

THE DIRECTOR

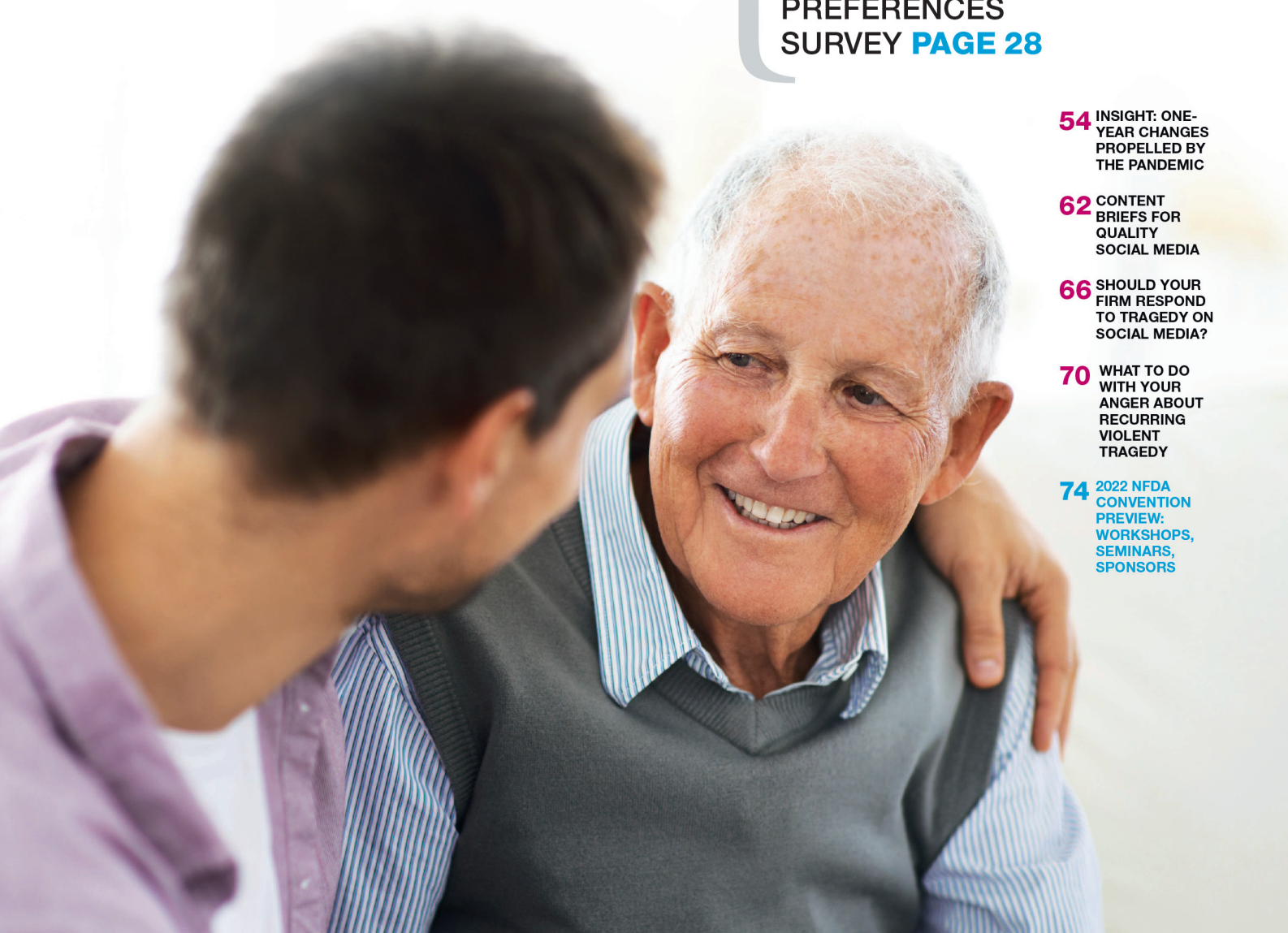
SEPTEMBER 2022

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What Today's Families Want

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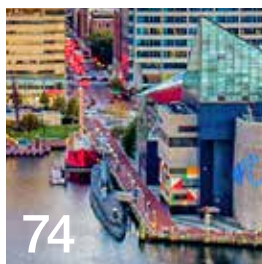
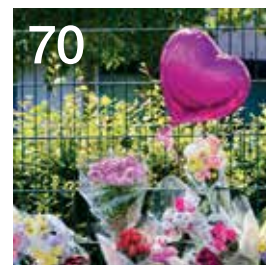
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Official Publication of



THE DIRECTOR

Volume 94, Number 9
www.nfda.org

EDITOR'S DESK

BY EDWARD J. DEFORT

Statistics and Reality Checks

A friend of mine defines himself as a “gamer.” He spends an inordinate amount of time playing the latest and greatest video games, his computer is tricked out with high-end video and graphics cards, and he’s always the first to get the latest PlayStation or Xbox consoles.

