

Summer
2024

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**Funeral Consumers Alliance
of the Virginia Blue Ridge**



Join us for our “Annual Undertaking”

**September 25, 2024, 5:30pm
Blacksburg Library**

Our speaker is **Ross Blount**,
Manager of McCoy Funeral
Home (Blacksburg, VA), who
will speak to us about the
current state and future of
death care policy and
practice in VA and the US
at large.



Come “dig in” on light refreshments



We are excited to welcome Mr. Blount because the FCA is committed to fostering fair and transparent communication between funeral professionals and those who are planning a funeral at a vulnerable time in their lives. We do so by providing information to help families make informed decisions about funeral and disposition options. Informed families are best able to secure from funeral professionals the goods and services they want.

Board members for the 2025 - 2027 term will be selected. Nominations can be made at the meeting or by sending an email prior to the meeting to fcavbr@gmail.com. Be sure to get the nominee’s agreement. If you are interested in serving on the board, please feel free to nominate yourself!

The latest **funeral home and cemetery price surveys** are now posted on our website, where you can also find a document defining various survey terms, such as the difference between a “viewing” and a “visitation.”
<https://www.fcavbr.org/surveys>



As if the loss of a loved one weren't painful enough, a whole panoply of “**death scams**” has appeared. In previous eras, it was wise to have a trusted friend stay in the house during a funeral service, knowing that thieves presumed the home would be empty for a few hours. Now the internet has provided dozens of new ways to rob the survivors.

The federal reimbursement program for COVID-related funeral expenses has been extended through September 30, 2025. Participants in this program must register and provide evidence that the decedent has died from COVID. But, as Michelle Singletary of *The Washington Post* notes, aid for COVID-related funerals can tempt scammers to do despicable things. Scammers call with an offer to take care of program registration in exchange for the name, birth date, and social security number of the decedent. If you receive such a call, **do not provide this information. Report the call** to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (1-866-720-5721) **AND** to the Federal Trade Commission <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/>

For information about the federal COVID-19 funeral assistance program, please visit
<https://www.fema.gov/disaster/historic/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>

Radio host Kim Kommando reports that “Ghost Hackers” have widened the scope of funeral fraud. They monitor obituaries and death notices and then hack weak passwords or other information to access banking and retirement accounts. Kommando strongly suggests editing all your digital connections by using Apple’s Legacy Contact. If you have a Facebook account, you can designate a legacy contact by searching “Memorialization.” Some sites allow you to pre-record a farewell message. To find Kommando’s detailed directions for protecting your accounts, see

<https://www.komando.com/tips/kims-column/creepy-ghost-hackers/>

In another online post called “How to Plan For a Digital Death”, Adrian Martinez suggests that you check a multitude of accounts to make sure your survivors have access to them. Identify and arrange your “digital assets”. For more details visit <https://beyondthedash.com/blog/funeral-planning/how-to-plan-for-a-digital-death/7408>

Our lives are much more public than they used to be, so it's important that we encourage our loved ones to be aware of the risks introduced through our "digital assets."

Digital assets may include:

- Digital content (make a list of online accounts)
 - Social media accounts
 - Email accounts
 - Online banking or other financial accounts
 - Retail shopping accounts
- Any digital content like that found on Google Drive
- Cloud storage
- Blogs
- Cryptocurrency
- Keep online and financial and business records organized

What to do after you have identified these assets?

- Secure and authorize a digital executor.
 - This person needs to know:
- Who will receive your digital assets
- How they will access them
- What your instructions would be
- Where you keep these instructions
- What streaming services need to be ended
- Your funeral plan and videos for the funeral
- Any information you want destroyed

Innocent information:

To be sure your family is able to view your shared histories, organize unsecured digital information (including pictures, archived articles, funeral and obituary wishes) so that secure access is not required in order for these to be viewed.

Most importantly –

Communicate your desires and decisions, including where you'd like donations sent in your honor.

New Virginia law regarding Advance Directives

Beginning July 1, 2024, this law affects a person who has an advance directive naming their spouse as their health care agent. If they have a court petition for divorce or custody, then their spouse is no longer their agent. Both the advance directive and the petition have to have been filed/signed after July 1st 2024 for this law to apply.

