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# MEMORIAL MUSE

Winter 2024

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## The Unique Identity of the Cooperative Memorial Society

We hope this newsletter finds you well. Today, we want to shed light on the unique identity of the Cooperative Memorial Society (CMS) and clarify the distinctions between a traditional memorial society and our



cooperative model.

Contrary to what our name might suggest, the CMS doesn't operate as a typical memorial society. While memorial societies are usually non-profit organizations dedicated to helping individuals plan for their end-of-life preferences, we've taken a different route by embracing the cooperative model.

A memorial society typically focuses on educating its members about funeral and burial options, legal requirements, and advocating for consumer rights in the funeral industry. Members pay a nominal fee to gain access to resources that assist in making informed decisions about their funeral plans. The primary objective is to empower individuals to plan their memorials in advance, promoting a thoughtful and personalized approach to end-of-life arrangements. Interestingly, the CMS shares these goals and actively engages in similar activities.

On the other hand, funeral cooperatives, or funeral co-ops, operate under a cooperative model where members collectively manage and organize funeral services. These co-ops offer an alternative to traditional funeral homes, emphasizing community involvement and affordability. Members contribute dues and gain access to funeral services at cost or discounted rates. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of community support during challenging times, with transparency and shared decision-making at its core.

Now, where does the CMS fit into this spectrum? The CMS operates like a Memorial Society but under the cooperative model. This means our members collectively manage our operations, but unlike traditional funeral cooperatives, we do not organize funeral services ourselves. Instead, we've forged partnerships with locally-owned funeral homes that provide services at better prices for our members.

Back in 2012, the CMS considered the possibility of becoming a funeral cooperative and owning our own funeral home. However, after careful investigation, we found that our current model, which allows us to negotiate significant savings for our members through partnerships with locally-owned funeral homes, makes more economic sense.

In essence, the CMS stands as a unique entity, combining the principles of a memorial society with the cooperative model. We continue to strive towards our mission of empowering individuals to plan their end-of-life arrangements thoughtfully, with the added benefit of community support and economic efficiency.

Thank you for being a part of the Cooperative Memorial Society community.

Ms. Terry Geib, Board Chair

Terry joined the board in 2009. She has a background in strategic and business planning for municipal government and has served on a number of coop boards in Canada. She assists with the web, strategy and graphic design work and leads the

board for CMS. While Terry's term ends at this AGM. She has agreed to remain on the board as the past chair for 2024.

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## Honouring Our Founders: A Look Back at the History of the Cooperative Memorial Society



Ever wonder how the CMS began? In April 1965, a diverse group, including individuals from various co-operatives and the Unitarian Church in Calgary, came together to establish a memorial society dedicated to helping individuals and their families make practical and cost-effective arrangements for end-of-life services like funerals, burials, and cremations. This mirrors the mission of memorial societies in general, which focus on promoting informed and pre-planned decisions for end-of-life matters.

Harold Webber, Supervisor of Co-operative Activities for Alberta, played a pivotal role by advocating for a memorial society within a co-operative business structure. This led to the creation of the Calgary and District Funeral Co-operative Ltd., registered under the Co-operatives Act. Initial representatives included prominent business leaders from the Alberta Dairy Pool, Co-operators, Calgary Co-op, and Alberta Wheat Pool. The co-op's inaugural annual meeting in September 1966 saw the election of Gil Jamieson as Chairman, with a board comprising individuals like Phil Davidson, Paul Greig, Allan Grant, and others. The co-op also secured its first contract with Foster's Funeral Home.

By 2012, CMS had seen significant growth, with over 40,000 members in southern Alberta. In 2020, the organization rebranded as the Cooperative Memorial Society (CMS), embracing modern strategies like social media and enhancing its life planning information services.

In 2021, CMS absorbed the members from the Memorial Society of Red Deer and District and a year later did the same from the Memorial Society of Edmonton, resulting in the formation of a single provincial memorial organization.

The journey of CMS continues, driven by its dedication to delivering accessible and cost-effective funeral services, while adapting to evolving member needs and the changing landscape of memorialization.

Submitted by Terry Geib

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## New Contracts in Medicine Hat and Central Alberta as Taber Contract Concludes

Effective January 1, 2024, we have entered into a new three-year contract

with our longtime Medicine Hat service provider, Cook-Southland Funeral Chapel. Rod Krushel and his staff will continue to provide members with their excellent service and member pricing until December 31, 2026. To review the new pricing and plan content, go to <https://www.calgarymemorial.com/medicine-hat-cook-southland.html>.

Our Taber service provider, Southland Funeral Chapel, decided not to renew their contract, which expired on December 31, 2023. We thank them for their past service to our members and wish them every success in their future endeavours. Members in the Taber area can obtain services from our Lethbridge service provider, Cornerstone Funeral Home, our Medicine Hat service provider, Cook-Southland Funeral Chapel, or even our Calgary service provider, McInnis and Holloway Funeral Homes. Each of them will, of course, charge an additional fee for transportation beyond their own city limits. Take a look at the pricing offered by each of these service providers on our website at <https://www.calgarymemorial.com/funeral-service-providers--plans.html> and decide for yourself which will provide the best value, if you live in the Taber area.

