

FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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Spring 2025

President's Update

Welcome! It is my pleasure to send you this Newsletter and to outline the accomplishments of our organization over the past few months. In addition, you will find information on Green Burials and what to do in the unfortunate event of death abroad. Let's start with our accomplishments:

1. I am happy to report that we finished 2024 in the black. This is notable given our switch from an employee-based workforce to an all-volunteer workforce. At the Annual Meeting in October, we were projecting a possible deficit of \$1,000.
2. For the first time FCAWP became part of the Giving Big Pittsburgh Day (now renamed Give Big Pittsburgh) on Tuesday December 3rd (see page four for more details).
3. In the past couple of years we had five of our participating Funeral Homes close. When this happened, we assisted members in selecting new funeral homes. We also responded to questions and requests for assistance via phone, mail and email.
4. Mission Statement and Goals: We have created a mission statement and a set of goals to drive our work for 2025. While we have a purpose outlined in our Articles of Incorporation, our new mission statement nicely encapsulates our primary directive! It is as follows:

The mission of the organization is to educate and advocate for the promotion of dignity and individual determination and economy with end-of-life issues in the Western Pennsylvania area.

The goals for 2025 include:

- Develop a website
 - Print a new brochure
 - Consider a new name to improve the association's recruitment of new members
 - Increase our membership by providing educational workshops
 - Develop a social media presence via Facebook
5. We continue to organize the membership records. We currently have 1,057 active members of which 712 members have selected a funeral home. There are over 1,000 inactive members. We encourage all members to select a funeral home to help your loved ones.
 6. We are continuing to cross-check our paper records with our spreadsheet-based database. We added the capability of tracking contributions by member. Across the past five years we have had 230 contributors. Our budget calls for an increase in contributions or new memberships of \$2,000 to cover our current expenses. Please consider contributing.

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7. We also are offering educational workshops. The first was in the Fall at the Carnegie Mellon University's Osher Institute, an adult life-long education organization. The program, **Planning for Your End**, will be repeated this summer at CMU.
8. To further improve our communications, we expect to launch a new website for the association in the near future which will provide tips, articles and links to the national Funeral Consumers Alliance and other resources.
9. We also hope to utilize emails as an important addition to our communication capabilities. If you would like to start receiving newsletters and information from us via email, send your email address to info@funeralconsumerswpa.org.

Stephen Christian-Michaels

FCAWP 2025 Board

Officers

- President, Stephen Christian-Michaels
- Vice-President, Susan Jones
- Secretary, Andrea Christian-Michaels
- Treasurer, Tom Stackrow

Members at large

- Beverly Bronder, Larry Comden, Terra Treasure

Treasurer's Update

2024 Year End Report		2025 Proposed Budget	
Expenses	\$4,033.44	Expenses	\$5,672
Revenue	\$4,304.37	Revenue	\$3,768
Surplus	\$270.93	Deficit	\$1,907

The checking account balance at year end was \$10,752.29.

In 2024 we had a refund of \$540 from our printer due their error in printing the annual meeting notice. We also had the cost of printing the **Postcard Mailing** paid by a board member. This contributed to having lower costs by about \$1,000 for 2024.

We will need to raise \$2,000 in membership dues or additional contributions over what was collected in 2024 to break even in 2025.

Tom Stackrow, Treasurer

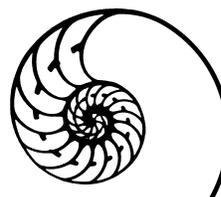
Call for Help!

We could use some help with the following

- Calling or sending letters to members to get updated contact information
- Updating membership records (paper files, etc.)
- Writing Newsletter articles
- Webpage assistance
- Presenting talks to community groups
- Joining the Board

If you are interested in helping or have ideas about attracting new members, please call us at 412.241.0705 or email us at:

info@funeralconsumerswpa.org.



Death Away from Home

What do we do if when traveling, one of us dies in another state or in a foreign country? This will depend on what your funeral wishes are. Do you want to be buried or cremated? If you would like to be cremated, you can have your remains cremated and shipped to your home address. We may be able to help you obtain a discount with the help of another Funeral Consumers Alliance affiliate. Just call us at 412.241.0705.

If you want your remains buried near your home, contact your selected funeral home who will coordinate with Inman Nationwide 800.321.0566 to arrange the shipment. Inman will also coordinate with a nearby funeral home in the state where you died to arrange the details. The costs prior to shipping, total about \$830 and include picking up the body, permits, death certificate, embalming, and delivery to airport. There will also be the cost of an airline ticket and \$50 for a shipping container. The receiving funeral home, i.e., the funeral home you selected in your home state, will typically charge \$500–\$3,000. You can check with your selected funeral home for the cost your funeral home will charge. Most states will allow family members to transport a family member's remains on their own. You should check each state's regulations before you commit to transporting your family member's remains. You will still need a death certificate and possibly embalming if there is a delay in the trip or the trip is very long.

