

With funerals, like cars, shop around Family specialists set for MSU conference

The funeral director leads the grief-stricken widow to the casket showroom where special lighting and color coordination dramatize the display.

After looking at several models, including one with an embroidered lining and mattress-type springs, the wife of the deceased decides to buy a steel model in the moderately-priced range. Having completed the selection, the two walk by the remaining caskets and into a reception area to complete arrangements for the funeral.

Funerals, and their costs, traditionally have been considered morbid subjects, with details usually arranged in a hurry. But, according to a consumer expert at the Michigan Consumer Education Center located on the campus of Eastern Michigan University, funerals should be just as important to Michiganders as the purchase of the family car.

Margaret Quinn, a coordinator at the center, recently wrote a consumer's guide on funerals, and she conducts in-service workshops on that topic for consumer education teachers throughout Southeastern Michigan.

According to Quinn, no one

would ever make arrangements for a funeral alone. Here's a list of consumer tips that the EMU experts suggest for planning a funeral:

• Always take someone else with you when planning a funeral, someone who can be objective and make decisions for you.

• Pre-plan funerals.

• If you have strong feelings about your funeral, make these feelings known to family members who eventually will handle the arrangements.

• Know all of the alternatives that are available to you. If price is a consideration, survey costs for funeral services.

• Be aware of the legal requirements for funerals in your state.

Quinn's booklet, originally designed as a teaching module, contains a list of materials and resources available to consumers on funerals and their costs, consumer expense sheets, an explanation of the funeral process, rights and responsibilities of the survivors, Michigan funeral industry laws, procedures in planning a funeral, and a glossary of terms commonly used by funeral directors.

While consumers often lack knowledge and experience in dealing with funerals, Quinn says, "Funeral directors are calm and familiar with the details in dealing with the dead."

Included in the section of the booklet dealing with the funeral industry is a list of Federal Trade Commission (FTC) citations compiled during a 1978 investigation. Quinn believes consumers should be aware of the FTC's remarks. The list of criticisms included:

• Embalming the body without the permission of a family member.

• Claiming directly, or by implication, that a casket is required for cremation.

• Failing to make an alternative container available in lieu of a casket for cremation.

• Failing to display the least expensive casket in the same manner that others are displayed.

• Failing to provide price information upon request.

• Encouraging the purchase of additional or more expensive merchandise or services.

• Making false or misleading claims regarding the preservative value of embalming, a casket or an outer burial container.

More Americans are turning to cremation as an alternative of traditional funeral arrangements, says Quinn. But, he says, cremating the dead will not necessarily save.

"Cremation only costs less if you don't go in for the traditional arrangements. So funeral directors will try to persuade you to buy an expensive casket, even though it will be destroyed in the process," Quinn said.

Cremation reduces the remains to an average of five to seven pounds of ashes in approximately 30 minutes. Bodies must be placed "in suitable container" and plastic and fiberglass coffins are usually discouraged by crematories because of the excessive smoke they produce.

Family specialists set for MSU conference

About 250 experts from family service organizations, agencies and advocacy groups will attend the May 9-10 Statewide Conference on Families at Michigan State University.

The sponsor of the conference is the Family Living Education Program of the MSU Cooperative Extension Service. It will be held in the Kellogg Center for Continuing Education.

According to Sharon Anderson, conference coordinator, the theme is "Focus on Family Strengths." Ten workshops will be featured, with more than 30 experts from a variety of disciplines scheduled to speak.

Topics include employment, leisure education and recreation, human development, creativity, nutrition and health, and family economics.

Richard Hey will deliver the keynote address. Formerly chairman and now

professor in the University of Minnesota Department of Family Social Science, he served as a family counselor, lecturer and member of the task force for the 1970 White House Conference on Children. His accomplishments include the publication of a number of papers on family life.

The goal of the conference, says Anderson, is to identify support systems, issues and policies related to the American family. Recommendations coming from the workshops will be considered as ways families, professionals and policy makers can strengthen and support the family system, he says.

More information on the conference is available from the county extension home economist or the MSU Family Living Education Program, (517) 353-9148.

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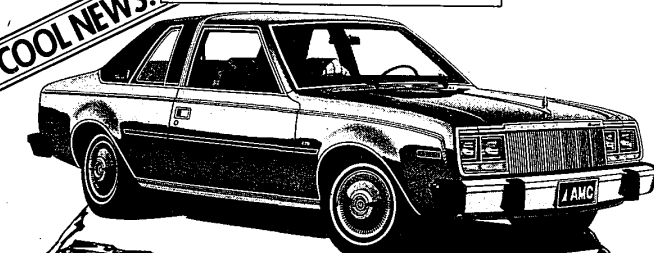
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