Stay tuned for service provider changes in the Central Alberta area. On February 14, 2024, existing contracts will expire and be replaced by a single contract with Central Alberta Family Funeral Services Ltd., locally-owned and operated by Gordon Mather and family. New plan content and pricing will be posted on the website when that time comes. We look forward to providing Central Alberta members with some exciting changes.

If you have prepaid with either Southland or any of the Central Alberta service providers, please rest assured that your prepaid contracts will be honoured when needed and you do not need to make any changes.

Submitted by Sylvia Kasper, Board Vice Chair

In 2007, Sylvia became a member of the CMS board. With a background as a former crown prosecutor, she contributes extensive business expertise to the board. Sylvia currently oversees the audit function and plays a key role in processing payments for new memberships, as well as delivering group presentations and managing the contracts with our service providers.

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## The Compassionate Role of Death Doulas



In the realm of end-of-life care, a compassionate and holistic approach has gained recognition through the role of death doulas. These non-medical professionals offer invaluable support, focusing on emotional, spiritual, and practical aspects.

Key Aspects of the role include:

Emotional Support: Death doulas provide a compassionate presence, engaging in open conversations and offering a comforting ear during the

emotional challenges of the dying process.

Guidance and Education: They assist in informed decision-making about end-of-life care, medical options, and advance care planning.

Meaningful Rituals: Doulas help create rituals and ceremonies aligned with individual values, fostering comfort and closure.

Practical Assistance: Beyond emotional support, they offer practical assistance, coordinating with healthcare providers and navigating paperwork.

Grief Support: Their role extends beyond passing, providing ongoing grief support and resources for coping with loss.

Death doulas complement medical professionals and hospice care, aiming to empower individuals for a more peaceful and meaningful end-of-life experience.

To learn more, please join us at our AGM on February 24th for our guest speaker Laura Silver. Laura is a Certified Death Doula who will be providing a glimpse into how using a death doula can support you or your loved ones during the dying process.

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## Register for our Annual General Meeting and Special Presentation



You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Feb 24, 2024 12:45 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Topic: 58th Cooperative Memorial Society AGM

You must register in advance for this webinar:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_Yk90YMS-QAmZHR7LDOAIBw](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Yk90YMS-QAmZHR7LDOAIBw)

Business portion of meeting begins at 1:00 PM. Meeting is open to CMS members and guests. Only members may vote. Meeting is conducted in a webinar format. More about webinars.

**\*\*Following registration you will receive an email with the link to join webinar. Link will also be posted on the CMS website on the day of the AGM.**

Special Presentation following the Meeting:

**THE COMPASSIONATE ROLE OF DEATH DOULAS**

Presented by Laura Silver, Certified Death Doula





## **ABOUT LAURA**

### **Committed to Compassionate Care**

Laura Silver, a Certified Death Doula based in Calgary, Alberta, is dedicated to compassionate care. With over 15 years of experience, she previously served as a Senior Policy Advisor and Project Manager in the Ontario healthcare system, contributing to various strategies and initiatives. Since 2016, Laura has led impactful projects in Alberta, including the creation of the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program. As a Certified Lean Green Belt in Healthcare and PROSCI certified professional, Laura is committed to ensuring that every community has access to supportive resources for individuals to spend their final days in comfort and peace. Currently, she serves on the Board of Directors for the Home Hospice Association (HHA) and chairs the Alberta Chapter of HHA, working towards her vision of every community having a local death doula.

Laura is HHA's current Calgary Chapter Champion. She lives in Calgary, Alberta, with her husband, two of three children, and two dogs.

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## **Empowering Community: Members Answer the Call for Volunteer Leadership**

In the spirit of community and shared responsibility, we are thrilled to share an uplifting story of how our dedicated members at the Cooperative Memorial Society (CMS) recently rallied to answer the call for volunteer board and committee members.

Facing the need to strengthen our leadership team, we reached out to our members, and the response was truly heartwarming. Members from diverse backgrounds, each sharing a passion for our mission, stepped forward to contribute their time, skills, and insights.

The commitment demonstrated by our members reinforces the cooperative spirit that defines the CMS. It is a testament to the belief that, together, we can shape and guide the future of our organization. The new board and committee members will bring a wealth of experience and fresh perspectives,

ensuring that our cooperative continues to thrive and evolve.

As we embark on this exciting chapter, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have volunteered to serve on the board and committees. Your dedication and enthusiasm underscore the strength of our cooperative community, and we look forward to the positive impact we will create together. Thank you for being an integral part of the Cooperative Memorial Society family.

Submitted by Mark Farris

Mark Farris, Director and Chair of the Board Capacity Committee

Mark retired in 2022 following a 30 year career in the investment industry, most recently as a Portfolio Manager with RBC Dominion Securities in Calgary. Mark is a past board member with the Calgary Cerebral Palsy Association and the Calgary Food Bank, where Mark took on the role of Treasurer. Currently Mark volunteers his time with the Foothills Country Hospice Society and the Calgary Food Bank.