Oh, he does have a day job and is very good at what he does. The games, he says, fill what he calls his “decompression time.” I remember speaking with him about a year ago about a video game we both enjoyed, called “Civilization VI,” and I now have to admit to spending considerable time “decompressing,” too.

The game logs the time you spend at the controls; over the course of a year, my friend bragged to have logged some 2,100 hours playing the game, which, if you do the math and divide by 24, translates into 87 days. I can’t think of many jobs that would require that much decompression time.

Taking any statistic – say, the amount of time the average person spends watching television – and extrapolating it over the course of a year can result in a pretty jarring realization. Spending close to three months of the year playing a video game would result in a reality check for many of us (not my friend, though, as he has seemingly checked out on reality).

But therein lies one of the many valuable points about statistics – the reality check. This brings me to the 2022 NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey. In setting the stage

in 2012 for the first consumer survey, we stated, quite obviously and logically, that if you want to know what consumers want, you have to ask them. So we did and continue to do so.

A critical function of statistical findings is to corroborate previous data. Eleven years in, the fact that statistics in a certain area remain the same year after year lends itself to validation of the statistical significance of the survey. Any slight upticks or downturns in data point to a possible trend, and the only thing that backs up a trend, of course, is more data.

This isn’t to suggest that every result in a survey is expected; changes often point to something worth noting. At times, too, the data do not make sense to the analyst and could suggest a completely unexpected trend or perhaps point to a need to fine-tune a survey question.

One of the key findings underscored in the survey this year is that respondents who attended a funeral or memorial service with burial were significantly more likely (compared to those who attended a cremation service) to state that the service was very helpful in paying tribute to or commemorating the life of their loved one. They also felt that it was an important part of helping them begin the healing process.

Why are consumers finding more of a healing value in a burial?

These survey questions, answers and statistics provide the blueprints. The challenge is to discover how to use them to our advantage.

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National Funeral Directors
Association

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¹Adobe Campaign Management Report.

²Homesteaders Solutions internal data as of March 2022.

³Homesteaders Solutions internal data as of March 2022.

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PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

BY RANDY ANDERSON

We're All Recruiters



In my travels across the country this year, one issue has been common among all the funeral service professionals with whom I've spoken – finding qualified directors to fill open positions. And this concern is supported as being the biggest challenge for funeral

home owners and managers by the recent NFDA Funeral Directors' Expectations Study, in which 84% of respondents said they have had trouble filling staff positions.

In response to this widespread issue, NFDA convened the Workforce Development Task Force, comprising funeral service educators and practitioners from across the country; I was honored to chair the group. Task force objectives include finding ways to recruit into the profession and to increase funeral service program student retention and graduation rates while increasing the pass rates of the National Board Exam. The group examined the issues surrounding the problem and looked at all areas that might influence the workforce, including educators, regulators and practitioners, along with how each impacted the workforce.

I will concentrate in this column on the action items the task force recommended for practitioners, one of which was opportunities for owners to pay for students' education and make interns aware of the numerous scholarships available to them. The group also identified opportunities for owners to host tour groups for high school students, participate in career days as early as elementary school and offer shadowing opportunities to spark interest in funeral service careers. In addition, it recommended that owners and managers have an awareness of the recruiting programs currently available through their national association.

The task force also examined the NFDA Funeral Service Student Expectations Study and recommended that owners review their salary schedule for new directors, offer benefits and look at working more flexibility into the work schedule to promote better work/life balance. It is important to prioritize mental health and make all employees and their families aware of the help programs offered with your NFDA membership. The SupportLinc program, available to all members, their employees and their families, is completely anonymous, without the knowledge of supervisors or NFDA.

The full task force report will be available later this year. It provides actionable items for educators and regulators and gives some recommended action for NFDA as well.

The NFDA staff is in the exploration stages of creating new recruitment material and is looking at assisting in the mentoring of interns. The association will continue to look at model laws and regulations it can offer state regulatory boards that might help them break down some of the barriers to reciprocity and licensure and is also looking at ways to help students successfully take and pass the National Board Exam. NFDA has heard members' concerns and has responded to help find solutions.

But we all must become recruiters for our profession. It's important that we constantly be on the look-out in our community for people who might be good funeral service professionals, and when we find them, we must give them opportunities to serve in our funeral homes.

It has been a pleasure to serve on this task force, and I greatly appreciate those who gave their valuable time and expertise to help elevate and find solutions for this issue. I trust that some of the actionable items will make a difference and help local funeral service professionals attain and retain the staff members they need to serve their community.

