



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

## **2024 Annual Meeting**

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge held its annual meeting on September 25, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. in the Blacksburg Public Library. Ten members and guests were in attendance.

Ross Blount, manager of McCoy Funeral Home, was the speaker discussed changes in the funeral industry and commented on the challenges. He answered many questions and shared the need for cemeteries and funeral homes to collaborate on green burial.

After the talk, members voted on and endorsed three nominees for the Board: Phil Olsen, Linda Plaut, and new member, Ivory Desper. Approval was unanimous. Following delicious snacks, President Dianne Rencsok presented a summary of the Annual Report

## **Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge 2023/2024 Annual Report**

The 2023/2024 year for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge has included mission introspection as well as continuing our interactions with the community. Study and discussion have reinforced our emphases on end-of-life as well as funeral information. Realizing that “information” is our most useful product, we are trying to make more of it accessible to our members.

FCAVBR continues in person advocacy. Information tables were sponsored at several public events, Senior Care Fare, Caregivers Conference, and AARP Health fair. Attendance at our Death Cafes has been large enough to bring in many points of view, but small enough to allow a supportive, sharing environment. Our “Ducks in a Row” program has been presented by FCAVBR members Wava Osborne in Southwest Virginia, Mary Strickling in Charlottesville, as well as

Cynthia Luke in the local Blacksburg area. We have increased our presence in other public forums such as the Palliative Care Partnership of the New River Valley. This most recent presentation has been added as a video on the FCAVBR website. There has been interaction with Blue Ridge Green Burial as well as publishing their information on our website Event page. Both Virginia Navigator and “211” list our organization as a resource.

After years of FCAVBR touting the importance of green burial, a green burial section has been created in Blacksburg’s Westview cemetery. John Boyer, from the town of Blacksburg operations, explained the history and the benefits of green burial at a well-attended public meeting at Warm Hearth. He noted that green burial has been traditional in the nearby Black cemetery. Panorama, a newly organized natural burial site near Charlottesville, welcomed us and Linda Haas, of Blue Ridge Green Burial, on a visit to see and learn about their unique situation.

Funeral Homes and Cemeteries were surveyed in 2024 for prices and choices. Two FCAVBR members, Kim Marye and Jo Burroughs, collected information from 33 Cemeteries and 95 Funeral Homes. Additionally, they communicated our expected reduction in establishments to be surveyed. Over many years, people who have attended a presentation asked that a particular Cemetery or Funeral Home be included in our survey. Consequently, we have information from as far away as Richmond! In our mission reflection, we decided to honor the geographical designations in our By-laws. As noted on the website, our chapter serves residents in the counties of Montgomery, Roanoke, Giles, Floyd, and Pulaski; and the cities of Roanoke, Salem, Bedford, and Radford.

Our recent financial review by a professional auditor, Ann Benton Ruple, yielded suggestions that have improved our record keeping methods.

Two different newsletters have attempted to encourage our members to take advantage of digital offerings. Unfortunately, our recent request for members to send us their preference for paper (hard copy) or on-line was thwarted by our own inexperience with computers. Now, however, changes to the website should successfully direct people to the most recent offerings such as current newsletters and events. The Resource section of the website has been expanded by several excellent additions. Links on the website can connect you to the two Virginia approved vendors for DNR bracelets. If you are interested in one of the recommended books, and it is available in the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system, a link will make it possible to request that book. Many thanks to our web developer, Katy Morikawa, for working with us to bring this website and information to you effectively. If you have any suggestions for improvement or questions, please let us know.

It is important to note that we will continue to publish and mail our paper copy newsletter. Many of our members, your FCAVBR president among these, find it more useful to hold literature in our hands. This allows us to bookmark where we stop, to make notes and to have information accessible whether or not we are near a computer.

Bill Baker's comprehensive review of the Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers (FD&E) has shown how our citizens benefit from the work of this board. FCAVBR members continue to monitor the Virginia legislature. Our newsletters have reported these happenings which show that our legislators are aware of current death care trends. Senator Morrissey from Eastern Virginia had entered a bill asking the FD&E to study and make recommendations on the use of alkaline hydrolysis (water cremation). The study undertaken by FD&E was timely and thorough. Unfortunately, subsequent bills to approve use of this process have not been successful. We will continue to monitor and advocate to assure the best care is available for all.

The work being done by two dedicated board members in their professional capacity has made a difference in the wider world. Medical schools all across the country have been affected by the decrease in body donations. Dr Tiffany Carpetti, from Via Osteopathic school, is focused on finding ways to improve Virginia's access in this process. Dr Philip Olson, of Virginia Tech, has taken information on current death culture, not only to meetings and conferences in the United States, but also to a seminar in Oxford, England. With their help and that of many other FCAVBR members, we look forward to increasing our presence in the community.

Respectfully Submitted, Dianne Rencsok, President FCAVBR September 25, 2024