



**Upcoming  
Program:**

**Why I Want to  
Die from Cancer**

– *Cynthia Luke,  
nurse educator*

Annual meeting  
Monday, October 11,  
2004 7:00 P.M.

Place to be  
announced, watch for  
September mailing

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Arthur Snoko  
Arville Stanley  
Goldie Terrell

2005 Term

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Gary Schroeder  
Jim Shotts

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## Paying last re\$pect\$

One of the most important functions of a funeral consumers alliance is providing its members with a price comparison of area funeral homes. Our latest funeral home survey accompanies this newsletter. Comparing funeral homes is a difficult task and price isn't the only consideration, but it is a significant one for consumers. The "full service" funeral charge was calculated using the least expensive casket and other items listed on our report. Please note that this hypothetical full service funeral does **not** include a vault, cemetery expenses (plot, opening and closing the grave, or the grave liner or vault), or ancillary merchandise. Prices for this type of funeral with no cemetery expenses range from \$2,425 to \$5,635.

Since our geographical area is a large one, we included the mileage radius that a funeral home considers to be its service area and the additional mileage charge outside that radius. Consumers

might do well to consider a funeral home that seems to be miles away, but that can provide the desired services at a reasonable cost.

More revealing than price was the compliance with the Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Funeral Rule. Five of the 27 establishments surveyed were in complete compliance. Three had serious violations — missing FTC-mandated pricing options, double-billing, etc. — that cause concern about how these funeral homes are treating their customers. The other 19 showed only minor errors or omissions that are likely clerical errors and probably don't indicate mistreatment of consumers. This is a significant improvement over our last survey and we believe our oversight has had an influence. Several funeral homes made changes we suggested after our last survey two years ago.

See Funeral Home Survey, page 2

## More Ink in Our Name

In May, we became an incorporated organization under the laws of Virginia. You will notice the addition of Inc. in our name. This is another indication of our maturing organization and provides a measure of protection to the volunteers who serve on our Board of Trustees. That same board is the Board of Directors for the corporation.

At our annual meeting in October, we will elect the Board of Trustees who will also serve as the Board of Directors.

We thank our sister affiliate, Funeral Consumers Alliance of Tidewater, Inc. for sharing experience in becoming incorporated and also member and former trustee, attorney Taylor Mead Albright, who provided pro bono legal advice.

## **Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge, Inc.**

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**We're on the Web!**

See us at:  
[www.funerals.org/fcavbr/](http://www.funerals.org/fcavbr/)

## **Funeral Home Survey** from page 1

They made their price lists easier to read, conformed to FTC regulations, removed illegal fees and some even made significant price reductions.

There were some bright spots among the funeral homes surveyed. Five funeral homes — DeVilbiss, Hamlar-Curtis, Maberry, Vauhan-Guyann, and Vaughan-Guyann McGrady — all showed total compliance with the Funeral Rule (although not all of their respective prices were favorable). Several funeral homes also offered very good prices overall. For details,

please see the price survey spreadsheet accompanying this newsletter.

Several funeral homes offered the option of an Immediate Burial with an alternative container, a thoughtful service that can help save families money. Four funeral homes also offered the option of a private family viewing without embalming, a service we wish all funeral homes would offer.

It is heartening to know that there are conscientious people in the funeral services industry and we are happy to work in good faith with these upstanding people to better serve the public.

## **Prepaying cemetery plots not always wise**

One of our members sought help with dealing with Fairview Cemetery in Roanoke. In 1928 her grandfather bought 12 plots in the cemetery. Four plots were used by the family, but eight remained empty. The third generation is scattered and no one wants to be buried there. She was dismayed to find that she could not sell the plots and they would revert to the cemetery if not used within a 50 year period. The owner informed her that he had 22,000 other plots waiting out the 50 year period.

According to our member, "It is a pretty good business situation for them. They will always have plots to sell and this makes it easier for their perpetual care if they don't have to mow around grave markers." In our mobile society, it is important to make sure plots can be transferred, resold, or returned.

Since we had not been able to get information from this particular cemetery, this woman volunteered to try. She was able to get a general price list and she sent it to us. It was not only a cemetery which had refused to supply any information to

us by phone or mail, but her collected data included another cemetery that had also refused to provide their prices. We now have information from Cedar Lawn and Fairview cemeteries in Roanoke. We have revised our cemetery survey information. If you would like a corrected copy, please request it from our office. We still have other cemeteries that have not been cooperative and hope for more volunteers to collect the data.

According to state regulations, these cemeteries are required to give their general price lists to anyone requesting it in person. However, there are often no offices at the cemetery and it is fruitless to just show up. If you are willing to call and make an appointment at one of these cemeteries to obtain a price list, we will continue to revise our report.

Our member's story has a satisfactory resolution. Because of her perseverance and our referral to the Senior Investigator of the Virginia Cemetery Board, after many months, she reports that Fairview has agreed to let her sell six of the eight lots. "It took a lot of hard work, time and persistence, but I am satisfied with the outcome," she said.