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IN THE NEWS

“FINDING GOOD HELP” TOPS PROFITABILITY AS GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR OWNERS

BY DEANA GILLESPIE AND EDWARD J. DEFORT

Finding qualified funeral directors to fill open positions surpassed decreasing profit margins as the greatest challenge facing funeral service today, according to results from the 2022 NFDA Funeral Directors’ Expectations Study.

This year, 84.2% of respondents cited the availability of qualified personnel as the greatest challenge facing funeral service, a significant increase from 73.9% in 2019 and 58.2% in 2016.

Decreasing profit margin was chosen by 48.8% of respondents, down from 58.7% in 2019. Next was increasing cremation, cited by 38.4% of respondents (52.5% in 2019), and changing consumer preferences, noted by 36.7% (49.0% in 2019).

This study surveys funeral home owners and managers to measure their workplace expectations of new graduates. It comes on the heels of another NFDA study of funeral service students, which sought to measure their expectations of starting salaries, job benefits and job responsibilities.

Comparing the results of the studies helps paint a picture of whether job seeker and employer expectations are indeed congruent, realistic and achievable. And if they are not, we must ask ourselves how the gaps in expectations might be bridged.

Where applicable, the results were also linked to the 2019 and 2016 studies.

These results, of course, don’t come as any surprise. For several years, firms have expressed the difficulty they are having in finding qualified people, which is exacerbated by the nationwide shortage of qualified applicants for all types of jobs in a variety of fields.



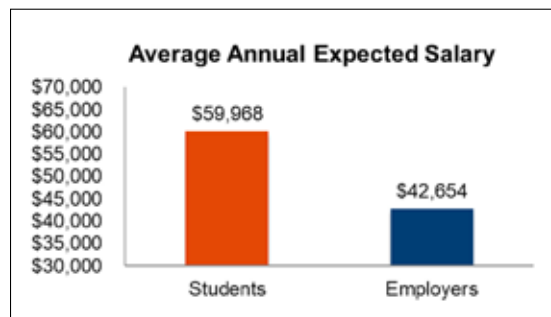
KEY FINDINGS

Similar to previous surveys, more than half of responding employers (61.8%) have hired at least one new graduate in the past five years, which compares with 54.8% in 2019 and 50.2% in 2016.

Most of these new positions were for the dual role of funeral director/embalmer (87.9%). Again, the results were in line with the 2019 and 2016 surveys, in which 86.6% and 86.8% of employers, respectively, hired someone to fill the dual role. This year, 31.6% of survey respondents hired a funeral director and 20.9% an embalmer (compared with 23.9% and 15.9%, respectively, in previous survey results).

Employers are almost evenly split as to which type of employee they prefer to hire – experienced individual versus new graduate – with 53.5% opting to hire new graduates, which is up slightly from 53.2% in 2019.

The main reason 66.4% of employers prefer to hire new graduates is because they can teach or mold them and because they haven’t yet developed any bad habits, cited by 18.6% of respondents. Converse-



ly, the main reasons 61% of employers prefer to hire experienced individuals are because they are already trained and understand the industry/job (35.4%).

New hires and employers seem to be on the same page when it comes to the main funeral service duties to be performed, as removals, embalming, visitations, funeral directing and funeral arranging topped both lists. When it comes to overall duties, students expect to do more funeral-related tasks than employers intend to assign to them. The greatest gaps in expectations occurred as funeral directors said they were significantly more likely to expect

