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## Find out more

- In the press 2
- A member's wish 3
- Vertical burial 4

## Cemetery survey relies on volunteers

Our cemetery survey posed several challenges. First we decided to survey only those establishments that are open to the public. That meant that we eliminated private cemeteries, family cemeteries, and church cemeteries. We included commercial cemeteries, those licensed by the state through the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulations. In addition, we included the municipal cemeteries in our service area and some cemeteries that act like municipal cemeteries but are run by private boards of trustees. Even though these and the municipal cemeteries are not regulated, our experience has shown these establishments are generally consumer-friendly. They are upfront about their costs and policies and they are open to all.

We had to file formal complaints with the State against four cemeteries because they told our volunteer that they did not have a general price list or they refused to provide one. This is one of the regulations clearly spelled out by Virginia regulations. The general price list should be available to anyone who requests it. We sent both a letter with a self-addressed, stamped envelope and had a volunteer call to request the price list. It was only after at least three attempts that we filed a complaint.

While such things make collecting our data tedious, it is one of the main reasons we exist as an organization. No consumer should have to face such obstacles. In our watchdog

See **Volunteers**, 2

## Are your will's signatures authenticated?

Member **Dianne Rencsok** recounts this cautionary tale. When her husband, Fred, went to the clerk of courts to begin probate for his father's will, he could not establish an executorship. The will was prepared in

1973 and, although it had the requisite three witness signatures, the clerk indicated current law requires evidence of the authenticity of the signatures.

**Will**, p. 3

## Volunteers *from 1*

capacity we can point out to the State when death-care businesses are not following the law. We can also do the footwork for consumers who want to be educated, to think about the best options for themselves and their families, and to be able to make informed decisions. A third result of our work is that we are educating death-care businesses so that they follow t

state regulations and good customer relation practices.

Our volunteers make all this possible. One of our members responded to our newsletter request and agreed to call six cemeteries who had not answered our letter. Five other volunteers called on the nine remaining cemeteries that needed prodding.

## Member's wishes followed



*Just what Mamma wanted*

One of our loyal members died recently. Her three daughters were able to carry out their mother's wishes of no embalming even though she died at Bowman Gray Hospital in North Carolina.

The funeral home agreed to transport the body without embalming, although the funeral home required a sealed casket. The daughters selected the least expensive

casket. The funeral director said, "Oh no, you don't want that one. That is what we use for welfare people." The daughters were adamant. That is exactly what their mother wanted. The steel gray metal casket was covered with a lovely tapestry that their mother acquired on a trip to Greece. There was a floral spray on top and the closed casket looked lovely as the large crowd of mourners filed past to pay their respects.

## In the press

In a citizen commentary in *The Roanoke Times* (3-6-07) Michael Abraham asks, "...why [do] we treat animals with more kindness, compassion and respect than we treat members of our own families?" In his commentary Michael describes the humane

treatment of Ruby, the Mill Mountain Zoo tiger, who was euthanized after her veterinarian and zoo officials determined that both her health and her quality of life had deteriorated. The

*Press, p. 3*

## Will, from page 1

Fred was able to find the retired brother of the lawyer who signed the will. He was able to tell us that his brother died in 1990, one of the other signers a few years after that, and he did not know where the third person was. Fred found a lawyer who had worked with the deceased lawyer. This lawyer went with him to the Clerk of Courts to say that he could authenticate the signature of the drafting lawyer on the will. But that was not enough as two witness authentications are required. It seems that having this form of will is the same as having no will at all.

Dianne Rencsok checked on her will to make sure it had a

notary statement attached. The notary validates the signatures on the will. Fred's will, which was prepared a few years earlier, has no such validation, only the signatures of the lawyer and two office staff who witnessed it.

Dianne says, "We have had Fred's will redone to meet these requirements. My father's will did not have this validation. This is a "new" requirement since the early 1990s. So I thought it might be a good idea to pass on the recommendation that people check their wills. If they were made some time ago and do not have "self validation", they will be considered as having died intestate!"



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*This is a "new" requirement since the early 1990's.*

## Press, from page 2

treatment of this popular zoo attraction is contrasted with the sad tale of Michael's friend, who had to watch his wife die a slow and painful death from cancer because to help her die is unlawful. Although tempted to increase her morphine to a lethal dose, this conflicted man realized that he might face a life sentence for the mercy killing of his wife.

Michael's article drew a response from Blacksburg resident Sharon Crane (Roanoke Time, 3-28-07) who suggests that end-of-life laws are in need of revision. She states that "...we as a society need to advocate for responsive, humanitarian laws that support a person's individual choice in end-of-life decisions."



'cemetery' actually comes from a Greek word,, meaning : "to put to sleep" (interpretation: "to lay to rest:, i.e., a "resting place").

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## Don't take it lying down

Vertical burial is used in the Netherlands and in several countries in Asia where land is scarce. Australia has just approved it. The price is cheaper than traditional burial because body bags are used instead of coffins and the space-savings allows for more graves per site.

Glendale Memorial Nature Preserve, a green cemetery located in the Florida panhandle reports that they have an auger that will dig a 2 ft. dia. by 8 ft. deep hole. Several prospective customers have expressed interest, but so far no one has used it.

Reporting of the vertical burial trend has produced a lot of clever headlines according to the Pittsburg Post Gazette. A sampling of "Rest in Puns."

**"Standing room only at Australia's first vertical cemetery"**

—Agence France Presse.

**"Going feet first into the hereafter"** — Daily Telegraph, Sydney

**"Vertical burial 'doesn't stand up' "** —Geelong Advertiser

**"Dead on their feet"**—MX magazine, Melbourne

**"The cemetery with standing tomb only"** —Daily Mail, London