

# The M essenger



**A Publication of the Funeral Consumers Information Society of Greater Detroit**

**Founded in 1961**

**Fall 2006**

## **D-I-Y Funeral Presentations**

By Wendy Lyons

**E**nthusiastic is the perfect word to describe people's response to our do-it-yourself funeral presentations. So far I've presented in Lake Orion, Ortonville, and Waterford to a total of 83 people. That means that 83 more Michiganders now understand why this powerful movement has been growing in America over the past 12 years. And many will be spreading the word to friends and family. They also know what they need to do before we lose any more legal ground here in Michigan. Our legislators in Lansing are now hearing from their constituents who want Michigan law changed to remove the needless hurdles that make it difficult, but not impossible, for families to care for our own here in Michigan.

We've been receiving attention from the media, too. Perhaps you've seen the newspaper articles or listened to Jack Lessenberry talk about it on Michigan Public Radio? We trust that the word will continue to spread. People need to know, and I am truly honored to be Michigan's DIY funeral advocate.

**I invite you to attend  
one of these upcoming  
presentations:**

**Saturday, October 21, 2006  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Ann Arbor Unitarian  
Universalist Congregation  
4001 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

**Saturday, November 4, 2006  
2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Auburn Hills Public Library  
3400 East Seyburn Drive  
Auburn Hills, Michigan

**Thursday, March 22, 2007  
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

Oak Park Public Library  
14200 Oak Park Blvd.  
Oak Park, MI 48237

## **We Need You!**

By Tom Madsen

**E**very few years the Funeral Consumers Information Society (FCIS) takes a survey of funeral home prices in the Greater Detroit area. We are in the middle of one now and in fact have collected information from 52 of the more than 200 funeral homes in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties. We hope to complete the survey by the end of this year or early in 2007.

Our procedure is first to send out questionnaires to all local funeral directors. From this approach we have received 20 some responses so far. Next we make phone calls to those who have not responded, requesting specific information and a funeral price list (it is required by law that funeral homes provide price lists to those who ask for them). Many funeral homes are cooperative, but not all. Our final step is to visit funeral homes in person. This usually provides us with price lists, though there are places where the proper person to contact is never available. During our last survey I went to one such place three times

(continued on page 4)



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## President's Remarks

### Is It How Much You Love or How Much You Spend?

By Carter Stevenson

I am an inveterate re-sale shopper. I like clothes. I like colors. I am intrigued with fashion and I am a member of that narrowing portion of the population called the middle class. The absolute best and worst predicament that a being can be located... high aesthetic low cash. I have placated the lack of money with the histories of used merchandise and I make choices when to buy new and at listed prices. I am an educated consumer. I find and buy and share the harvest of these

sole and without knowledge of our friend's wishes. The ritual was in accordance with the traditions of his church. A baby died of a rare disease. The mother spent more money than she had and will have the memory of the solicitations of additional funds to pay the funeral home. Another friend examined with me the alternatives of how to be supportive, who to include in the decision making process and the pain that is associated with contemplation of the funeral rite. Tough but necessary and we both

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**It is up to us as consumers to  
define what is of value and  
decide when and how to  
assign importance.**

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forays into the half-off, marked down, discontinued reaches of city and suburbs. I give these treasures with love, commitment and energy.

Since our last newsletter I have lost friends and shared grief with acquaintances and strangers and witnessed appropriate and strained expressions of devotion. The family of a dear friend contacted FCIS for cremation information. The family felt like they could make choices about what way to treat their dead loved one: the body, the memory, the things. Another friend died without a plan and ensemble with other friends I can recount the anguish of being prompted to do "right and proper" in the absence of a family to con-

reported feeling better.

In this newsletter and on the FCIS website is information about funeral planning, a solicitation to institutional membership and opportunities for action regarding funeral consumer rights and rituals for the memorializing loved ones. It is up to us as consumers to define what is of value and decide when and how to assign importance. As well as, what thoughts and feelings to engage and how much and what kinds of energies to commit as a matter of choice. One of our new FCIS board members made the statement "How much you love is not based on how much you spend" or is it?

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# Death and The Day of The Dead

By Al Ugelow

The Day of the Dead (or “Dia de Muertos” in Spanish) is a celebration observed in Mexico and elsewhere on November 1 and 2. These days correspond roughly to All Saints Day and All Souls Day in Catholic churches. Yes, there is a remote connection to our Halloween. Like Halloween the Day of the Dead can be traced to early peoples before Christianity. The modern form dates from the Spanish conquerors of the New World and their influences.