Summer 2024 Newsletter Contributors: Bill Baker, Tiffany Carpenetti, Cynthia Luke, Phil Olson, Linda Plaut, Dianne Rencsok

Element	<p align="center">Table: How Your Funeral Impacts the Environment</p> <p align="center">Environmental impact</p>
Embalming	<p>Chemical embalming involves the use of formaldehyde, which is highly toxic and a known carcinogen. Buried embalming fluids give rise to soil pollution, impacting soil health.</p> <p>Cornell University’s Mary Woodsen estimates that more than four million gallons of embalming fluid are used in US burials each year.</p>
Casket	<p>Heavy wooden caskets are often treated with chemicals and often contain metal and plastic fittings. This makes burial resource intensive and potentially soil polluting.</p> <p>The same Cornell study estimates that 20 million board feet of hardwoods and 64,500 tons of steel are buried in the US each year.</p>
Tomb lining	<p>Caskets are often placed in an outer container, which will typically be made of materials like concrete. 1.6 million tons of concrete are buried in the US each year, according to the study.</p>
Grave marking	<p>Grave markings vary, but often include concrete, metal or plastic elements, adding non-renewable materials to an already resource intensive process and contributing to the estimated figures above.</p>
Land usage	<p>Traditional burial involves the unsustainable consumption of urban land.</p>
Cemetery maintenance	<p>Some cemeteries use pesticides to maintain lawns, reducing biodiversity and potentially leading to soil pollution.</p> <p>Water consumption is also an issue. At one point, the biggest cemetery in the US was using 293 million gallons of drinkable water each year.</p>
Cremation process	<p>Cremation is a fossil fuel-powered process, which releases CO2 and other emissions.</p> <p>The average cremation produces 535 lbs of CO2, equivalent to a 600+ mile car journey.</p>
Transport	<p>Use of vehicles throughout the funeral process, from transporting the materials used in traditional burial to transporting the body, adds to the emissions involved in traditional processes themselves.</p>

How Your Funeral Impacts the Environment is from Team Earth, Aug 15, 2023
 Green Funeral Practice Copyright Earth Funeral Group, Inc

Death and death-care have become more visible in the public media. Articles are appearing in many reputable sources. For example, the book *The Afterlife of Data: What Happens to Your Information When You Die and Why You Should Care*, by Carl Öhman (University of Chicago Press) was reviewed in *The Economist* (July 2024), the *Wall Street Journal* (May 2024), and by *Inside Higher Ed* (March 2024). Both the Roanoke Times and the News Messenger celebrated the recent change to allow green burial in the Blacksburg cemetery.

An Update Regarding the Virginia State Anatomical Program

In Virginia, individuals who wish to donate their bodies “to science” must do so through the Virginia State Anatomical Program (VSAP). This program is run through the Virginia Department of Health and is overseen by the Chief Medical Examiner. Last summer, the program director, Rick Sikon, retired after a very successful tenure with VSAP. For many years, Rick nurtured the program to ensure donors were placed with medical, training, and research programs and treated respectfully throughout the process.

With the onset of COVID, the program faced significant hurdles, including staffing, restrictions due to COVID-19 infection history, and an overall decrease in the number of individuals signing up for the program. Since 2020, the program has continued to see reduced numbers, and a tremendous strain has been placed on both VSAP and the schools and training programs relying on willed-body donors.

Thankfully, a new director, Raymond Rhodes, took the helm in July. Ray intends to update the program website and spread the word so that every Virginian who would like to donate knows how to enroll in the program. Shortly, FCAVBR will provide the most up-to-date information about the donation program, how to sign up, and the address of the updated website. For now, information about the program can be found at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/medical-examiner/vsap/>.

Be sure to scroll down to find VSAP forms : Dedication form (to enroll).

The Future FCAVBR

The FCAVBR has been evaluating our success at improving community knowledge about end-of-life issues. We plan to seek more involvement and interest from the younger generations. Have you discussed your end-of-life plans with those who will have to direct them?

Although some might assume that younger people don't concern themselves with the subject of dying, we have found evidence to the contrary. Virginia Tech and University of Virginia have well attended course offerings on death culture and customs. With this new insight, the FCAVBR is looking at ways to better attract the people who will carry out the end-of-life decisions of the older generations. One of those ways is to take advantage of digital media. We have had a Facebook page and a YouTube channel for quite some time, but we plan to make greater use of digital media as a means of communication, and as a source for information and inspiration.

We are asking you to help with this goal.

Please send your suggestions to our email: fcavbr@gmail.com

What could be keywords that would make search engines find our website?

Examples - burial / funeral / ?others?

What banner or slogan can we use to interest someone who only sees it in passing?

To what questions might we and our website provide answers?

Good examples can be found in "Will my cat eat my eyeballs" by Caitlin Doughty, which, serendipitously, is the subject of the September 18 book club meeting sponsored by Blacksburg Books from 6:30PM to 7:30PM.

To learn more go to <https://www.blacksburgbooks.com/>

Bookclub meetings are held at Moon Hollow Brewery (located at 4237 Prices Fork Rd Ste B, in Blacksburg – this is part of the old Prices Fork School Revitalization project). The Brewery offers discounts to bookclub meeting attendees. In addition to featuring their products and some local brews, some non-alcoholic beverages are included in their menu. To learn more, visit their website: www.moonhollowbrewing.com

In this Summer of 2024 newsletter, you are challenged to consider how the digital world affects your life. "Digital Scams" cautions about the new world dangers. Yet, electronic resources are offered to provide an easier way to view this newsletter and just "click" to follow the links for more information on subject matter!