

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge

Blue Ridge Green Burial in Floyd



Blue Ridge Green Burial is a new organization that was incorporated in March, just as we were asked to shelter in place due to the COVID epidemic. The intrepid founders began meeting by Zoom to lay out the foundations for an organization dedicated to an environmentally responsible alternative to the conventional cemetery. The group envisions this as a way to connect with the natural diversity of the Blue Ridge Mountains while restoring and protecting ecosystems. The mission is to

- Provide affordable, environmentally sound burial
- Conserve and restore land
- Promote courageous and reverent engagement with death and dying
- Provide contemplative and recreational community space

Blue Ridge Green Burial is a 501(c)3 non-profit. It is working to secure land and begin operation. It is soliciting interested people who will help, as well as tax-deductible donations. You can donate on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/sustainabledeathcare> or website at <https://www.blueridgegreenburial.org>.

Newsletter via email

Would you like to “save a tree” and get this newsletter by email? It looks nicer, you see it in color, and it saves money to send it that way. If you are not already receiving this by email and would like to, please contact us with your preferred email. We don’t share your information.



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Special points of interest

Did you know? See page 2

Threshold Services

Gate Keepers

Did you know?

Threshold Services of Central Virginia --- a totally volunteer group offering home funeral guidance and end of life education. Their mission: igniting passions, fostering community, and supporting empowered choices for end of life and after death care. This is particularly useful for people in the Charlottesville area.

Some funeral homes are willing to work with families who want to do some or all of their home funeral care. Call around to see. Phone numbers are listed on our Funeral Home Survey on our website.



There is a local group that repairs and maintains cemeteries. The Gate-keepers Cemetery Organization has been doing this throughout the New River Valley.

They are all volunteers and headed by April Martin, Director of the Wilderness Road Museum. The Gatekeepers need financial help to repair or replace historic markers, especially those who were connected to the American Revolution.

Separate license for embalmers

The Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers was authorized by the General Assembly to issue separate licenses, one for funeral directors and one for embalmers, in addition to the current Funeral Service license which covers both. This means that people can qualify to be funeral directors without having to also be embalmers. The Board is working with colleges to develop separate curricula for the different professions as well as state exams. There are people who are interested in providing funeral services, but who do not wish to embalm. It is toxic work and with the growing consumer interest for no embalming, there is a reason for the separate licensure.

The use of embalming has been declining for several years. Cremation has been the choice in nearly 50% of funerals. The growing interest in green burials as well as awareness of the prohibition of embalming for Muslims and Jews has also affected the need for this process. Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Blue Ridge appeared before the Board several years ago to advocate for this change. It gives consumers more and makes good business sense. At that meeting, one of the local funeral directors stated, "I never thought I would find myself agreeing with the Funeral Consumers Alliance, but we are in agreement on this case."

Have that important conversation

One of the things we always emphasize when talking to our members is "having the talk." Do your loved ones or next of kin know how you want to live the last days of your life and what you would prefer for your funeral? Are there documents that you have shared with them such as a health power of attorney, advance directive, health proxy and any funeral plans you have made with a funeral home? (We recommend pre-planning, but not pre-paying except for a very few special circumstances.)

While starting that conversation can be difficult because some people hate talking about "death," we remind them that talking about "birth control" does not make one pregnant, and talking about death does not make one dead. It is important that the dying person receives what they want and it is important for the care-giver to know what those wishes are. As long as your loved ones know, care for you will be easier.

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Annual Report 2019-2020

Our usual activities were cut short by the pandemic. We were scheduled to provide five programs that had to be canceled. We were to have a booth at five health fairs that didn't happen. A planned free movie on home death care and burial was canceled. We still received many phone calls and emails from our web presence. Most of the requests were asking for financial help. We were able to provide information about lower cost choices.

A positive development this year was the many referrals we received from various hospice organizations. We also received requests from several funeral homes and cemeteries. Some folks outside our service area of the New River and Roanoke Valleys wanted to see their local funeral homes added to our survey and we complied.

We saw several more funeral homes have their prices on line and we supplied direct links on our survey. We experienced growing interest in home burials and greener options

Outreach

Provided information – to our area and beyond, some examples:

- Taught Getting Your Ducks in a Row, a four-session, six-hour class, for Lifelong Learning Institute
- Staffed our display table at the Radford University Nursing School health fair
- Presented a program at Blacksburg Public Library – Going out Green
- Delivered a program for Alexandria Public Library via Zoom on Writing Your Own Obituary
- Gave the program for VA Tech Women's Club via Zoom – Going out Green

Answered requests from our service area as well as from Pamplin, Emporia, Yorktown, Staunton, Charlottesville, Chesterfield, Williamsburg, Swoope, Richmond, Norfolk, Nelson County, Rockbridge County, Washington County, Knoxville, California, and North Carolina

Legal advocacy

- Monitored the State legislature, provided assistance to our local Delegate
- Monitored the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers
- Sent comments to the Federal Trade Commission

Helped consumers – members and non-members alike

Clark Howard refers people to Funeral Consumer affiliates on his radio show. We received several calls. Partnered with TimeBank to help folks with end of life planning. This were to be person-to-person, but they had to be done by phone.

Welcomed 13 new members

Annual meeting elects board/officers

The annual meeting was held on September 22 via Zoom. Although meeting this way is difficult for people who don't feel comfortable using this technology, it is the best that can be done when we are social distancing and avoiding inside meetings. The positive aspect of a Zoom meeting is that people who live farther away were able to join. A former board member who moved to Lynchburg several years ago was happy to be included.



In place of a guest speaker, we reviewed what we all need to know in the time of COVID-19. The synopsis of the annual report was presented, see page 5. After the meeting, the board elected officers for the coming year. See the sidebar on the right.

The board continues to meet monthly by Zoom. If you are interested in attending a board meeting, send your request by email and you will be sent the Zoom invitation. Zoom meetings need to be by invitation.

Board of Trustees

2020 Term

Leanne Mitchell

Helen Renqvist

Sandy Schlaudecker

2021 Term

Linda Plaut

Harriett Cooper

Phil Olson

2022 Term

Ben Crawford

Darrel Clouse

Dianne Rencsok

Officers

President: Sandy Schlaudecker

Vice president: Phil Olson

Secretary: Linda Plaut

Treasurer: Dianne Rencsok

The important talk from page 2

Isabel Berney, Administrator
(volunteer)

It is important that all who care for you have copies of your advance directives. These include your doctors, lawyer, health care givers and the ones who hold your durable powers of attorney. The documents should be scanned and added to your electronic medical record. You should avoid storing the documents in a safe or locked file cabinet where no one can access them when needed. Make sure your family knows where these documents are kept. Having these documents available when needed will be a true gift to your loved ones.

Kroger Community Awards & Amazon Smile

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Affiliated with Funeral Consumers
Alliance www.funerals.org

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.