What may seem like morbid subject matter — until we make the connection with Halloween — is actually a lighter and more robust time of celebration. The Day of the Dead is a festive holiday with a special emphasis on celebrating and honoring the lives of the deceased rather than

fearing evil or dark spirits. Hearty refreshments are served and banquets are held. Many build altars featuring comical rather than frightening skeletons and skulls as well as Christian crosses.

Well what does this all have to do with our society you may ask? The Day of the Dead actually represents a perception of death, which is very different from that of most of us who are not of that culture. We tend to compartmentalize death to a time of grief and official activity. We may have refreshments and lighter conversation once ceremonies are concluded, but a period of time follows which may involve wills, reconciling property matters, updating records and so on. Then we mostly move on except perhaps for those closest to

the deceased.

Day of the Dead celebrants surely must mourn at some point and have their own official changes to make. Day of the Dead celebrations are complex and varied. Nevertheless a time is set aside each year for public remembrance in a way which acknowledges the universality of life’s passing. In a warm, honorific and even jovial way, the spirits of the deceased are recognized and not dismissed with time.

The Funeral Consumers Information Society offers our membership our own way of keeping death in perspective, whether through plans for final arrangement which we are happy to keep on file (simply contact the office if you have not done so), or consideration of the extent to which individuals

(continued on page 4)

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# Attending The FCA Convention

By Wendy Lyons

I had the honor of representing the entire state of Michigan at the Funeral Consumers Alliance 2006 Biennial Convention in Austin, Texas, this past June. One might not automatically think of a conference about the funeral industry as fun, but it was. Our accommodations were great, the people were wonderful, and the lectures were interesting and relevant.

I attended affiliate-taught lectures on lobbying and forming a speaker’s bureau, and I took Josh’s workshop on demystifying the FTC’s General Price List. Esquire Kerin Coughlin gave an overview and update on the FCA v. Service Corporation International et al

class action lawsuit. Two presentations were especially powerful. The first was by Esquire and former Texas legislator, Steve Wolens, who enlightened us to the very alarming business and lobbying tactics of SCI. The second presentation was by a Texas funeral director who spoke candidly of the vicious backlash he received from fellow funeral directors when he rocked the boat in Austin by offering very low cost funerals.

Attending brought me up to speed on the history of FCA, the impact that we have on the entire funeral industry, and the vital role we play as an alliance of concerned citizens working together to protect the rights and rites of

all Americans. It was great to be around so many friendly, funny, knowledgeable, and dedicated people who freely share their wisdom and experiences so that each affiliate can be more effective in our home communities. The conference was inspiring and empowering. I can’t wait for 2008.



Wendy and Josh

## Day of The Dead

(continued from page 3)

can take charge of their arrangements. See Wendy Lyons' article elsewhere in this edition.

If you are interested in attending a Day of the Dead commemoration service on Sunday, October 29 at 10:30 a.m., feel free to attend Emerson Church Unitarian Universalist that morning. A Day of the Dead altar will be on display with photos of attendee family members who have died. Emerson Church (the "Barn Church") is located on Livernois Road between Wattles (17 Mile) and Long Lake (18 Mile) Roads in Troy. For more information please contact Al Ugelow at 248-689-8544 before October 29 or call the church at 248-524-9339.

## We Need You!

(continued from page 1)

without success and some time later learned on TV news that the place had closed and that two or three unidentified bodies had been found on the premises.

But such cases are unusual enough to make the news. Often calls or visits to funeral homes are instructive and interesting. During our last survey several years ago, one hot August day, I went to a family run funeral home on Detroit's west side where two women and a three-year-old little girl were most helpful and accommodating. Indeed, the little girl, to everyone's amusement, offered me a lick of the big ice cream cone she was eating. I thought it proper to thankfully resist temptation.

If you are able to volunteer your services as a telephone or in per-

son pollster for the survey, please call our office number 313-886-0998 and we will get back to you, or call Al Ugelow 248-689-8544 or Tom Madsen 313-824-6368. We can't promise that you'll unearth dead bodies or be offered a lick of ice cream, but we can offer a useful experience of what FCIS does. And we will provide careful written directions on how to go about your tasks.

### The Lighter Side

**Mother-in-law on the phone:**  
"I've decided I want to be cremated."

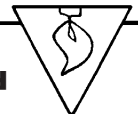
**Daughter-in-law:**  
"Great, get your coat on, and I'll be right over."

~ AOL Seniornet

www.funerals.org  
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