

# 2009 FUNERAL PRICE SURVEY

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*By Steve Nicely*

The comprehensive funeral price survey on pages 2 and 3 reveals a classic good-news, bad-news situation. The bad news is that prices continue going up, this time in the face of a recession. The good news is that consumers are getting smarter and are finding ways to economize.

The price of a standard funeral in the Kansas City area is \$6,177, an increase of \$616 from the 2007 average of \$5,561. The 11% price boost is triple the 3.6% increase in consumer prices here during the same period. The new \$6,177 average cost includes the lowest-priced caskets and grave liners listed by area funeral homes and does not include cemetery costs.

Ironically, economic pressures induced by the recession are influencing full-service funeral homes to raise their prices. Consumers are more cost conscious than ever. They are moving to the lower-cost alternatives of cremation and to low-cost funeral providers. The price increases for traditional funerals represent an attempt to make up for lost revenues.

"When money is an issue, loyalty (to a particular funeral home) is one thing, but cost is another thing," said Mack Smith, executive secretary of the Kansas Board of Mortuary Arts, a state consumer protection agency. "The unemployment rate is up. Money is the number one factor everywhere."

## Cheers for good news

Finally it is happening. Increasingly, families are examining their options for thrifty, meaningful funerals and not accepting the prices of a single source without question. This price survey makes comparing prices easy.

Our volunteers donated their time, talents and resources. Will you please help cover our costs with your tax-deductible gift in the enclosed envelope?

It has been a long-time goal of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City (FCA-GKC) that consumers should compare prices at more than one funeral home. The Kansas City area reflects the national growth in cremations to the current level of about 35%.

The cremation rate now is 65% at the area's two lowest-cost providers, Marts Memorial in Westport and Kansas City Funeral Directors in Wyandotte County. Both reported robust volumes this year. At \$3,560, K.C. Funeral Directors has the lowest price in the survey for a standard funeral and Marts has the second lowest at \$3,670. Marts posted the lowest price, \$675, for a direct cremation followed by K.C. Funeral Directors' \$750. (See column A on page 2.)

The results of the 2009 survey reflects a continuation of the upward movement in prices registered in the last survey when the average area funeral cost went up 19.6% between 2004 and 2007, more than double the increase in consumer prices.

Leading the way in price increases last time were 19 area funeral homes owned by two national chains, Service Corporation International (McGilley, Mount Moriah and Chapel Hill-Butler) and Stewart Enterprises (Newcomer's). In this survey, the Newcomer's properties posted increases from 20% to 37% while SCI posted more modest gains of 5% to 11%. Only one funeral home in this survey had a higher price than the \$8,390 amount posted by the area's eight Newcomer's (Stewart) properties. That one is \$8,560 at the locally owned Chapel of Memories in Grain Valley, affiliated with Swan Lake Cemetery, an increase of 45%.



*Bern-Klug*



*Bengtson*

Four funeral homes actually reduced their prices in the new survey compared with the last survey when none did.

The job of culling over 800 prices from 77 funeral home price lists was performed by Kate Bengtson, a social studies graduate student at the University of Iowa under the direction of Aging Studies Professor Mercedes Bern-Klug, a former member of FCA-GKC's board. The two women logged 41 volunteer hours assembling the chart on pages 2 and 3. Lyle VanVleet, a Shawnee income tax preparer, volunteered 13 hours inserting the 2007 survey results and finishing the chart. FCA-GKC and area consumers owe them a debt of gratitude.

FCA-GKC sent letters with self-addressed envelopes to all of the funeral homes requesting their Federal Trade Commission-mandated General Price Lists. About half cooperated by return mail. FCA-GKC board members collected the remaining price lists in person. The FTC's Funeral Rule requires funeral homes to produce their price lists when requested in person.

Bern-Klug said she was shocked at some of the price increases and at the high number of Funeral Rule violations she and Bengtson found in the General Price Lists. For instance, the average prices for basic services and embalming both increased 16 percent, more than four times the increase in the Consumer Price Index. Basic services, the fee funeral homes charge to cover their overhead costs, is the only charge among nine items in a standard funeral that consumers cannot decline.

Josh Slocum, executive director of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance, agrees that the basic services fee in many price lists has become excessive.

