

# The M essenger



A Publication of the Funeral Consumers Information Society of Greater Detroit

Founded in 1961

Winter 2007

## Funeral Homes Survey

By Al Ugelow

As part of our ongoing mission to obtain price data from funeral homes for burial or cremation we were able to obtain prices from approximately 60 firms in the metropolitan area. As always we make no attempt to recommend the nature of any family's wishes for final arrangements for their loved ones, but we believe it is advisable to present the range of pricing in the areas desired for these arrangements.

Beginning in 2004 we mailed questionnaires to some 250 firms. We received only 28 in return. We learned that a number of these were evidentially no longer in business and that others had merged. We then mailed 200 additional questionnaires but were still not satisfied that we had a good response. In the meantime our organization had been undergoing changes in the Executive Board make-up due to another untimely death and some departures, leaving us seriously short-handed. More about this later. In any event we have carried on as best we can and have now netted the 60 men-

tioned above via limited telephone calling and on-site visits. You may read about Wendy Lyons' experiences and that of her daughter's with regard to some of these contacts on page 3 of this newsletter.

Our general findings for direct burial and direct cremation are shown below. Details and names of particular funeral homes can be provided as the need arises by contacting the office. However, bear in mind that the prices quoted do not necessarily include charges for casket, viewings, etc. in the case of burial, nor crematory charges in the case of cremation. One should always ask for and review a

particular funeral home's General Price List, which is required by federal law.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this project. Again each relative's desires and situation may be different and so one must plan accordingly. Even in grief it is advisable to call or visit actual funeral homes and review the firm's General Price list carefully. As mentioned we can provide some direction here within 24 hours if the office is contacted. Also the Federal Trade Commission's "Funerals: A Consumer's

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	Direct Cremation	Direct Burial
<b>Eastern Suburbs</b> (7 firms)	\$695 - \$1,275	\$875 - \$1,665
<b>Western Suburbs</b> (11 firms)	625 - 2,615	995 - 2,787
<b>Northern Suburbs</b> (15 firms)	1,170 - 3,285	1,345 - 3,285
<b>Southern Suburbs</b> (16 firms)	695 - 1,700	695 - 2,290
<b>City of Detroit</b> (10 firms)	625 - 1,105	895 - 1,999



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# President's Remarks

## You Are The Answer

By Carter Stevenson

In this edition of the Messenger you will find the results of the 05-06 surveys of area prices, a personal reflection from a surveyor and this shameless appeal. The effort toward increasing intelligence concerning funeral rites, rights and finance can be bolstered with more member volunteers, renewal of memberships, donations and institutional support.

Saying goodbye to loved ones deserves advance consideration and need not be exploited by impulses or decisions made in the absence of adequate information. Right and proper is sometimes a reflection of the information available to us as consumers and always is subject to personal choice. The Funeral Consumer Information Society is obliged to provide assistance with unbiased information to anyone who asks in his or her time of need. FCIS is a society with the expectation that members be well versed and willing to share information.

In 2006 our Society entered a relationship with the Funeral Consumer Alliance our national organization that will bring to members information through the FCA newsletter without cost and the choice for continuity after get-

ting acquainted. We have presented FCIS information to the public at community events, participated on panels and been the subject of newspaper articles and local television programming. FCIS has also examined the Funeral ritual through exploration of the "day of the dead" ceremony and exposition of the Do-It-Yourself Funeral. We continue to share information on our website and through the phone bank. Might we improve? We can and will with the participation and financial support of people who believe that the power of choice is enhanced by the availability of information to consumers. We need money!

How big is the challenge to Funeral consumers this year and beyond? For the past six years FCIS has received less than we have given if the trend continues the society will not. Your help in the form of ideas, energy and yes money is vital to the assurance that information is available to consumers in the future. We, you and I and the ones who will come after us need your help now. Help however you will.

How might FCIS be of greater service to you as a member and the public in general? Your answer is more important than the question.

## Annual Contribution Drive

The Funeral Consumers Information Society exists solely through you're your contributions. It is, as you know, a non-profit society. We receive no grants or subsidies. So please be as generous as your situation allows when making your yearly contribution. The society counts on you. Thank you.

**Contributions can be mailed to:  
Funeral Consumers Information Society  
P.O. Box 24054, Detroit, MI 48224**

# Price Surveys – Anything But Easy

By Wendy Lyons

Last summer, I participated for the first time in our funeral home price survey. What I thought would be a straight-forward task, turned out to be anything but easy.

It has been over 22 years since the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) began regulating the funeral industry with what is termed the Funeral Rule. Amongst other things, the Rule requires funeral homes to quote prices over the phone to anyone who inquires — period.

