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## Area funeral and burial costs rise faster than cremation prices

BY DIANE STAFFORD - THE KANSAS CITY STAR

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After barely rising between 2009 and 2012, the average price of a standard funeral in the Kansas City area rose 4 percent between July 2012 and July 2014 to \$6,623. MEL EVANS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Price checks this year of 93 funeral homes found that the average cost of a standard funeral in the Kansas City area has risen to \$6,623, a 4 percent increase from 2012.

This year's survey (<http://www.funeralskc.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/2014-survey-final-with-immediate-burial-correction.pdf>) by volunteers for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City also found that the average cost for immediate burial in a "minimum casket" jumped 14.2 percent to \$3,506.

The cost of cremation, a less expensive option, rose 3.6 percent to \$1,809.

The alliance said price increases had moderated between 2009 and 2012, when the economy was flagging. But the new report said the local industry's price increases outpaced an overall 3.1 percent growth in the Midwest consumer price index between July 2012 and July 2014.

The survey figures, published this fall, exclude cemetery costs.



The alliance obtained price lists from 93 out of 94 funeral homes in the region. The Federal Trade Commission requires “general price lists” to be publicly available.

Cedar Crest Memorial Chapel in De Soto did not respond to the alliance’s survey, but the owner on Wednesday said a price list is available for people to review.

The alliance acts as a funeral industry watchdog. Members said the most notable change in this year’s report involved the expansion of Service Corporation International, the nation’s largest funeral home operator. SCI in 2013 acquired Stewart Enterprises, the second largest funeral home company.

“Even though SCI’s expansion means less competition in the Kansas City area market, SCI did not raise standard funeral prices at all of its 15 funeral chapels included in the survey,” the alliance reported. “It raised prices at 10 chapels and reduced them by double-digit percentages at five.”

But, the survey also noted, the prices at SCI properties generally are higher than prices at independent or locally owned funeral homes.

A spokesman for SCI declined to comment Wednesday.

Before the acquisition, Stewart owned eight funeral homes in the Kansas City area that originally had operated under the Newcomer name. SCI added to its previous area count of 11 funeral homes, 10 of which had been McGilley operations.

As a condition of the deal, the Federal Trade Commission ordered SCI to sell two former Newcomer properties, the Johnson County Funeral Chapel and Memorial Gardens and the Overland Park Chapel, as well as the Mount Moriah Terrace Park facility. SCI also decided to sell the Newcomer Longview funeral home.

All four of those properties were purchased by the Signature Group, based in Albuquerque.

The alliance’s full report is at [www.funeralskc.org](http://www.funeralskc.org) (<http://www.funeralskc.org/>). The public is welcome to attend the nonprofit organization’s annual meeting at 1:30 p.m. Nov. 14 at the Kauffman Conference Center, 4801 Rockhill Road.