If you die in a foreign country, there are many more details. Call the United States Consulate before you start informing family members back in the States. If the next of kin is traveling with you, the Consulate will describe the different options. If the next of kin is in the States, they will receive an official notification from the Consulate with the different options available. Money will then need to be wired to the Dept. of State, which will then wire the funds to the Embassy in that foreign country. Wishes for the disposition need to be sent to the Embassy immediately if the next of kin is in the States.

The options generally include:

- Local burial.
- Cremation (not generally available in Catholic or Muslim countries).
- Body Donation-your body donor card should state to contact the nearest medical school.
- Return of embalmed body to US:
 - Preparation and shipping must comply with local laws. Your Funeral Home can coordinate.
 - A shipped body may not be suitable for viewing.
 - Costs for returning a body will be high.
 - It can take 3-10 days before body will be shipped.

Stephen Christian-Michaels

Donate and Designate

By designating how you want your donation to be used, you keep your entire gift local. All undesignated gifts require FCAWP to pay 15% of the amount as dues to the national Funeral Consumers Alliance. *To designate a gift, write "communications," "office supplies," or "postage" in the memo line of your check.* Choose the category you want to support.

Mail your check, payable to FCAWP, to the address above, and know that you have the thanks of FCAWP members. FCAWP acknowledges all gifts in writing.

Susan Jones

In Memoriam

We recently learned that former member, Arlene Stromberg, passed peacefully on Thursday, April 3, 2025. Arlene was a very dedicated member of Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western PA and served several years as President and Trustee on the Board. One of her notable achievements was the creation and teaching of courses on various end-of-life topics at the CMU's Osher Institute. We extend our deepest sympathies to her family.

Green Burials

Penn Forest Natural Burial Park is Pennsylvania's first exclusively green cemetery and is committed to creating a beautiful burial park where nature is at the forefront. A natural burial park bears little resemblance to a conventional cemetery. There are no manicured lawns or rows of headstones. Often, they are both a cemetery and a natural area with trails and native plantings for visitors to enjoy. Green burial is a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources. Its main requirements are that everything that goes into the ground must be biodegradable including your clothing and casket, shroud, or urn. Toxic embalming fluids are prohibited, and burial vaults are not used. Grave markers, if desired, are made from stone or wood that is indigenous to Western Pennsylvania and placed flat to the ground. Our green burial certification is through the Green Burial Council. They are the certifying organization for green cemeteries, funeral homes, and products in North and Central America.

At Penn Forest, you can be buried in our open meadow or one of our wooded groves. For body-burial, the cost for the burial right is \$2,800 if purchased pre-need or \$3,200 if purchased at-need. For cremated remains burial, the cost for the burial right is \$900. The other fee associated with burial here is the interment fee. The interment fee for body burial is \$2,200. The interment fee for cremated remains is \$900. The interment fees are due at the time of need only.

Penn Forest isn't just a burial park. We have 35 acres and about 3 acres are used for burial right now, but we are in the process of expanding. We have a hiking trail that is about 2/3-3/4 of a mile long, a flower picking garden that is free and open for any visitor to use, and a farm with goats, sheep, ducks, and a donkey. We also have a 10-acre wildlife preserve, a native grasses and wildflowers meadow, a meditation hut, and a Remembrance Wall where folks can write notes on rice paper to deceased loved ones and leave them in the cracks of the wall. In addition to these features, we host a lot of events that are not only open to the Penn Forest community but the greater Western Pennsylvania community as well. We are a great place to visit, and we welcome visitors every day from dawn until dusk to walk the grounds. If you would like to set up a guided tour, we would be happy to schedule a day and time for you to come out. You can find out more information on our website at www.pennforestcemetery.com or you can contact Laura at laura@pennforestcemetery.com or 724.612. 2492.

Laura Faessel, Manager
Penn Forest Natural Burial Park

Giving Day Pittsburgh

Last November we checked out the possibility of joining *Giving Day Pittsburgh* or as it is now called *Give Big Pittsburgh*. It was a straightforward process, and we were up and running within a few days. We did not have much time to spread the word, but we tested the process and it worked very well. We are now ready for future Giving Days. Please check out this way to help us continue to meet the needs of our members. Keep *Giving Day Pittsburgh* in mind for another tax-deductible donation at the end of the year. If you are ready to donate now, however, we would be thrilled to receive your check in the mail. Thank you!

Susan Jones

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Pennsylvania is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, donations to which are tax-deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. Official registration and financial information regarding FCAWP is available from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling, toll-free within the state, 800.732.0999 or by visiting file.dos.pa.gov/search/business. Annually, FCAWP pays 15% of undesignated donations to the national Funeral Consumers Alliance.