



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

## **2023 Annual Meeting**

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge held its annual meeting on September 12 at 7:15 p.m. in the Christiansburg Public Library. Seventeen members and guests were in attendance. After enjoying coffee, tea, and cookies, the members sat in a circle and made brief introductions. President Dianne Rencsok presented a summary of the Annual Report (see below) and invited Cynthia Luke to present our speaker.

Paula Markham spoke about her experiences as a death doula—giving care to the dying modeled on the concept of the birth doula, who guides the mother from pregnancy through delivery. In discussion, Phil Olson revealed the difference between his academic preparation to be a death doula and the speaker's more experiential training.

After the talk, members voted on and endorsed three nominees for the Board: Dianne Rencsok, Ben Crawford, and the new member, Tiffany Carpenetti, who joined us by phone since she was unable to attend in person. Approval was unanimous.

The Board will meet next on October 18 at Luther Memorial Church, Blacksburg.

## **2022–2023 Annual Report of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge**

The mission of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge has been successfully met in this past year. Helping our neighbors make informed end-of-life decisions has been accomplished in several ways. Our newsletters have highlighted information on the actions of the Federal Trade Commission and of the Virginia Legislature. The website, [fcavbr.org](http://fcavbr.org), has been revised to make information more current and easier to access such as direct links for a recommended book that is available in the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system. Meaningful information has included what's new (alkaline hydrolysis) and what's historical (green burial). We have continued

to provide guidance and information through participation at public events such as the Senior Care Fair and response to contacts on our information phone line and email account. Increased active participation from more individual members has helped achieve our goals this year.

## **Outreach**

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge (FCAVBR) continues to participate in community events such as the Senior Care Fair. Our Facebook page has periodic updates with intriguing comments regarding death's experience in today's world. Our visit to the newest green (natural) cemetery was the impetus for our newsletter article on green burial. We are especially proud of the revisions on our website to make it more current and more accessible. The Resources tab will not only allow you to link to the Virginia Advanced Medical Direct form, but also provide a direct link to either of the two retailers approved by Virginia for obtaining DNR Jewelry (Do Not Resuscitate). The FCAVBR sponsored a presentation by Kevin Bradley from Final Exit Network. (Video recording also available on the website).

## **Legal Advocacy**

The Funeral Industry is regulated by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). This organization assures that Funeral Homes will accept a coffin that you provide instead of requiring that one of theirs be purchased. The FCAVBR has participated in the FTC review of that regulation (The Funeral Rule) to assure it reflects the modern world. We, and alliances across the nation, provided comments and recommendations when the review process was begun, two years ago, and again this year as changes are being finalized.

Our FCA monitored actions of the Virginia Legislature and provided information on legislation pertinent to our mission. These topics included alkaline hydrolysis, historic black cemeteries, state requirements for disposition of unclaimed bodies. More detailed information can be found in the Spring and Summer newsletters. We continue to

monitor the Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. For many years, FCAVBR Board members have presented information on green burial to the Blacksburg Town Council. This year, their serious consideration of a green burial section in Westview Cemetery resulted in a public meeting, at which one of the FCAVBR Board members spoke. The Town Council approved this change unanimously.

## **Helped Consumers**

The FCAVBR continues to offer information and reference, via telephone (540-953-5589) and our email ([fcavbr@gmail.com](mailto:fcavbr@gmail.com)) account. One such contact involved advising a family on a funeral home complaint. Our monitoring of the FD&E board, as mentioned above, meant that we could see the penalty dispensed to the negligent funeral home. We participated in three Death café's and plan to increase the availability of these interactions. We created or updated documents on sources of financial help, extending welcome to joining members and a time-line of recommendations for actions needed after a death (see website Resource "What to do when a family member dies").

This past year, five (5) new families were welcomed as members to the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Blue Ridge. The success for this past year is due to the willingness of individuals to take responsibility for specific tasks. Thanks especially to Kim Marye and Bill Baker as well as the Board of Trustees. It is hoped that as members continue to see the FCAVBR as an important resource, more will continue to help with the various monitoring and information activities; achieving the goal of making death a part of life.

Respectfully submitted,

Dianne Rencsok, President, FCAVBR