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"The basic service fee was meant to be a modest charge for the services provided to every customer, not an artificial profit support," he writes in the FCA's guide for funeral directors. "Charging high prices for basic services isn't fair. Overhead should be spread out among the items you actually sell so customers pay their fair share, not more."

The FCA's guide, "Consumer-Friendly General Price Lists," is available at the national office in South Burlington, VT by calling 800-765-0107.

"A confusing price list agitates customers who are already upset," Slocum states. "But a clear, plain-language, legally compliant price list goes a long way toward heading off confusion and hard feelings. An informed customer is a satisfied customer."

## Kansas City Area Funeral Homes

1. Alden-Harrington, 214 Oak, Bonner Springs, KS, 913-422-4074
2. Amos Family, 10901 Johnson Dr., Shawnee, KS, 913-631-5566
3. Barreto Family, 614A S. Brookside, Indep., MO, 816-252-5017
4. Belden-Larkin, 707 S. 6th St., Leavenworth, KS, 913-682-2820
5. Bross & Spidle, 217 W. Broadway, Excelsior Springs, MO, 816-630-3131
6. Bruce, 106 S. Center, Gardner, KS, 913-856-7111
7. Bruce, 712 S. Webster, Spring Hill, KS, 913-592-2244
8. Joseph A Butler & Son, 19th & Minn. Ave., K.C. KS, 913-371-7000
9. Carson-Speaks Midtown, 1501 W. Lexington, Indep., MO 816-252-7900
10. Cedar Crest, 35665 Lexington Ave., De Soto, KS, 913-583-1002
11. Chapel of Memories, 3000 E. Valor Dr., Grain Valley, MO 816-463-4030
12. Chapel Hill-Butler, 701 N. 94th St., K.C. KS, 913-334-3366
13. Charter Blue Ridge, 5000 Blue Ridge Cutoff, K.C. MO, 816-921-5555
14. Charter Kan., 10250 Shawnee Mission Pkwy., Shawnee, KS, 816-921-5555
15. Charter Northland, 77 E. 72nd St., Gladstone, MO, 816-921-5555
16. Charter Sunset, 16731 Springdale Rd., Leavenworth, KS, 913-682-5400
17. Church, 5845 Horton, Mission, KS, 913-789-9600
18. Cremation Soc. of KS & MO, 8837 Roe, Prairie Village, KS, 913-383-9888
19. Cremation Soc. of KS & MO, 5561 NW Barry Rd., K.C., MO, 816-822-9888
20. Cullen, 612 W. Foxwood Drive, Raymore, MO, 816-322-5278
21. Davis, 531 Shawnee, Leavenworth KS, 913-682-5523
22. Eley & Sons, 4707 E. Truman Rd., K.C. MO, 816-924-8700
23. Elite, 11525 Blue Ridge Blvd, K.C. MO, 816-765-0141
24. Fry, Bross & Spidle, Kearney, MO, 816-628-4411
25. Duane E. Harvey, 9100 Blue Ridge Blvd., K.C. MO, 816-763-9100
26. Heartland Cremation Soc., 6113 Blue Ridge, Raytown, MO, 816-313-1677
27. Heartland Cremation Soc., 7700 Sh. Mission Pkwy, O.P., KS, 913-789-8998
28. Highland Park & Crematory, 41st & State Ave., K.C., KS, 913-371-0699
29. Mrs. J. W. Jones, 703 N. 10th St., K.C., KS, 913-321-0253
30. K.C. Funeral Directors, 4880 Shawnee Dr., K.C., KS, 913-262-6310
31. Lawrence A. Jones, 1800 E. Linwood Blvd., K.C., MO, 816-921-1800
32. Lawrence A. Jones, 2065 N. 5th St., K.C., KS, 913-371-2823
33. Langsford, 115 S.W. 3rd St., Lee's Summit, MO, 816-524-3700
34. Louis Memorial, 6830 Troost Ave., K.C., MO, 816-361-5211
35. Maple Hill, 3300 Shawnee Dr., K.C., KS, 913-831-3345
36. Marts Memorial, 14 Westport Rd., K.C., MO, 816-561-8181
37. Mary Butler Meyers, 6300 Parallel Pkwy., K.C. KS, 913-334-6300
38. McGilley Antioch, 3325 N.E. Vivian Rd., K.C. MO, 816-453-7700
39. McGilley & Frye, 105 E. Loula, Olathe, KS, 913-782-0582
40. McGilley & George, 12913 Grandview Rd., Grandview, MO, 816-966-0250
41. McGilley & George, 611 Chestnut, Belton, MO, 816-322-2995
42. McGilley & Hoge, 8024 Santa Fe Dr., Overland Park, KS, 913-642-3565
43. McGilley Midtown, 20 W. Linwood Blvd., K.C. MO 64111, 816-753-6200
44. McGilley & Sheil, 11924 E. 47th St., K.C., MO, 816-353-6555