Accordingly, this survey should have been an easy task: dial the phone, politely introduce our organization, ask the price of an immediate cremation and immediate burial, say “thank you,” hang up and call the next funeral home.

Silly me; it was not to be so.

Assigned 16 funeral homes to call, I recruited my 22-year-old daughter who just graduated from college and had some time on her hands. I told her it would be fun.

After calling five funeral homes, my daughter, frazzled with the lack of cooperation and the curt-ness her phone inquiries received, vowed never to call another funeral home again and promptly resigned.

Alas, it was up to me to finish the job. And over the next month, many of my conversations made me wish I could quit, too.

I had one totally positive experience with an exceptionally polite and helpful funeral director named Tim Simpson, of Simpson-Modetz Funeral Home in Waterford, with whom it was a delight to speak.

Most funeral homes were less gracious and were either evasive — claiming that the only person who could give prices was repeatedly unavailable — or they provided prices grudgingly.

My worst experience was practically being yelled at by a Brandon Township funeral director, whom I will not mention by name, though I probably should.

When I explained our survey, he told me that the Michigan Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) advised him that he did not have to quote prices over the phone so that people could shop around. And, by the tone of his voice, he wasn't going to start with me.

I politely told him that it was not my intention to be argumentative, but what he had been told was incorrect. I even quoted FTC regulations. Nevertheless, he would not be swayed, and the conversation came to a rather abrupt end.

Now, if this had been a onetime occurrence, I might have let it go. But this was the second time during this survey that I had heard this claim from a funeral home.

Concerned, I alerted Josh Slocum, the executive director of the Funeral Consumers Alliance. He advised me to write a letter of complaint to the Federal Trade Commission, which I happily did. At the same time, Slocum contacted the MFDA to investigate.

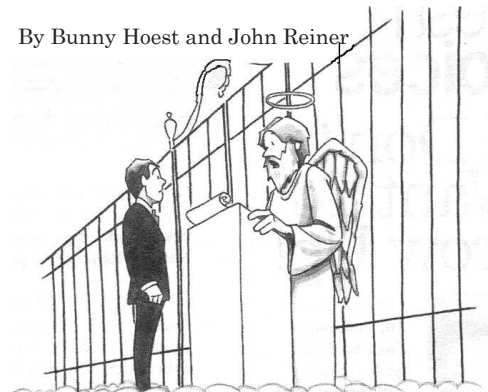
Slocum spoke with Phil Douma, MFDA's executive director, who stated that, despite the claims from two funeral homes, MFDA does not advise its members to refuse to quote prices over the phone. Douma offered to remind members of their Funeral Rule obligations in the association's next newsletter. And, to his credit, a review of the FTC's price quotation rules was included in the “MFDA Update” newsletter, last fall.

While the sentiment may not be mutual, we, at the FCIS, do not consider ourselves to be antagonistic towards the funeral industry. We simply desire to ensure that funeral consumers receive the full protection and benefit of the hard-won Funeral Rule.

And this experience has taught me that, even after 22 long years, there is still much work to be done, not only in educating consumers, but, unfortunately, educating funeral directors, as well.

## The Lighter Side

By Bunny Hoest and John Reiner



“It comes down to how many New Year's resolutions you've broken.”

## Funeral Homes Survey

(continued from page 1)

Guide” is a good resource. We will be happy to provide a copy or you may call 1-877-FTC-HELP.

About our survey itself we have learned that requesting such information by mail does not produce the best results. Phoning can be a little better. Not all of us working on this met with the frustration that some did. On-site visits are probably best and in the end least time-consuming, but it does require a larger cadre of volunteers than we had in this round. Next time around we hope that some more of our members will be willing to lend a hand, and we may attempt to recruit college students to help as well.

Finally we owe a debt of gratitude to those who were able to volunteer to help with this project. Deep thanks to Janet Henning, Jim Bilen, Tabitha Lyons, Joanie Ugelow and fellow board members Tom Madsen and Wendy Lyons.

## Upcoming DIY Funeral Presentation Schedule

**Tuesday, February 20**

6:30 — 8:30 p.m.

Auburn Hills Public Library

3400 East Seyburn Drive

Auburn Hills, Michigan

Call 248-364-6706 to register

**Thursday, March 22**

7:00 p.m.— 9:00 p.m.

Oak Park Public Library

14200 Oak Park Blvd.

Oak Park, MI 48237

Call 248-691-7480 to register

**Thursday, April 26**

6:45 p.m.— 8:45 p.m.

Oxford Public Library

530 Pontiac Road

Oxford, MI 48371

Call 248-628-3034 to register

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