



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Eastern Massachusetts

Promoting a consumer's right to choose dignified, meaningful, and affordable after-death care

Annual Newsletter

Published January 2011

With new book on the way, Josh Slocum to bring national agenda to March event

by Emma Crossen

Whether he is traveling across the country to meet with activists, helping Congress to develop legislation, or appearing in national media, Josh Slocum is taking on corrupt practices in the funeral industry. On March 19, he will bring stories from his work and a full agenda to the FCAEM annual gathering at Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain.

The gathering in 2010, featuring advocate and joke-teller Lisa Carlson, proved that FCAEM members can laugh at death, and the event rallied an impressive number of new volunteers.

For the 2011 event, FCAEM turns to Carlson's co-author and successor at FCA. Since Slocum took over FCA leadership in 2003, he has become the nation's leading advocate and sought-after expert on national trends and laws affecting consumers of after-death care. As the executive director of FCA, Slocum advocates for the concerns of FCA affiliates nationwide.

His appearance in Boston comes as his latest book hits the shelves. With Carlson, Slocum co-authored *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death*. This comprehensive resource provides a state-by-state guide to

consumer laws and trends for each of the 50 states. It is an updated version of Carlson's earlier book, *Caring for Your Own Dead*. FCAEM intends to make copies available at the annual gathering.

Slocum and Carlson met in 1996 when Slocum was a young journalist investigating the nation's largest funeral industry chain. He joined the FCA staff in 2002 and succeeded Carlson as Executive Director after her retirement.

His agenda for March 19 includes the following topics:

- Consumers' "last rights," the ones they don't know they have when it comes to funeral shopping.
- Failure of state regulations to protect consumers from fraud in

prepaid funeral arrangements.

- Cemeteries getting away with behavior that is outlawed among funeral homes.

Rep. Bobby Rush has vowed to reintroduce a bill to fix this, HR3655, which will extend the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule to cover cemeteries.

- Corruption in funeral and cemetery regulation, due to the industry itself wielding

undue influence on regulatory boards.

FCAEM looks forward to a lively and important gathering, with time for questions.

2011 FCAEM Annual Gathering

Featuring Josh Slocum,
FCA Executive Director

Saturday, March 19, 1-3 p.m.

At Forest Hills Cemetery
Forsythe Chapel
95 Forest Hills Ave.
Jamaica Plain, MA

All are welcome!

FCAEM's own Heather Massey joins National Home Funeral Alliance. For more, see volunteer bios on page 2.

Gaining widespread attention for funeral consumer issues, FCA and Josh Slocum have appeared recently in these national media outlets.

New York Times
NPR's Marketplace
Morning Report
Live with Kyra Phillips
on CNN
Chicago Tribune
SmartMoney.com
San Francisco Chronicle

Workshops, talks deliver message to consumers, nurses, clergy in E. Mass.

by Emma Crossen

FCAEM maintains a network of local educators and practitioners who speak and teach about consumers rights and options in after-death care. In 2010, these educators took their message to consumers, nurses, clergy, and other professional caregivers who influence how families and friends make decisions about caring for the dead.

On October 19-20, FCAEM joined FCA of Western Massachusetts to staff an exhibit table at the New England Hospice and Palliative Care Education Conference in Norwood. Because Hospice caregivers are present with families in the final days of a patient's life, they

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E. Mass. Home Funeral Educators join national alliance in Colorado

by Heather Massey

The newly-established National Home Funeral Alliance (NHFA) held its first annual conference in Boulder, Colorado, in October. Among the nearly 100 attendees were two Home Funeral Guides and Educators from Eastern Massachusetts--Peg Lorenz of Peaceful Passages at Home, in Shirley, and Heather Massey of In Loving Hands, on the Cape.

The NHFA describes itself as "a group of home funeral educators and advocates from all across the United States who have formed a non-profit alliance for the purpose of educating the consumer about the intrinsic value of a home funeral." The Alliance works to "promote education and professional development, networking and community building among home funeral guides, green funeral advocates and all those who support the rights of families and communities to care for their own dead."

The conference provided attendees with the opportunity to meet, interact and brainstorm with other home funeral guides and educators in this new and relatively

undefined profession. Featured speakers were Josephine Speyer, co-founder of the Natural Death Centre in England; Joe Seehee, executive director of the Green Burial Council; and FCA's own executive director, Josh Slocum.

Many attendees also participated in a two-day pre-conference workshop about "The Sacred Art of Caring for Our Dead." This was

led by nationally-recognized Home Funeral Educators including Beth Knox of Crossings, in Maryland; Shar Barrett of A Sacred Moment, in Seattle; Karen Van Vuuren of Natural Transitions, in Colorado; and Jerrigrace Lyons of Final Passages, in California.

For an introduction to home funerals in the United States, check out the documentary film, *A Family Undertaking*, now available on Netflix.

The mission of the Alliance is "to support the innate rights of families to care for their own dead, and to support an alliance of ethical, responsible, and knowledgeable educators and providers whose

primary focus is planning and facilitating home and family led after-death care that is environmentally friendly."

The 2011 NHFA workshop and conference are scheduled for September 21-24. More information about the Alliance and upcoming events is available online at homefuneralalliance.org.

