____ State: ___ Zip: _____

Benefits of membership:

- you gain information on conventional burial, "green burial", cremation, donation of organs or the whole body, home funerals, and newer options for disposition of remains such as human composting and alkaline hydrolysis.
- you receive advice from knowledgeable volunteers who are not selling any services.
- you become an educated consumer, able to shop for services with full knowledge of your rights and options.
- you learn why it is important to plan ahead for the funeral or memorial arrangements you want
- you learn why it may not be wise to prepay for these arrangements and what your alternatives are.
- you leave behind a final gift, sparing your next of kin the burden of making difficult decisions during a time of grief.

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MEMBERS RECEIVE

- the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Rhode Island Spring and Autumn newsletters
- our RI Funeral Home Price Survey
- invitations to our annual meeting, educational workshops, and programs featuring speakers of interest
- various pamphlets and a directory of FCA affiliates across the United States
- the satisfaction of helping to support a national organization dedicated to educating consumers about end-of-life choices and protecting their rights to choose arrangements that are meaningful and affordable
- the opportunity to purchase our "Before I Go ... You Should Know" end-of-life planning kit

Printed copies of this newsletter are available. Just send your request to our East Greenwich address shown above. Include your mailing address and \$1 to help with the postage cost.



GREEN BURIAL
a.k.a. Natural Burial

Green Burial emphasizes simplicity and environmental sustainability. The body is neither cremated nor prepared with chemicals such as embalming fluids. It is simply placed in a biodegradable coffin or shroud and interred without a concrete burial vault. The grave site is allowed to return to nature. The goal is complete decomposition of the body and its natural return to the soil. Only then can a burial truly be "ashes to ashes, dust to dust," a phrase so often used when we bury the dead. Because green burials do not involve embalming, fancy caskets, or concrete vaults, they can be a very cost-effective alternative to conventional burials, lowering the cost by thousands of dollars. If the family supplies their own shroud or coffin, the cost can be further reduced.

Each year, US cemeteries bury over 30 million board feet of hardwood and 90,000 tons of steel in caskets, 17,000 tons of steel and copper in vaults, and 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete in vaults. With green burial, fewer resources are used.

For some, forgoing the embalming process is the main attraction, since embalming fluid contains formaldehyde, a respiratory irritant and known carcinogen. In the U.S. about 5.3 million gallons of embalming fluid are used every year, and funeral home workers are exposed to it routinely. Love of nature and a desire for "eternal rest" in a forever-wild meadow or forest are frequently-cited reasons for choosing green burial. The most conservation-intense green cemeteries do not use fertilizer, pesticides, or herbicides.

In Rhode Island, green burial sites are available at:

Swan Point Cemetery
585 Blackstone Boulevard
Providence, RI 02906
(401) 272-1314

Prudence Memorial Park
PO Box 228
Prudence Island, RI 02872
(401) 919-0837

Arnold Mills Cemetery
Stearns Memorial Section
680 Nate Whipple Highway
Cumberland, RI 02864
(401) 374-2972

A NEW BENEFIT FOR VETERANS

from NFDA News, 6-21-24

On June 10, 2024, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) began accepting applications for a new benefit - a commemorative plaque or urn. It is only available if the veteran is cremated and not interred.

It is important to note that if families choose to commemorate their veteran with the plaque, the VA will be prohibited from interring them in a VA national cemetery or providing a government headstone, marker, or medallion for that veteran in any cemetery.

The VA will ship the commemorative plaque or urn without charge to the applicant and it becomes their property once received.

The VA encourages careful consideration of the interment prohibition before applying for the plaque or urn. Many veterans and family members consider the interment and gravestone marking benefits which will be forefitted to be of greater monetary value than a plaque or urn. For these reasons, it is critical that the family member consider the final disposition of the veterans remains and be certain of their decision before completing the application for a plaque or urn.

FREE PAMPHLETS – SPANISH



Como Elegir una Funeraria ... de Manera inteligent
Como Cubrir Los Costosn de un Funeral

Sus Derechos Funerarios
Planificacion Funeraria de Cuatro Pasos

GRIM REAPER ATTENDS WOMAN'S FUNERAL

from a 4-3-24 article by Ludia Patrick in the uk Independent News



With a Grim Reaper and a congregation of people dressed in white, those who saw Sharon Taffs' funeral would be forgiven for thinking the ceremony resembled a Halloween party, not a memorial service.

