



In Touch

Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association

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Ask a Funeral Director: Covid-19

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the funeral industry and on funeral practices?

According to Jack Jensen of Cypress Funeral Services, Inc., who has been in the funeral business for 35 years, the initial reaction among funeral staff was a widespread concern bordering on panic. OMG, do we need triple body bags? How do we protect ourselves? But things settled down, and, in any case, morticians have long been handling deaths by infectious diseases as a matter of course (think HIV and hepatitis). There are known protocols to follow for such things. One interesting change is that when those who have died of Covid are picked up from hospitals, the bodies come wearing masks, because while dead people don't cough or sneeze, moving the body can cause residual air to be expelled from the lungs, and could therefore still release virus particles.

The biggest change, according to Jensen, has been in mourning habits and public rituals because gatherings have been restricted by lockdown rules which differ by county and change over time. The hard thing about limiting gathering sizes for funeral and memorial services has been that family members of the deceased are bereft of the support they would otherwise get from friends and loved ones being present—hugging, clasping hands, and offering words of comfort and caring. The webcasting of memorial services simply cannot provide the same closeness and warmth that comes with the physical presence of those who care.

Within the funeral business, more interactions with clients have been over the phone or on computer video apps. But much of funeral work

entails transporting and handling of bodies, which cannot be done remotely. Jensen reports that there is a small uptick in the number of dead they are handling here in the Bay Area, but nothing like in New York where the sudden massive increase in the numbers of dead overwhelmed the industry's capacity and bodies had to be held in refrigerated trucks until they could catch up. Fortunately, there have been no infections among employees at the funeral homes associated to Cypress Lawn, where everyone has been exercising extreme caution, always wearing masks and using sanitizer.



Jack Jensen

For bodies being shipped overseas, foreign consulates are requiring rigorous proofs that the death was not caused by Covid-19. None will accept Covid deaths. Shipping within the US is still possible without much trouble.

There have been no price changes in the services that funeral homes provide (at least within the Cypress Lawn-associated homes), and only minimal changes in what death-care choices family members are making. There is a slight reduction in the number of bodies embalmed before cremation, since viewings are curtailed.

NOTE: UCSF reports that they will not take body donations from people who have died of Covid-19. And Stanford is not accepting any body donations during this time. BE SURE TO HAVE A

FALL 2020 Issue

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PLAN B if body donation was your Plan A.

Cemeteries are using staff to carry caskets rather than letting the deceased's family members do it.

Jensen's one piece of advice to families experiencing a death is that they should not let the cause of death affect their death care choices, such as burial or cremation. Gatherings must be small but need not be eliminated. He worries that families who put off memorial services "until this is all over" will simply not hold those services at all because the need for communal sharing of grief will have passed.

No Annual Conference

The BA-FCA Board decided to skip the annual conference this year since no one on the board knows how to conduct a Zoom computer meeting, and we can't meet in person due to the Coronavirus threat.

The board needs someone in its readership who has the

Zoom or Go To Webinar technical skills to help out, and we will have a chance to bring you informative programs online.

This newsletter will give you information normally handed out at our annual business meeting—annual report, finances and budget, and nominations to the board. We will be voting for board members and amendments to the bylaws, however—look for the voting coupon on page 3 of this issue, clip it out, and please vote. Use the remit envelope to send to the office.

The amendments to the bylaws will be tune-ups that allow us to do online and teleconference meetings, allow board members to serve up to three three-year terms, make it clear that our members are also members of the state and national FCAs, and take out some hard-to-meet requirements. See the proposed changes on the By-laws insert with this *In Touch*, or online at www.ba-fca.org/Bylaws_Proposed_2020.pdf

If you are familiar with Zoom operations and have the time, please volunteer your expertise. Call 650-321-2109 and talk to Krystle or Margie. We would love to bring educational speakers and programs to the public once again. And the rest of you **share your email address** so we could notify you about what is upcoming!

About Death...

Penny V. Phillips, First Congregational UCC San Jose

Think about Death? Who, me? The best time to think about death is before it happens. Don't you agree?

Although the timing of death is an unknown, we do know it is coming, so we can consider different aspects that we can actually 'prepare' for and gain some confidence and comfort from the preparation.

In addition to becoming a member of the Bay Area Funeral Consumers Alliance for financial knowledge in burial and cremation plans, it is not too early to start the conversation with loved ones about your wishes and vision of what you would like for yourself when you die. There are many Death Cafés (Google the term) providing an informal way to talk about this topic in a safe, supportive atmosphere.

