

FCA REPORT

© 2015
FCA-GKC



Historic Prairie Village cemetery offers natural burial

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member

For several years, the FCA-GKC has fruitlessly sought a public metro-area cemetery that allows natural burial. Imagine finding one in the middle of Prairie Village that has been open since the Civil War—when natural burial was the rule—and is still open today.

This little-known site is the one-acre Highland Cemetery, which contains the graves of some of Johnson County's pioneer families.

A sign at the cemetery entrance, at the west end of the 5000 block of West 65th Street (between Nall and Roe avenues), provides the phone number (913-722-0100) of Highland's sexton. It is the number of Langworthy Companies, Inc., in Mission, developer in years past of about 900 homes in northeast Johnson County, including those of



Sexton Asher Langworthy at the Highland Cemetery in Prairie Village, which allows natural burial.

the Countryside East neighborhood surrounding the cemetery. The sexton is 80-year-old Asher C. Langworthy Jr., company owner and husband of former Kansas Sen. Audrey Langworthy.

Asher Langworthy, whose parents are buried in Highland, took

Just what is hospice?

By now we've all heard about hospice care. Be sure to read our article on page 3 to learn more of the basics.

responsibility for the cemetery when its maintenance endowment was nearly exhausted. Plot sales have rebuilt the fund to a modest \$27,000, but more sales are needed to strengthen its financial footing. Prairie Village Boy Scout Troops 99 and 199, and loved ones of the deceased, have been performing maintenance at Highland.

The cemetery, enclosed by a chain-link fence, is not in tip-top condition by modern standards and probably never will be. Some graves have settled. Recent graves still are topped by mounds of unsettled earth, which was the practice of the 1800s. Some grave stones are missing or broken or have tilted with time. A few trees need trimming or removal.

See *Highland cemetery*, page 6

First exclusive 'green' burial cemetery coming to the Kansas prairie

By Lynn Anderson, FCA-GKC Volunteer

Back in 2009, Sarah Crews picked up a book called *Grave Matters*, by Mark Harris. Within its pages, she read for the first time about natural burial. What she learned resonated deeply.

Having worked as a music caregiver and bereavement counselor for hospice, Crews was familiar with society's struggle in accepting the myriad challenges associated with death and dying. She had accompanied many families as they traversed the very natural, though often difficult, process of dying.

She had also participated in many funerals.

"I watched many a steel coffin be lowered into the ground or raised high on a platform into an above-ground mausoleum," she remembers. "I stood on unnaturally green Astro-turf, carefully placed to hide any soil exposed from the digging of the grave, which was lined with concrete, plastic, or steel, waiting to accept the ornate coffin held above it on a mechanical lowering device.

"I held hands with a grieving daughter who told me about her shock at seeing the ghastly, curved smile the embalmer had carefully arranged on her mother's face. I witnessed the disconnect so many felt with laying their loved ones to rest in these



Sarah Crews is shepherding the creation of a natural burial cemetery on the Kansas Prairie. Photo by Tom Dorsey, Salina Journal.

resource-intensive, expensive, culturally accepted ways."

The pages of a funeral director's general price list imply that we have a lot of choice. The reality, says Crews, is that our choices as presented are very limited. So, while reading the following

See *Prairie burial*, page 7

The big picture

By Nancy Jobe, FCA-GKC President

It's spring, the time of new beginnings and sunshine for the soul.

I want to thank the FCA board for once again creating a great informational format at the 2014 annual meeting. It is always nice to hear participants praising the topics and new ideas presented. We look forward to planning this year's November meeting, and we ask for your suggestions on topics. What would you like to learn about? To whom would you like to listen? Please e-mail your suggestions.

This year the FCA will work on several projects focusing on outreach to educate community groups about funeral arrangements, including choices and hazards, and we are preparing informational fliers about our latest funeral price survey. We plan to distribute these materials to hospices, senior communities, and senior resource centers.

As you plan for end of life, please consider a gift to the Funeral



Consumers Alliance—Greater Kansas City. What a great way to continue FCA's work of helping others with their planning and decision processes. A planned gift is as easy as adding FCA as a beneficiary on checking, savings, or other accounts, or you can add a bequest to your will. Contact your bank or attorney for more information.