The eccentric 68-year-old mother-of-four retained her sense of humor to the end of her life. She planned her departure down to every last detail. She died of breast cancer diagnosed in 2022 which spread to her lungs. Her dying wish was for the 'Grim Reaper' to be at her funeral, and her daughter Louise 49, made it a reality.

Six months before her death, the idea came up when Ms. Taffs' daughter's best friend, Kenny, was discussing her funeral arrangements. Kenny joked that he would attend the service dressed as the 'Grim Reaper' and announce to guests "you're next". The daughter said her mother thought it was a really good idea.

He played the part perfectly. He did not speak a single word and stood at the back of the church – he did make a few people jump but guests were forewarned. The masked robed figure boldly stood out against the backdrop of guests who were in-

structed to dress in white rather than black. (Some disgruntled invitees refused to attend due to the controversial guest). Ms Taffs opted to have her cremation before the service so her ashes could be on display at the front of the church.

When you think of funerals, you think of sadness and people weeping. So many people said they really enjoyed her service with the lively religious songs played throughout and it was the best funeral they had ever been to. Ms. Taffs' daughter said "It's helped my grieving process because when I look back at her funeral, I don't remember it as a sad occasion, it makes me smile".

CREMATORIES

Crematories in Pennsylvania can now lower standard operating temperatures to save money and limit environmental emissions. The governor signed legislation which drops the temperature from 1800 degrees to 1600. This small change yields big results. Demand for cremation services has risen significantly since the early 80s when only about 17% of families chose cremation over burial.

In the Netherlands, a crematory plans to replace two of their units to provide a fossil-fuel-free option for customers. It is studying the feasibility of using hydrogen which would however raise their fuel costs by 2.5 times.

FREE PAMPHLETS

Cremation Explained
Embalming Explained
Traditional Burial

Should You Prepay Your Funeral ?
Death Away From Home
Common Funeral Myths

COLORFUL VINYL CASKET WRAPS

excerpts from an Orlando Sentinel article

It was supposed to be a regular day for 12-year-old Mariah Reginae Smith when she sat on her couch on Aug 25th to watch "SpongeBobSquarePants". A few minutes later, bullets shot and fired into her Lake City home killed her.

Nearly half a year later, Mariah's mother still struggles to come to terms with her daughter's death, but she has found comfort in embracing photos and other images of her life. One image was particularly helpful: A plastic banner with Mariah's image on it that wrapped her burial casket, displaying her in the clouds with angel wings behind her back and a halo.



A sample casket wrap ^

It was designed by 'A Touch of Jai', a casket wrapping and memorabilia business owned by Larry Fulton, 40, and his wife, Jamie, 38, in Gainesville. Large graphic depictions of a loved one can completely surround an otherwise impersonal coffin. Sometimes the customized graphic is surrounded by glitter and bling that Larry Fulton said represents the deceased's personality. The Fultons said they got into the business of casket wrapping to help provide comfort to their clients. On A Touch of Jai's website, customers fill out a form to order a casket wrap. The completed wraps can be shipped within 250 miles.

The vinyl wrapping industry includes businesses that wrap cars, appliances, tool boxes - and caskets. Unheard of a few years ago, casket wrapping is becoming increasingly common across the U.S. Casket wrappers often sell prefabricated wraps showing stock images of nature scenes and religious symbols. The wraps, made from a vinyl plastic material that is adhered using heat, can be made in one or two days. But custom wraps displaying the deceased and their favorite things like logos from a favorite sports team or images of a favorite place provides meaning to the business, Larry Fulton said. The Fultons' is one of a few casket wrapping businesses in the U.S. They began designing and wrapping caskets for a living in 2022. Their business became even more personal, however, after Larry Fulton's sister died. "I keep referring to her as my baby sister even though she was 32", he said on a video uploaded to TikTok. Touch of Jai's prices its casket wraps from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Demand is variable, according to Larry Fulton. There are weeks where they have zero caskets to wrap and other weeks where they might produce five, but the average is two or three.