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## Meet our new Practicum Students

We are thrilled to welcome two practicum students who will play a vital role in executing our strategic initiatives. The primary objective of these students is to perform a comprehensive needs gap analysis for the existing offerings and services at CMS. This analysis will be conducted through client engagement, focus groups, and leveraging their understanding of social work theory, particularly in relation to equity and accessibility.

Based on their findings, the students aim to propose innovative strategies and suggest potential resources that can be implemented to enhance member satisfaction and foster increased engagement with the cooperative. The students will articulate their proposal following a formal project management cycle, with a keen focus on equity and inclusion. Furthermore, they will adhere to a client-centered approach and integrate the principles of the person-in-environment theory.

We look forward to the valuable contributions these practicum students will make towards elevating member satisfaction and ensuring the cooperative remains an inclusive and responsive entity.



My name is Nichole and I am a 4th year bachelor of social work student from Mount Royal University. I completed my social work diploma at MRU in 2022 and I currently work at the Alzheimer Society in the Club 36 adult day program! I am very passionate about programs and services for seniors, particularly those who have dementia. My goal after I graduate is to find permanent work in this field because I love to work with families and help contribute to a better quality of life for seniors. I'm excited to do this

unique practicum because I will get to learn more about non-profit end-of-life work. In my free time I like to read romance novels and do video calls with my family in Estonia. I also volunteer with AHS at the Foothills Hospital in the transitions units where I love chatting with the patients and making them feel comfy as they await placements.

CMS expresses sincere gratitude to Michael Cacace, a former director and a dedicated member of our End-of-Life Advisory Committee, for his outstanding contributions in identifying and mentoring our students. His commitment has played a pivotal role in the growth and development of our student community. Thank you, Michael, for your invaluable support and dedication to the success of our students.



My name is Natalie and I will be completing my Bachelor of Social Work through Mount Royal University in April 2024. I have a background in healthcare administration, project management and systems development and most recently worked for Alberta Health Services as the staffing coordinator for COVID-19 vaccination and immunization sites. Although I do not currently work in the field, I have a passion for the healthcare industry and hope to pursue medically focused social work in the future. Social

justice, equity, and client centered service have been core themes throughout my education and professional experience thus far. I'm keen to engage with service users, build relations and develop an offering that is truly accessible and equitable. With the support of colleagues, practicum supervisor, Michael, and the CMS Board of Directors we aim to elevate member services and increase engagement. I'm excited to see measurable success and achievement at the end of our project.

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## Ask Barb



### Question:

*Hi, Barb. I am a young 90-year-old member in Edmonton. So far, my mind is clear, but my body is feeling its age. I have everything all set up: my cemetery plot, my cremation, everything. But I have no idea where my paperwork is! What should I do? I don't want to put any stress on my daughter.*

### Answer:

*We receive so many of these calls. Many members have prepaid for their funeral arrangements, or they tell their family: "Everything is taken care of..." but, when the time comes, there is no paperwork. The family is left struggling to find out who, what and where, during a difficult time.*

*We advise our members, first and foremost, to let your family and executor know that you are a member of the Cooperative Memorial Society and that*



*means something very important: you will receive much lower member pricing for your cremation or burial plans with our partner funeral homes (below).*

*Next, if you have prepaid for your funeral arrangements (cremation or burial, with or without a memorial service), please keep a paper copy of everything and also give a copy of that paperwork to your next of kin. When you purchase a cemetery plot, keep a copy of the contract. When you prepay for a cremation or burial contract, keep a copy of the contract, which will show the funeral service provider that you contracted with. Keep those documents at home in the place where you keep your important papers, and tell your family where that place is. Don't keep the only copy in a safety deposit box at the bank! No one can access your safety deposit box at the bank unless they are a co-owner of the box or can prove that they are your executor and that you have passed away, not to mention that the bank may not be open when the information is required. Your family and executor need to know your arrangements and you need to know yourself!*

*If you cannot locate copies of your plot contract, call the cemetery. If you do not have copies of your prepaid cremation or casket arrangements, call the funeral home that you arranged them with. If you do not know which funeral home, you can try Trustage Customer Service (formerly Assurant Life of Canada). They hold most of Canadians' prepaid funds in trust: 1-888-977-3752. Ask them to send you a copy of your contract.*

*The Cooperative Memorial Society will always strive to assist you with locating your prepaid arrangements, but it can be quite difficult and time-consuming. Keeping copies of them at home and providing copies to your family and executor is easy and much less stressful for everyone.*

*Our partner funeral homes in Alberta: <https://www.calgarymemorial.com/funeral-service-providers--plans.html>.*

Submitted by Barb Montgomery, Membership Services Coordinator  
Barb became the CMS Membership Services Coordinator in January 2017 after a 30 year career in hotels and hospitality. Barb's warm and caring personality and attention to detail is appreciated by the entire Board.

Contact Barb



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