As Jim Fitzpatrick mentions in his column, FCA-GKC is delighted to have received a grant from Crossroads Hospice Charitable Foundation for a second year. Without such grants and your contributions, we would not be able to perform our mission: To educate and support individuals and families in making informed decisions about death-related services, consistent with their values and lifestyles.

We thank all of our supporters for contributing and helping our community. ✕

Good news on the financial front

By Jim Fitzpatrick, FCA-GKC Treasurer



Thanks to a new grant and your generous response to our 2014 Funeral Home Price Survey, the financial status of the FCA-GKC is sounder than it has been in several years. As of this writing, we have about \$3,500 in our bank account.

As most of you know, ours is an all-volunteer organization, and our biggest expense is printing and mailing our semiannual newsletter, about \$1,200 per issue. We e-mail the newsletter to about 500 households and mail about 1,000 paper copies. We also print extra price surveys, brochures, and rack cards for use at outreach presentations.

As a rule, we see a sharp financial upswing in response to the Funeral Home Price Survey, and last fall was no exception. In the wake of that newsletter we received about \$2,500 in contributions. FCA-GKC has no membership fees and depends entirely on your contributions. Thank you so much!

We are fortunate to have a solid group of repeat contributors. If you are in that category, I extend particular thanks because you represent financing that we can "bank on."

Periodically we are fortunate enough to get a grant, and early this year the Crossroads Hospice Charitable Foundation saw fit to give us \$1,500. The foundation is active in seven states and has offices in Independence and Lenexa.

Although we are in good financial shape currently, we are always looking for ways to cut expenses. Last year, for example, we became concerned about our phone bill, which had risen from about \$40 to \$60 a month. Board member Lyle Van Vleet came up with a Costco service that cut our monthly bill to \$10.52. That move alone will save us \$550 to \$600 this year.

In this spring of 2015, I am happy to be able to give you an uplifting financial report. We need your continued support to go on providing the substantive information you are accustomed to getting in these newsletters and at our presentations and annual meetings.

Please keep the checks coming in! We will put your money to good use. ✕

Funeral home owner busted on drug charges

By Jim Fitzpatrick, FCA-GKC Board Member

Late on the night of Feb. 24, Toby Polley, owner of the Polley Funeral Homes in the Northland, was arrested in the Argosy Casino parking lot in Riverside when he was found to have in his possession a controlled substance and drug paraphernalia.

The "goods" were in his vehicle—a white 1996 Cadillac hearse that Polley had been driving when he dropped off a body.

Perhaps a more troubling layer to Polley's arrest is the fact that he was Ray County coroner. No more, though; he has resigned.

The arrest occurred after an Argosy security guard called police to report "a male sitting in a white hearse smoking a white substance out of a glass pipe." During the incident, Polley informed the officer that he had a concealed-carry permit and a gun in his boot.

Polley, 46, of Excelsior Springs, was

issued two citations before being released. Because these are municipal charges, there is a good chance Polley will not serve time in jail. If he is convicted, probation and a fine are more likely.

Until his arrest, Polley owned and operated funeral homes in Excelsior Springs, Lawson, and Richmond.

A woman who answered the phone recently at the funeral home in Excelsior Springs said that Ryan Cashatt, of Cashatt Family Funeral Home in Platte Woods, was buying out Toby Polley. She said the Polley homes in Excelsior Springs and Lawson were continuing to operate but that the Richmond home was not.

Ryan Cashatt could not be reached before the newsletter deadline.

What is hospice? An introduction

By Susie Bradford, LMSW; FCA-GKC Volunteer



“Hospice” is a word that is greeted with many reactions. I have worked as a hospice social worker in the Kansas City area for several years. My job often includes being the first person to talk to someone about hospice and its role during life’s end. This is a scary thing, but it’s also comforting and empowering.

Every room I enter to start this conversation is different because of the person, or people, sitting across from me. Some are ready to dive into the conversation about starting hospice. Others have trepidation about even mentioning the word, for fear of summoning death. Most are somewhere in between. They have heard about hospice, but their knowledge is riddled with holes and misunderstandings.

My goal in these visits is not to convince anyone to choose hospice. Rather, I provide information to help people make the best decisions. Educating others about hospice is one of my favorite things. Here are the reasons:

Purpose of hospice

Hospice is a whole-person approach to serving those with terminal illness who are not seeking further aggressive treatment. Hospice acknowledges that the illness is a piece of who you are, but it is not the whole of you, or even the majority of you.

Hospice is there to manage your care, but it is also there for your loved ones. Hospice involves a team, including nurses, physicians, and other professionals: chaplains, social workers, bath aides, music therapists, pet therapists, massage therapists, physical therapists, and dieticians. All are prepared to help navigate your end-of-life needs and goals. Hospice cannot take away the pain, loss, or grief, but hospice is there to be present in the moment with you.

Hospice growth

A phenomenal growth in hospice availability and use has occurred since 1982, when about 25,000 people received hospice care across the nation, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. In 2013, 1.5 to 1.6 million people received hospice care. Today,

about 25 hospice agencies serve Kansas City area residents, according to Missouri Hospice and Palliative Care.

Most of hospice care is provided in homes, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, independent living facilities, and group homes. Some hospice organizations have hospice houses to which dying people may be moved for end-of-life care. Hospice is very flexible about where care can be provided.

Palliative care

Hospice has a palliative focus, to manage pain, discomfort, and other symptoms. Although a hospice nurse does not move in with you, a nurse is available around the clock to assist with comfort needs. The team will work with you and your loved ones until all of you are comfortable with the care plan.

Payment

Medicare and Medicaid cover 100 percent of all services related to the reason you are using hospice. Even most private insurance policies have hospice benefits.

It’s about you

There is a saying in hospice: “We meet you where you are.”

Hospice does not try to push you where you are not ready to go. However, your hospice team will walk beside you when you are ready. Hospice provides education and advice, but you or those you have chosen make all decisions.

All of us in hospice acknowledge that we are guests invited into your life; we feel honored to be included.

If you think your goals (continuing with dialysis or specific medications) might conflict with the hospice philosophy, talk to your hospice agency. Hospice does not follow a cookie-cutter approach. If a conflict does not allow hospice to continue, that is OK. Hospice will be there when you are ready. This is about you. ☘

Calls, from page 8

wife’s remains. The couple had purchased two spaces for \$13,250. Mr. Medlock was sure all expenses had been included.

“I was enraged and dumbfounded when they told me the vaults I bought had to be opened and I would have to pay \$1,400 to do so,” he wrote. “How can you sell a vault, sign a contract, and say it is all paid, then make someone pay to put their loved one in it? I had my grieving process robbed from me and replaced with anger and rage instead. This is like buying a house or car and then having to pay extra to open the doors.”

A faxed copy of his contract contained several pages of fine print. I saw nothing that indicated an extra opening and closing charge. I contacted Courtney Phillips, manager of White Chapel, who checked into it and faxed the opening page of the contract with one section circled. Mr. Medlock had initialed the section asking the question, “Does this agreement include cemetery professional service fees (opening and closing charges)?” The “No” box was checked. Then it read, “If no, this charge will be made at the time of need at the rate that is in effect at the time.”

I looked again at Mr. Medlock’s contract and, sure enough, it was there. I called it to his attention.

“It looks like they got me,” he responded. “You sign those contracts when your brain’s not working right.”

Opening and closing fees are standard charges at cemeteries for graves and mausoleums. White Chapel was purchased last year by Service Corporation International, the largest chain of funeral homes and cemeteries in the nation. The opening and closing fee for mausoleums recently was increased to \$1,595, one of the highest in the metropolitan area. ☘

Back to the basics with do-it-yourself funerals

By Nancy Jobe, FCA-GKC President

We are increasingly hearing about “home funerals” and “natural burials.” Perhaps you might like to consider it, but don’t know where to start. Let me show you the steps for a do-it-yourself funeral.

For years, most Americans have assumed that “traditional” funerals and burials (embalming, caskets, cremation) were the only choices. But you have many choices about the type of funeral and burial you want. In some religions and cultures, loved ones have always prepared their deceased after death or held natural burials for them. It wasn’t until the 1920s that our society turned the entire process over to funeral homes. So, when I write about home funerals or natural burial, I’m not really talking about a new trend. I’m talking about getting back to the basics. And yes, it is legal.

Home funerals consist of any type of celebration you conduct on your own, without the assistance of a licensed funeral director. A home funeral may include preparing the body, transporting it, conducting services, and taking care of paperwork. You may choose to perform all or just some of these elements on your own. You may also engage a home funeral guide or celebrant to assist you in planning and conducting a home funeral.

Some families choose a “hybrid” funeral, in which they rely on a funeral director to perform some of the functions. But be aware that the funeral home’s basic service fee will likely be charged. This fee for overhead costs ranged from \$775 to \$3,895 in our recent funeral price survey of 95 area funeral homes. Sometimes the amount of this fee can be negotiated. Check the prices at our website, funeralskc.org.

Some people are drawn to the idea of cleansing the body; others aren’t comfortable with it. You may have a home funeral with a closed casket without cleansing the body, or you may conduct a service without the body being present. Although I touched many bodies when I worked as a paramedic, I was

not sure that I would want to prepare the body of a loved one. Last year, though, I attended a seminar on how to prepare a body for a home funeral. Members of the National Home Funeral Alliance demonstrated how to clean a body, cool it, and position it for burial. I am now confident that I can do it, and I have a new appreciation for the emotional and spiritual components of this age-old custom.

The terms “natural” and “green” burial are synonyms, except that “green” emphasizes a focus on the environmentally friendly aspects of burial while “natural” places more emphasis on a back-to-basics attitude. For simplicity, the term “natural” is being used in this article to include both subtleties. They achieve the same result, which is to allow the body to decompose naturally. To accomplish this, you’ll need to follow just a few steps.

- No embalming of the body occurs. No states require embalming if the body is kept cool and buried within a specified time, whether it be a natural or traditional burial.
- Biodegradable containers, such as cardboard, wood, or cloth shrouds, are used.
- Some cemeteries prohibit cut, machined, or polished markers or monuments, favoring native boulders. Native plants and grasses are the only decorations allowed in most natural burial areas, but each cemetery will have its own rules.

Steps for a home funeral and natural burial

1. **Body care.** You will prepare the body by washing and dressing it, or arrange to have this done by others. The body will be cooled at home or taken to a refrigeration facility such as a morgue. Frontier Forensics, in Kansas City, Kan., is a morgue that will provide refrigeration and storage for \$30 a day and will help arrange transportation (913-299-1533).



When the author’s husband died, the family chose natural burial in a Lawrence cemetery. The Jobe grandchildren participated in decorating their grandfather’s burial container and later visited his grave site, where he is memorialized on a natural boulder.

2. **Transportation.** You may transport the body yourself in Kansas and Missouri, or you may arrange to have it taken by others to a morgue or cemetery. Local crematories do not accept bodies transported by private parties. Check to be sure a cemetery will accept a body transported by individuals.
3. **Paperwork.** You may arrange for the death certificate yourself by contacting the Vital Statistics office of Kansas, 785-296-1428, or Missouri, 573-526-0348.
4. **Containers.** Consider what type of coffin or shroud you will use.
5. **Services.** Will a service take place at a church, a home, the graveside, or a memorial service at a later date?
6. **Notifications.** Inform friends and family of the death and prepare an obituary.
7. **Grave marker.** Consider the type of marker you’ll want and what type is allowed in the cemetery.
8. **Don’t forget to grieve.**

One thing is sure: You will need to be prepared if you are planning a home funeral or natural burial. Many decisions must be made at the time of need, but the process will be less burdensome when arrangements are made in advance. ✕

See Home funeral, page 5

Home funeral and natural burial resources

Web sites

Many articles are available in our newsletters posted at our website: www.funeralskc.org

National Home Funeral Alliance: www.homefuneralalliance.org

Green Burial Council: www.greenburialcouncil.org

Natural burial cemeteries in our area

Site	Phone	Plot prices	Grave opening/closing fees
Green Acres, Rocheport, Mo.	573-355-4647	\$885-\$1,185	\$600-\$800 (50% discounts for U.S. veterans)
Oak Hill, Lawrence, Kan.	785-832-3450	\$850	\$800-\$1,250
Mount Muncie, Lansing, Kan.	913-727-1935	\$800	\$1,100 + \$25 state fee
Highland, Prairie Village, Kan.	913-722-0100	\$2,000 /5 grave sites \$2,500/6 grave sites	Cemetery does not provide grave opening or closing services; you must arrange this.
Heart Land Prairie (Coming soon in Ottawa County near Salina, Kan. See story on page 1.)	785-404-3214		

'Before I Go' kits help with planning

We still have a supply of "Before I Go, You Should Know" planning kits, which are great repositories for all the information needed to make survivors' lives easier when a loved one dies. The kit is a comprehensive guide to end-of-life planning, with more than 30 pages in which to record everything from your burial or cremation preference to how to close down your social media and online accounts.

The kit offers advice on things as routine as obituary preparation and as non-routine as full-body donation. To order kits, send a check, \$15 per kit, to P.O. Box 7021, Kansas City, MO 64113. Make checks out to "Funeral Consumers Alliance of GKC."

If you have questions, call us at (816) 561-6322. Leave a message and we will get back with you.

Preplan, but don't prepay

Funeral homes like to see families arriving ahead of time to plan funerals, and FCA does, too. But the funeral home will try to sell a prepaid plan, and we advise against it. Preplan, we say, but don't prepay.

Prepaid contracts can be restrictive and can make you vulnerable. What if you move? What if you change your mind? What if the funeral home is sold or goes out of business? What if you can't make the payments? What if someone raids your account? All those things have happened in our community.

We suggest opening a bank or credit union "pay-on-death" savings account with a trusted friend or relative who knows your wishes.

Presentations available

Would your organization benefit from an unbiased presentation about important practical aspects of funeral planning? Contact FCA-GKC by calling (816) 561-6322 or emailing fca.gkc@gmail.com. We'll line you up with one of our members for a visit.

FCA-GKC Board of directors

Officers

President: Nancy Jobe

Vice President:

Marci Michnick, MSW, LMSW

Secretary: Pam Thomas, PhD

Treasurer: Jim Fitzpatrick

Members

G. Frank Cockrell

Sally King, MSW, LCSW

Steve Nicely

Lyle Van Vleet

Tell us your story

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City has been educating the community for more than 50 years about your rights, choices, and alternatives regarding the funeral process.

Have we helped you in making decisions or planning funeral arrangements for a loved one? We are always interested in the results of our mission. Please share your story with us. Give us a call, 816-561-6322, or e-mail us, fca.gkc@gmail.com. We'd love to hear about it. Your experience, shared anonymously if you prefer, may be the tipping point in helping someone else.



Grave digging: How deep must it be?

By Frank Cockrell, FCA-GKC Board Member



Several times a year, FCA-GKC receives an inquiry about the grave depths required for human remains and cremation ashes.

As our ancestors populated Missouri and Kansas, farms were the normal burial sites. These sites are still around and some remain active. Recently we received a call from a Missouri farmer asking whether private-property burials were still permitted by the state. Our answer was "Yes, but check first with your city, county, or township zoning offices."

The grave in these private cemeteries should be deep enough to provide about two feet of earth on top of the burial container, according to regulations in Missouri and Kansas. The grave must be a minimum of 150 feet from a potable water supply. For a

green (natural) burial in a biodegradable container with no embalming or grave liner, the Green Burial Council suggests a depth of 3.5 feet. This exposes the body to microbes living within three feet of the land's surface, thus enhancing its decomposition.

The Missouri farmer was planning a home funeral, his son building a wooden casket. A reception and service were planned in the home with the unembalmed body present.

Burial depths in standard cemeteries vary according to policy, but most require depths of five or six feet. The greater depths allow for the possibility of a second burial on top. They also relieve the obsessive fear of cemetery operators that animals might dig up the grave. The burial depth

term "six feet under" was a practice mandated in the 1600s in England during a plague to prevent the spread of infection.

Burial depths for cremation ashes vary widely in accordance with local cemetery policies. Three feet is a commonly required depth.

The scattering of ashes also is a common memorializing practice. In general, ashes may be scattered just about anywhere with the permission of property owners. Even without permission, the act is often carried out by families adhering to their own "don't ask, don't tell" license, reasoning that the ashes are harmless and invisible.

The book *Final Rights*, by Lisa Carlson and Joshua Slocum, FCA's Executive Director, is an excellent reference for this topic. ☒

Highland cemetery, from page 1

But the cemetery has a charm and a rich history that cannot be found in today's manicured cemeteries. It is easy to imagine what it would be like restored to its original condition. A 2005 article by Linda Lewis tells of some of its history. She wrote:

"In the 1850s, this land was part of the Shawnee Nation reservation. When the Shawnees were later removed to Oklahoma, pioneer brothers John and Thomas Nall and their families squatted out 200 acres and became prosperous farmers. Half of this cemetery was owned by John Nall, the other by an Indian named John A. White, who was a friend of Nall's."

Twenty-nine Nall family members are buried in Highland, also known as Nall Cemetery. Nall Avenue commemorates the family name.