Camelia Clarke, owner of Paradise Memorial Funeral Home in Milwaukee and a longtime member of the National Funeral Directors Association, said casket wrapping is "a level of memorialization and personalization" that is "really helping families with a healthier grieving journey".

Burials have roots in the African-American approach to the customs of funerals as a celebration of life, a time for joy and remembrance, not for solemnity, according to Joseph A. Brown, a Catholic priest and director for the school of Africana and Multicultural Studies at Southern Illinois University. "In Catholicism, the blemishing of one's soul is represented by a cloth over a casket." Brown said. He said such traditions come from Africa and ancestral ties stemming from alavery -- such as the sprinkling of holy water over a casket — and can symbolize the act of "ancestors crying tears of joy that we have returned to them".

Jamil Robinson, 35, creative director of WeWrapCaskets, a South Florida business said "There is no right or wrong way to celebrate life, but if you're going to celebrate, make sure it looks beautiful as it can for them and put your all into it." "If you're really honoring someone's whole life, make sure you honor it in the fullest."

the original story was produced by 'Fresh Take Business', a news service covering business news from the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications.

A GRAVEDIGGER TRIES TO MAKE GRIEF EASIER

An August 21st article by Miquela V. Thornton in 'The Capital Times', Madison WI

As a child, Dustin Duve felt confused witnessing his first burial.

Then as an adult, Duve realized why: The burial didn't align with his logic for ecological sustainability or working through grief.

His epiphany arrived while standing at the feet of his dying uncle, who Duve called "like a brother". As his uncle took a last breath, Duve realized the experience was different from past encounters with death.

Duve was present and active the entire time. From sickness to death to the burial, he never shied away from any of it.

Now Duve thinks about mortality all the time. He digs graves for green burials as a cremetarian for Natural Path Sanctuary in Verona.

A green burial is a natural burial that forgoes heavy metal caskets for biodegradable containers or cloth shrouds and prohibits embalming and other pollutants. Many green cemeteries are located in natural areas to limit the amount of land solely used for burials.

And as the Cap Times reported this summer, interest in green burials is rising in our state.

Duve said burying people sustainably has helped him cope with death and can help others, too. At Natural Path Sanctuary, loved ones are allowed to bury bodies themselves, a practice that faded with the rise of funeral homes and popularity of cremations.

As he bears witness to people in the thick of grief, Duve said participating in the burial can ease the process of coming to terms with death.

"A burial experience in this cemetery provides an opportunity for life and death to interact and for us to contemplate this reality," Duve said.

He said the interaction happens on two levels. First, being involved in a burial helps grounds people "in the realization of the fleeting, ongoing nature of life and death." They see the preciousness of life.

Then, from an ecological perspective, people understand how microorganisms interact with remains, nurturing decomposition. To Duve, this process is also about renewal, allowing a burial to "perpetuate life."

"It's exhilarating, even a little overwhelming at times and difficult to grasp, but all in all, I see it as profound and beautiful," he said.

Since 2021, Duve has helped dig the more than 200 burials added to Natural Path Sanctuary in the last three years. One burial that sticks with him involved a man who barely knew his daughters. They were so estranged that the daughters didn't find their father's deceased body for two months, Duve recalled.

When one daughter called Natural Path Sanctuary about the burial, she batted Duve's condolences away.

"Oh, I didn't really know him. I just want to get this done," he recalled her saying.

Duve said he typically encourages bereaved family and friends to help dig and shovel dirt atop a grave until it disappears inside the forest. But this time he thought the family wouldn't care. Surprising him, though, one daughter asked, "Dustin, do you mind if I help?"

"I stepped back and let them do what they needed to do, and it wasn't long before they were both crying in each other's arms. One said, "We couldn't find him in a timely fashion, but at least we could do this.", Duve said.

Duve says the burial sticks with him because a "going through the motions" burial ended up being "transformational" for him and the daughters.

"It really underscored people's not only willingness but desire to be a part of life but also a part of the process of final disposition from loved ones," he said. "If these women, given this situation, wanted to be involved, surely other people do."