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have a unique opportunity to help families understand their options for after-death care.

The response from conference attendees was enthusiastic, and FCAEM's presence raised the profile of FCAEM among hospice caregivers. Looking to next year, FCAEM members are collaborating with others to propose an educational session about after-death care in addition to the exhibit display.

In January, Emma Crossen organized a day-long workshop for ministry students about the role of religious leaders in promoting after-death options. Ruth Faas hosted the event at her Mourning Dove Studio in Arlington. Speakers included Nancy Accola of FCAEM, green burial advocate Judith Lorei, Home Funeral Guide Peg Lorenz, and Rev. John Gibbons from First Parish in Bedford.

Accola and Lorenz also gave presentations in 2010 at Groton Unitarian Church, Groton Council on Aging, and St. Anne's Church. As part of a speakers' series on end-of-life issues, Accola presented separately at First Parish Church in Northboro.

For the past three years, FCAEM has promoted Green Burial at the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition annual conference, with presentations and an exhibit table. In November, new FCAEM volunteer Sophia Sayigh organized a Green Burial informational event at Arlington Public Library, at which several FCAEM members answered audience questions.

Educational events are at the core of FCAEM's mission. FCAEM members can contribute to this mission by scheduling an FCAEM educator to speak to a community group or professional association.

For the upcoming year, events are already scheduled at First Unitarian Society of Newton, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard Divinity School. Updated information about events can be found on the FCAEM website (www.fcaemass.com), on the "Events" page.

Consider inviting FCAEM to speak to your community, professional, religious, or family group.

FCA: Think twice before dialing 911

by Emma Crossen

When 911 is called after a death, emergency workers must respond, even if the death is not an emergency. For taxpayers, this is expensive; for families confronting a recent death, the sudden arrival of police and EMTs can be disruptive and unhelpful.

Noting that most deaths are not emergencies, Josh Slocum of FCA urges survivors to use the following guidelines when deciding whether to call 911:

Call 911 when there is an unexpected or traumatic death. If it is out of the ordinary, unexpected, or if there is any possibility of suspicion, call the police.

Do NOT call 911 when an ailing or elderly person dies at home expectedly. In this case, call a funeral home (if you choose to use one), or call the doctor if you are planning a family-directed funeral.

In either case, if you want to report the death to authorities to avoid suspicion of foul play, you can call the non-emergency number for your local police department.

and other options for after-death care, and in helping FCAEM to connect with divinity schools and seminaries. Emma works as Executive Director of the Outdoor Church, a church among homeless men and women in Cambridge. With FCAEM, Emma is responding to phone and email inquiries and acting as

board president. Emma also enjoys walking, listening to podcasts, eating, and reading about food.

Nancy Accola and Richard Kellaway, who were featured in previous newsletters, continue to volunteer with FCAEM.

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Emma Crossen graduated from Harvard Divinity School last May. It was during her studies there that Emma first learned about local efforts to promote funeral options and consumer rights. She is particularly interested in how religious leaders can promote caring-for-your-own

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Promoting a consumer's right to choose dignified, meaningful, and affordable after-death care in Eastern and Central Massachusetts

FCAEM and FCA - What's the difference?

FCAEM is a regional affiliate of FCA. As an all-volunteer organization with no staff, FCAEM focuses volunteer efforts on consumer education and consumer protection in Eastern Massachusetts. FCAEM does this by promoting educational events, providing educators and education materials to these events, and monitoring prices and trends in the region's funeral industry.

FCA is a national federation of affiliates like FCAEM. Based in Burlington, Vermont, FCA has a small paid and professional staff and approaches consumer protection from a national perspective. FCA serves as a national resource for media, court cases, and lawmakers, on issues affecting consumers of after-death care. FCA also develops extensive educational resources for use by affiliates nationwide.

Both organizations do important and complementary work to protect and educate consumers of after-death care.

FCAEM is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit. Your tax-deductible contributions encourage and sustain this all-volunteer consumer alliance.

FCAEM offers help, advice through phone, email

FCAEM offers both phone and email methods for consumers to inquire about their rights and options in choosing after-death care.

Volunteers check the email account and voicemail several times a week and usually respond within a few days. FCAEM provides this important service in order to make information available to a diverse group of consumers and professionals.

Recent callers have included social workers, individuals, families, and a legislative aide.

Because FCAEM invites these inquiries, FCAEM also provides volunteers with training in order to respond accurately and effectively. Your financial support makes this possible.

CONTACT FCAEM
Email: fcaemass@gmail.com
Phone: (617) 859-7990

WEBSITES
FCAEM: www.fcaemass.org
FCA: www.funerals.org

Online efforts to expand membership, outreach

With this newsletter, FCAEM continues a long tradition of using print and mail communications. This year, volunteers want to maintain that tradition and add to it by reaching out to more people online, through email and other online forums.

This move will allow FCAEM to supplement our annual print newsletter with more frequent online updates about consumer issues and events. With internet outreach, volunteers also intend to raise FCAEM's profile among younger consumers.

As part of this effort, FCAEM is creating an email list by collecting email addresses from current and potential members. To join, email your email address to fcaemass@gmail.com, or write it on the enclosed envelope and send it through the mail, with or without a financial donation.

FCAEM asks members to "Join our email list."