It is also perfectly all right to start a conversation with your family, perhaps at a family gathering or at mealtime. *And all can join in the conversation, not just "old people"*. You may start with just two simple but important questions: If you were facing serious illness, what kind of care would you want? AND, if you couldn't speak for yourself, who would? Think about what matters to you most, talk about it with your family, choose your health care agent and write it down. Share your plan. This is truly a great gift to give your family as it will ease their distress as they may struggle to determine your wishes.

Let's all get more comfortable talking about dying and death. Consider your values and wishes for the last phase of life and share those with the important people in your life. Really, the best time to think about death is *before* it happens!

FINANCIALS

	2019 Actual	2020 Proposed
Income		
Donations	12,213	12,500
Memberships	5,525	5,500
Book Sales, Escript, Interest, etc.	240	300
TOTAL INCOME	17,978	18,300
Expenses		
Outreach (Newsletter, Appeal, Annual Mtg)	4,443	4,500
Facilities, Equipment, Insurance, Supplies	1,936	3,400
Phone, Internet, Website, etc	1,507	1,600
Employee (wages, Fed and State taxes, etc)	7,159	7,000
Postage	900	1,000
State FCA and National FCA Dues	350	475
Misc (fees, travel, registration)	125	125
TOTAL EXPENSES	16,420	18,100

Messages from our Office

Our mailing address has been officially changed to:

**PO BOX 60448
PALO ALTO CA 94306**

Please do NOT send mail to our street address. If it arrives at our building, it goes into a slot for the church office which is largely unstaffed, making it hard for us to retrieve. Most mail is now automatically forwarded to our PO Box. However, many charitable funds such as Fidelity do not allow their mail to be forwarded so if you send it to our physical location instead of the PO Box, the check may languish in a vacant church office indefinitely or be returned to the charitable fund. You may need to update this in your account with them.

Also, please send in your Planning Forms with your updated contact information and mortuary arrangement information. This will be used to update your database file and it will be faxed to the mortuary you have chosen. Or contact us by phone or email to update any changes.

Please update your address, phone numbers, email address and next-of-kin if they have changed.

Fun Fact:

We are receiving more check donations in the mail vs Pay Pal from our online website. But we are receiving more new memberships from our online website vs in the mail or by phone.

BAFCA is participating in a Drive Up Resource Fair this year since COVID-19 doesn't allow gatherings.

Our application brochures and mortuary price list will be distributed by the Barbara Lee Senior Center by their own staff at 40 N. Milpitas Blvd, Milpitas CA 95035 on October 30, 2020 3pm-5pm. If you know anyone in that area who may be interested in receiving our material, please attend the fair or reach out to the Barbara Lee Staff to receive a copy as they shall have more copies after the event.

ON SALE!

Our *Before I Go, You Should Know* booklets are \$15.00 and are available for purchase!

It is a spiral workbook that members can record everything survivors would need to know to handle their estate. This workbook allows members to write down all important contact information from assets, healthcare power of attorney, will, debts and liabilities, funeral and memorial wishes, etc.

IN TOUCH is issued twice a year from the offices of Bay Area Funeral Consumers Association, PO Box 60448, Palo Alto, CA 94306

Cut out this coupon and return in the enclosed envelope by Nov 15. OR, you may go online to vote at www.ba-fca.org/VOTE.html

VOTE ON BYLAWS AND BOARD MEMBER

Name _____ Member Number _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Bylaws: ___ approve all changes ___ oppose all changes
 ___ approve all except Section(s) _____ (attach extra sheet if nec)

Second three-year term for co-treasurer Peter Lee: ___ approve ___ oppose

___ I am available to be a BA-FCA Board Member for one three-year term

___ I am interested in helping BA-FCA's expansion with computer technology

___ I can help compile prices of funeral homes and cemeteries in _____ County

What Zoom topic or speaker would you like to suggest? _____

Annual Report
 by Margie Bridges, Hotline Volunteer

The Bay Area FCA has been suffering for over a year with a reduced number of Board of Directors, fewer volunteers, and turnovers in the Office Manager position. Not to mention the difficulties in 2020 due to the Coronavirus shutdown leading to our inability to talk to organizations and appear at senior fairs in the past eight months.

However, the bright spots are that we have more mortuaries to choose from, new memberships and donations are sufficient, the website and newsletter thrive thanks to Deborah Meckler, the office is open 9 hours a week since Office Manager Krystle Bantilan joined us in February, and the Board is able to meet via Zoom on their computers once a month.

The board spent half of 2019 considering whether to raise the membership fee, and finally changed it from \$50 to \$100 beginning Jan. 1, 2020.

2019 Statistics--Before Jennifer Harris retired as Outreach Chair in 2019, she gave four "Are You Good to Go?" presentations, and we had a booth with brochures at six senior/health fairs. We gained 101 new members in the year, had 63 members die that we know of, and 131 others made donations.

