

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge

Annual meeting & program via Zoom invitation—Tuesday, September 28, 7:15 PM

Caitlin Crenshaw, graduate student in material culture and public humanities, will speak on the history and archeology of mortuary practices of Native Americans in SW Virginia. The Tech program examines artifacts and processes from a critical and historical perspective. Crenshaw will share her summer field work examining mortuary practices in southwest Virginia.

Every year we hold our annual meeting where we have a guest speaker and elect officers. This year, we will again hold our meeting via Zoom. Last year a Zoom meeting was all we could do in the midst of the COVID lockdown, but we realized it allowed members and friends who live far away to join in.

If you would like to join our Zoom meeting, please send your email address to: fcavbr@gmail.com. You will receive instructions the day before the meeting on how to join it. There is NO CHARGE for this meeting. We don't share your email with anyone else.



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Special points of interest

- Nominating committee presents slate.
- Alabama approves alkaline hydrolysis
- Poetry for the dead

Elections to the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting

The nominating committee, chaired by Sandy Schlaudecker and members Gene Gardner and Todd Solberg, presents this slate for the 2024 term:

Phil Olson

Linda Plaut

Todd Solberg

Nominations “from the floor” are accepted at the annual meeting . Please be sure the nominee agrees to the action.

Scammers target COVID death benefit

As part of the American Rescue Plan, families can be reimbursed up to \$9,000 for funeral expenses. FEMA has revised the rules so that COVID no longer has to be listed on the death certificate if the death occurred between January 20, 2020 and May 16, 2020. After May, 16, COVID must be on the death certificate. Applicants must have receipts showing expenses that can include the funeral, the cost of a casket, clergy services, the use of the funeral home, headstone, and a burial plot. It also covers cremation and the cost of an urn.

Unfortunately, scammers are offering to register people for the program, while extracting personal information such as credit card numbers. Applicants must call FEMA to sign up. FEMA will not call anyone until they have signed up for the program, but scammers will. Funeral homes are not eligible to apply for this assistance. Only someone who has incurred the death care costs is eligible to apply.



Scammers have become sophisticated and it is difficult to know whether the calls, texts, or emails are fake because they may display local numbers which appear legitimate.

Survivors can apply for benefits by contacting FEMA at 844-684-6333. Online applications are not accepted. You must call FEMA. FEMA admits to being understaffed and difficult to reach by phone. They suggest people keep trying to call. The program does not have a deadline.

Poets for the dead

In Amsterdam, it is estimated that at least a dozen people die alone and unclaimed by relatives every year. Some poets create Lonely Funeral Poems for the anonymous dead. Lonely Funerals are typically held with a group of pallbearers, a designated civil servant, and the poet. Here is an example:

*‘Farewell sir,
without papers, without identity. What were you looking for?
How much did you lose along the way?’*



Death Doulas

Just as birth doulas help pregnant women through labor, end-of-life or death doulas help people who are dying. They are trained as support companions who honor the emotions of the person and the family. They can also tend to the details of the last days and weeks, such as medical plans and funeral arrangements. One of the most important things doulas do is to make space for and encourage conversations between loved ones and the one in the last days of life.

Hospice services offer palliative care and support, but death midwives or doulas say they complement hospice care. Although not regulated or licensed, the International End-of-Life Doula Association (INELDA) offers certification with training and a code of ethics and a directory. The Lifespan Doula Association is a similar organization with birth and death doula certification. Often doulas are found by word of mouth and are caring people who can ease the dying. They may not have any special training or organization behind them. Clients must be careful and engage the doula at their own risk.

Alabama approves alkaline hydrolysis

Miller Funeral Home in Oxford, Alabama now offers aquamation, another term for alkaline hydrolysis. It is the only place in the South offering this choice to consumers. Their charge for aquamations starts at \$1,295 while their traditional flame cremation starts at \$2,395. Perhaps Virginia will be the next southern state to offer this greener alternative.

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Kroger Community Awards & Amazon Smile

Thanks to our members who have connected their Kroger Loyalty Cards to us. If you have a Kroger Plus card, consider signing up for Kroger Community Awards to give a percentage of your bill as a donation to FCAVBR.

Go online to <https://www.kroger.com>. If you already have a Kroger account, simply log in. If not, you will be asked to create one. When asked to select the organization to receive your rewards, enter this number:

TK761.

Amazon also supports us. At your browser, type smile.amazon.com. If you have an Amazon account, sign in and you will see the choice to select a charity. If you type in Funeral Consumers Alliance, several affiliates come up and you can scroll down to select Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge.