

Funeral Consumers Alliance of OREGON (FCAO)



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September, 2011

OLD FRIENDS, YOUNG IDEAS MINGLE AT FCAO CELEBRATION

by Roger Anthony

NE PORTLAND – The occasion was a golden one – a 50th anniversary. There was a lovely buffet, and drinks suitable for a festive afternoon. There was a hostess, a master of ceremonies, distinguished guests, light-hearted reminiscences, and a remarkable honoree.



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New volunteer Karen Fujimoto is welcomed to FCAO by Sue Staehli.

The star of the show was the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Oregon – once (and perhaps soon to be again) known as the Oregon Memorial Association.¹ You probably don't know them by either name.

But maybe you should: The FCAO addresses a need that everyone will face at one time in their lives -- the final farewell of a loved one. Members of the Alliance, who pay a one-time fee between \$35 and \$45, become eligible for funeral pre-planning through an affiliated mortuary, currently the Riverview Cemetery Funeral Home located at the west end of Portland's Sellwood Bridge.

Bob Bouneff, a lawyer and former board chair for the organization, realized something had to be done when he was representing a client in 1959. "They were going to charge her \$7,000. Think of what that would be now!" he remembers.

Bouneff, former Oregon Public Utilities Commissioner Charles Davis and Russ Peyton, then director of Portland's Human Relations Commission, put their heads together and came up with the organization's structure. All they needed was a mortuary to team up with.

"I remember going to one place in Portland, and they physically threw me out," says Bouneff. "Most funeral homes wouldn't touch us; I was called a communist a number of times."

Eventually, Bouneff came across Ellsworth Purdy, owner of the Little Chapel of the Chimes in Northeast Portland. Was he enthusiastic? No. Was he willing? As Bouneff tells it, "He said, 'As long as I can make a profit, I'll talk to you'."



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Bob & Sylvia Bouneff were also celebrating a 50th anniversary – their own!

¹ There were about 55 FCAO members at the Aug. 22 celebration. Several of them suggested going back to the Oregon Memorial Association name, and the idea seemed to have a lot of support. The board may consider a name change later this year.



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Eleanor Davis was recognized as the first member of the Alliance.

That was good, because I was in no condition to make the kind of decisions you'd have to make." But now membership numbers have dwindled, and the founding generation is eager to pass the torch.

At one point, the organization had over 20,000 members. It established an affiliated non-profit, the Funeral Consumer Education Foundation, to monitor the funeral industry in Oregon, part of which includes compiling price lists that are made available to the public. The organization also has compiled 25 brochures, with information about everything from organ donation to handling deaths that occur away from home.

Membership is a long-term investment, but a worthy one according to Ruth Robinson, an attendee at the celebration. "I made use of my membership four years ago," she says. "Everything went seamlessly.



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Ruth Robinson discusses the benefits of FCAO and planning ahead.



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Two FCAO stalwarts: Jim Sitzman and Jeanne Staehli.

Toward that end, they will be raising the organization's profile through outreach and events such as a seminar scheduled for Sept. 17 titled "Your Last Gift: Mindful Memorials." Nancy Ward of Sacred Endings and Jeanne Staehli of FCAO will be joined by two other speakers in a presentation running from 10 a.m.-noon at the Friendly House, 1737 NW 26th Ave. The presentation is free, but registration is requested so the group can prepare materials for participants to take home. The seminar will be repeated on October 22nd at The First Unitarian Church., 1034 SW 13th Avenue in Portland.

**For more information on FCAO call:
Jeanne Staehli at 503-235-3515**