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45. McGilley State Line, 12301 State Line, K.C. MO, 816-942-6180
46. Meyers, 1600 West Main, Blue Springs, MO, 816-229-3276
47. Meyers Northland, 401 Main, Parkville, MO, 816-741-0251
48. Missouri Funeral Care, 6113 Blue Ridge, Raytown, MO, 816-353-1700
49. Mt. Moriah & Freeman, 10507 Holmes, K.C., MO, 816-942-2004
50. Mt. Moriah Terrace Park, 801 N.W. 108th, K.C., MO, 816-734-5500
51. Mt. Washington Forever, 614 Brookside, Indep., MO, 816-252-4141
52. Muehlebach, 6800 Troost, K.C., MO, 816-444-2060
53. New Salem, 1823 Blue Mills Road, Indep., MO, 816-796-8600
54. Newcomers Ch.-Archer-Pasley, 119 E. Franklin, Liberty, MO, 816-781-2000
55. Newcomers Floral Hills, 7000 Blue Ridge, K.C., MO, 816-353-1218
56. Newcomers Johnson Co., 11200 Metcalf, Overland Park, KS, 913-451-1860
57. Newcomers Longview, 12700 Raytown Rd., K.C., MO, 816-761-6272
58. Newcomers Noland Rd, 509 S. Noland Rd., Indep., MO, 816-252-8900
59. Newcomers O.P., 8201 Metcalf, Overland Park, KS, 913-648-6224
60. Newcomers Stine & McClure, 3235 Gilham, K.C., MO, 816-931-7777
61. Newcomers White Ch., 6600 N.E. Antioch, Gladstone, MO, 816-452-8419
62. Northern Star Mortuary, 5029 Leavenworth Rd. K.C.KS, 913-400-3766
63. Park Lawn, 8251 Hillcrest Rd., K.C., MO, 816-523-1234
64. Passantino Bros., 2117 Indep. Blvd., K.C., MO, 816-471-2844
65. Penwell-Gabel, 14275 Blackbob Rd., Olathe, KS, 913-768-6777
66. Polley, 5951 Highway 10, Excelsior Springs, MO, 816-630-3388
67. Polley, 214 N. Pennsylvania Ave., Lawson, MO, 816-580-7704
68. Polley, 122 N.W. Main St., Richmond, MO, 816-776-2255
69. Porter, 8535 Monrovia, Lenexa, KS, 913-438-6444
70. George F. Porter & Sons, 1835 Minn. Ave., K.C., KS, 913-621-6400
71. Quisenberry, 604 E. 4th St., Tonganoxie, KS, 913-845-2740
72. Sebbeto, 901 E. 5th, K.C., MO, 816-221-4400
73. Skradski, 340 N. 6th, K.C., KS, 913-371-1404
74. Slider, 1734 Washington Blvd., K.C. KS, 913-573-2020
75. Speaks Buckner, 300 Adams, Buckner, MO, 816-650-5555
76. Speaks Suburban, 18020 E. 39th, Indep., MO, 816-373-3600
77. Thatcher's, 1520 N. 5th, K.C., KS, 913-321-1211
78. Watkins Bros., 4000 Cleaver II Blvd., K.C., MO, 816-861-3030

## Caution: Don't prepay

FCA-GKC recommends against pre paying for funerals in most circumstances. Millions of dollars have been lost by fraud and mismanagement of pre-paid funds. Families have been bound by rigid contracts at the time of need. See "The Pitfalls of Preneed" at [www.funerals.org/frequently-asked-questions/general/198-preneedpitfalls](http://www.funerals.org/frequently-asked-questions/general/198-preneedpitfalls) or call the national FCA office at 802-865-8300 for a copy.