Changes may be implemented in 2021 because Patricia Haines, marketing consultant, is volunteering her time to interview our major players in order to analyze our future social media and website technology needs. She will be glad to have suggestions from our members, too. Leave her a message at 650-245-2692.

The Board now consists of Allan Behr of Half Moon Bay, president; Penny Phillips of Sunnyvale, secretary; and Byron Chan of San Francisco and Peter Lee of Mountain View, co-treasurers. Peter's term expired this year, and he agreed to be elected to another three-year term, so **PLEASE USE THE COUPON ABOVE TO VOTE!**

The bylaws (see insert) allow for a board of seven members, so we

would welcome three additional people to be appointed. Fill in your name on the coupon, call 650-321-2109 or email office@ba-fca.org if you can serve on the Board.

Other may wish to be an occasional helper in these ways:

1. Education/outreach committee (write, update, or distribute brochures, speak about FCA or obtain speakers, arrange Zoom programs, help do PR and marketing)
2. Cemetery survey committee (use phone to get information to be posted to the website)
3. Mortuary survey committee (use computer & phone to get information to be posted on website)
4. Computer savvy person(s) to upgrade/supervise our Facebook page, host a Zoom meeting, help with our website or newsletter production.

It would be a pleasure to meet and volunteer with more of our members!



Tributes

With thanks to these donors

Each year our organization receives gifts made to honor respected individuals or in memory of loved ones who are missed. Below are the financial tributes we have acknowledged since the last newsletter:

- In Memory of:**
Al Meckler by Deborah Meckler
David & Margot Botsford by Peter Botsford
Lou Gado by Mary Simpson
Paul De Carli by Anne di Carli

NOTE: there is currently a problem with Paypal not returning to our website to identify the tribute donations. This problem is being worked on.



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Visit us on the web! www.ba-fca.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

This newsletter
will stand in place of our
Annual Conference
in this year of Covid-19
and no gatherings.

News You Can Use

Mushroom coffins? The Netherlands has had its first burial using a “living coffin” made of mycelium, the mat of fibers that forms the underground part of fungi. Mycelium is a natural recycler. It neutralizes toxins and provides fresh food to anything growing above ground. Its fibers can be used to make food, clothes, and packaging—including coffins. Bob Hendriks, who founded the startup that produces the Living Cocoon, says that, “Mycelium is constantly looking for waste products – oil, plastic, metals, other pollutants – and converting them into

nutrients for the environment. This coffin means we actually feed the earth with our bodies. We are nutrients, not waste.” Humans buried in conventional containers, including metal, synthetic fibers, and toxic materials, can take decades to decompose into the soil. A mycelium coffin will be absorbed into the soil within weeks, with the decomposition of the body occurring within a year or two after that. Hendriks is working with scientists to measure the contribution to soil quality from this process. He hopes to show that polluted areas can be restored to healthy forests and ecosystems, since mycelium will decompose almost anything—oil, plastic, metals, and other pollutants. Each Living Cocoon takes several weeks to form as the mycelium mat grows in the shape of a coffin and then is allowed to dry naturally. Once exposed to damp soil, it comes back to life and starts its

decomposition work. Ref: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/15/first-funeral-living-coffin-made-mushroom-fibre-netherlands>

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### Home funeral guides file lawsuit against California.

Although “death doulas” often do not charge (although they take donations) for giving families advice on how to conduct home funerals without the help and expense of a funeral home, California is trying to shut down this activity, charging “practicing funeral service without a license.” The Institute for Justice is helping the home funeral guides to take the case to court. Ref: <https://funerals.org/death-doulas-sue-california-for-the-right-to-give-families-advice-on-home-death-care/>

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Forensic Botany. When human remains are left out in the environment to decompose, plants

and soil absorb their nutrients, often causing a slight change in leaf color or reflectivity which can be picked up by remote sensing equipment. Human remains can be distinguished from other large animal remains due to certain metabolites specific to humans.

This difference offers the possibility of using remote sensing to find corpses in remote or treacherous terrain where it would be difficult or dangerous for humans and cadaver-sniffing dogs to search for them. The University of Tennessee’s “body farm” is studying this process to tease out the specifics of the “necrobiome,” the small area where the corpse has caused changes in the plants. Ref: https://www.inverse.com/science/forensic-botanists?link_uid=37&utm_campaign=inverse-daily-2020-09-04&utm_medium=inverse&utm_source=newsletter

Before I Go, You Should Know—This \$15 booklet contains useful forms (powers of attorney, advance directives, etc) and lots more! Order by emailing office@ba-fca.org or calling 650-321-2109.