Thirty-seven plots with space for more than 150 graves are available for sale today. The 10 feet by 20 feet plots

sell for \$2,000, the 10 by 25 feet plots for \$2,500. The smaller plots will accommodate five burials and the larger ones six. That's about \$400 per burial site. Grave sites are not sold individually, but more than one family may join together to buy a plot.

What about digging the grave and refilling it?

"We don't do it," Langworthy said. "You have to arrange that with the funeral home."

And yes, natural burial – in biodegradable containers or shrouds with no embalming and no concrete grave liners – is permitted. And if family members want to dig and refill a grave, they may do so.

As Linda Lewis noted, "Even though the cemetery is surrounded by homes on all sides, the neighboring fences and landscaping make it feel secluded."

To inquire, call Asher Langworthy at 913-299-1533. ☒

When transporting bodies by air

Aaron House, of McGilley Funeral Homes, answered our questions. House is an embalmer, funeral director, and manager of McGilley's Personal Care Center.

Do airlines require that bodies be embalmed?

No. Bodies being transported by air do not have to be embalmed. We can transport an unembalmed body with ice packs.

Do the airlines (or does the law) require funeral-home service on the sending and receiving ends?

This depends upon the laws in the state where the body is being buried or entombed. The airlines will not require a funeral home to pick up the remains, but I would check with Air Cargo in the receiving city to make sure that the state doesn't require that a licensed director be present. Most airlines do require a funeral home as a point of contact. The shipping funeral home must be

Prairie burial, from page 1

words in the preface of Harris' book, she knew she was on to something important:

"...families choose natural burial because it achieves the very end our modern funeral industry labors to prevent at literally all costs: to allow, and even invite, the decay of one's physical body—its tissue and bone, its cache of organic components—and return what remains to the very elements it sprang from, as directly and simply as possible... to give back to the earth some very small measure of the vast resources they drew from it in life and, in the process, perpetuate the cycles of nature, of growth and decay, of death and rebirth, that sustain all of us."

In 2012, Crews and her husband, Tim Crews, moved to central Kansas, where he began working as a research director for the Land Institute in Salina.

"While he set to the task of developing a perennial polyculture to change the way we do agriculture," Crews said, "I set about exploring how to open a natural burial ground in central Kansas to change the way we do burial—or, more accurately, to start doing burial the way our pioneering ancestors did before the advent of the modern cemetery."

As Crews reports, and as you might suspect, the trickiest part in starting a cemetery is acquiring the land. She submitted a proposal to the board of directors of the Land Institute, whose mission promotes the connection of people, land, and

community.

"I was very fortunate," Crews said. "They understood that the option of a natural, ecologically sound burial on a piece of restoration prairie would benefit the whole community—indeed, the entire state—for years to come, and that such an offering was uniquely in line with their mission."

The Land Institute agreed to donate 13.5 acres of land to the project.

The future home of Heart Land Prairie Cemetery lies in southern Ottawa County just northeast of Salina. It is adjacent to a piece of prairie that has never been plowed.

The cemetery will be a restoration prairie project. Although alfalfa is currently cultivated on the land, plans call for replanting only with native prairie species, eventually restoring to natural prairie the eight acres of land suitable for burial. The cemetery will seek natural burial certification from the Green Burial Council.

Only unembalmed bodies in biodegradable containers or simple shrouds will be accepted. Grave markers will be low or flush with the ground. Vaults and above-ground monuments won't be permitted. The cost for a grave site will be comparable to a site in a conventional cemetery, but families may participate in digging and covering the grave.

A nonprofit organization called Heart Land Green Burial, Inc., was founded in 2014 for the sole purpose of operating this natural cemetery. The Ottawa County Zoning Board has endorsed issuing a special-use permit

Become part of this progressive project

- Volunteers are needed to participate in work days for trail building and other projects on the land.
- Spreading the word about the cemetery is crucial. If your organization has a newsletter, consider sharing information about the cemetery.
- The Heart Land Prairie Cemetery project must raise \$10,000 to fund a state-required maintenance endowment, and additional funds for design and landscaping. Financial contributions are welcome.
- To provide support, contact Sarah Crews: E-mail heartlandhomefunerals@gmail.com or call 785-404-3214.

required to create a cemetery on agriculturally zoned land. The County Commission is scheduled to take it up on April 6.

If all planning goes well, burials at Heart Land Prairie Cemetery will occur starting in the fall. The cemetery will be the first of its kind in Kansas.

"A couple of conventional cemeteries in the state offer natural burial in a designated area, but Heart Land Prairie Cemetery will be unique as a restoration prairie burial ground," said Crews. "We will establish hiking trails with stops along the way to sit in the beauty and quiet of nature, to watch the hawks and clouds move across the sky." ❧

Air, from page 6

a "known shipper." A few general things to remember:

- Advance arrangements are required. The shipper must comply with all local, state, federal, and international regulations.
- Dry ice is subject to the airline's dry-ice policy. Ice packs are allowed; wet ice is not.
- Human remains, other than cremated remains, must be adequately secured in an approved casket or container to prevent shifting and the escape of offensive odors. If the remains are in a casket, the casket

must be enclosed in an outside shipping container that has at least six handles and sufficient rigidity and padding to protect the casket from damage with ordinary care in handling.

- Unembalmed remains must be placed inside two sealed body bags, or a sealed casket or metal container that prevents the escape of offensive odors or fluids, and then placed in an approved outside container that will adequately protect the contents from damage with ordinary care and handling.
- All shipping containers must be new

and cannot be reused.

- All human remains shipments must appropriately display the label "head" on the outer shipping container to assist handlers in aircraft loading and unloading operations.
- Appropriate documentation must accompany all human remains. This includes a signed certificate of death, a burial permit, or a burial transit removal permit as mandated by local, state, and government regulations.
 - The maximum allowable weight is 500 pounds. ❧

Funeral Consumers Alliance
of Greater Kansas City
PO Box 7012
Kansas City, MO 64113



816-561-6322
fca.gkc@gmail.com
www.funeralskc.org

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
KANSAS CITY, MO
PERMIT NO. 2826

RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED



What you ask in your calls and e-mails

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member



When someone dies or is about to die, family members often find us on our website (funeralskc.org) and ask our advice about what is reasonable and what isn't. They call our number, 816-561-6322, and leave a message or e-mail us at fca.gkc@gmail.com. Usually we get back to them in time to help. We failed to respond on time in the first case described below.

When time is of the essence

The mother of four adult children died in January in Lawrence. One of her daughters, who does not want to be identified, left an urgent message.

We FCA-GKC volunteer board members take turns each month responding to our phone and e-mail messages, but sometimes we miss a beat. It was too late by the time I got back to her a few days later. I regret the lapse, because we could have saved the family a significant amount of money. And since the caller is anonymous, it doesn't seem fair to identify the funeral home either. Regardless, we can all learn from the case.

The mother had visited the funeral home with the thought of prepaying for her funeral. The same funeral home had handled her husband's funeral years ago, but now it is under new corporate ownership.

"The prices were so outrageous, she didn't do it," her daughter said of her mother's intent to prepay. "She knew she didn't have the money to put herself in the ground."

FCA-GKC advises against prepaying for the reasons listed in the item on page 4.

The siblings ended up paying about \$15,000 for the funeral and burial, the daughter said. The average price for a standard funeral in FCA's fall funeral price survey was \$6,623. Cemetery costs add about \$2,000 to that. Two of the

siblings had to break into their retirement accounts.

"They would not budge on any of the prices," the caller said. "They started with the horse manure that they knew what my mother wanted. They [tell you they] just know what they're doing. The casket prices were so incredibly extreme. We wanted a simple wooden casket. It was about \$5,500. At the last minute, they came up with last year's model, saving maybe \$1,000 or \$1,500."

If I had responded on time, I would have said that they could buy a casket anywhere, from Wal-Mart or Costco or a wood worker crafting one from scratch. Funeral homes are required by the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule to accept and use them without extra charge.

So here are some lessons: The first is our own, to check our messages more often. We once had an emergency number listed on the phone message, but somehow that got dropped. Here is an emergency number, my cell phone: (913) 624-4601.

The second lesson is to preplan but not prepay. That means shopping the prices and services of other funeral providers before the time of need. It was a difficult, high-pressure situation that the siblings found themselves in, with no time to explore the alternatives.

Missing the fine print

Dillard Medlock, of North Kansas City, e-mailed us in late January, complaining that White Chapel Cemetery charged \$1,400 to open the mausoleum space he had purchased in 2011 to receive the casket containing his

See Calls, page 3