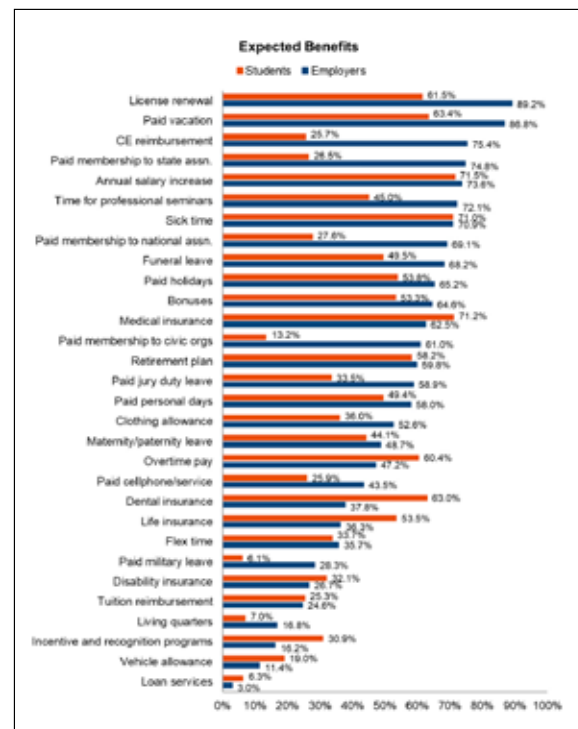
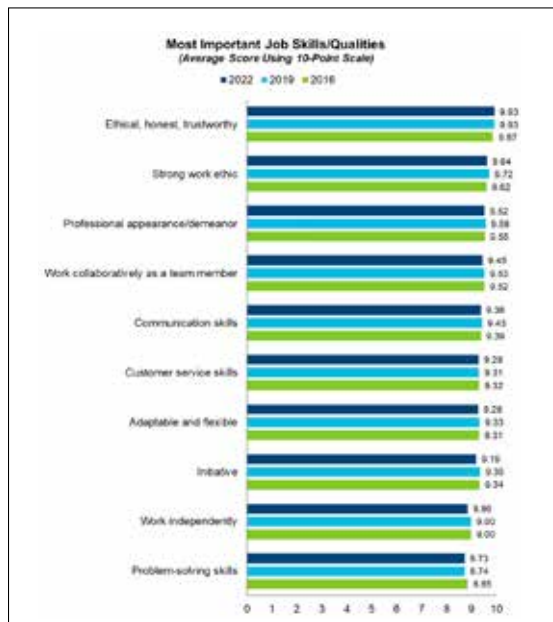
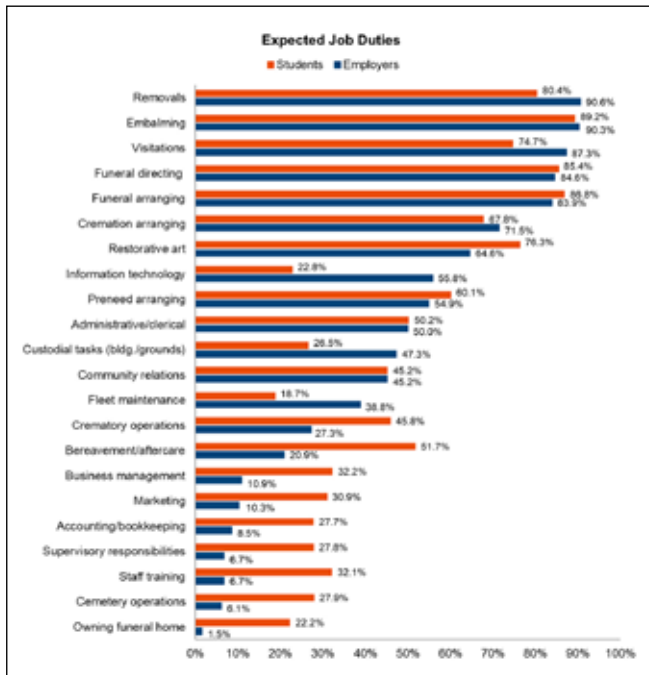
new hires to perform tasks related to information technology, custodial duties and fleet maintenance. New hires were significantly more likely to expect to perform tasks related to bereavement care, crematory operations, business management, marketing, staff training and supervisory responsibilities.

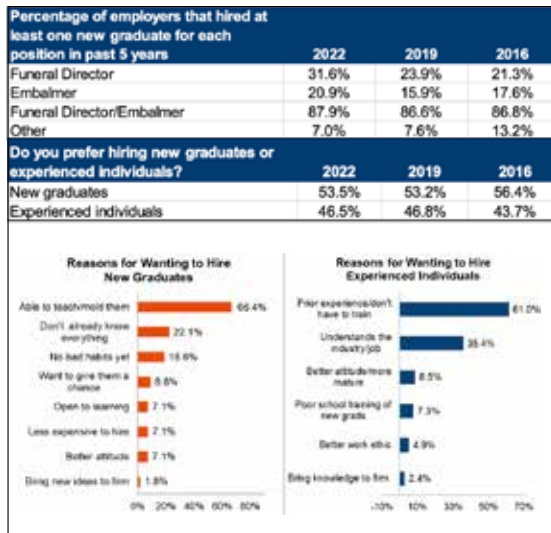
In general, employers offer more benefits than students expect to receive. The survey found that benefits employers are most likely to offer new hires are license renewal, paid vacation, continuing education reimbursement and paid membership to state associations. The benefits students are most likely to expect are sick time, medical insurance, license renewal, paid vacation and an annual salary increase.

When it comes to anticipated annual salary, students expect to make 40% more than employers intend to pay them (\$59,968 and \$42,654, respectively). A question arises: When it comes to supply and demand, will the firm pay?

Additionally, students expect to work slightly longer work weeks than employers expect them to work. Employers expect students to work an average of 43 hours per week, but students expect to work an average of 46 hours weekly. Almost all students and employers expect newly licensed employees to be on call.

The most sought-after qualities employers seek when hiring new graduates include ethics, honesty and trustworthiness; a strong work ethic; maintaining a professional appearance and demeanor; and



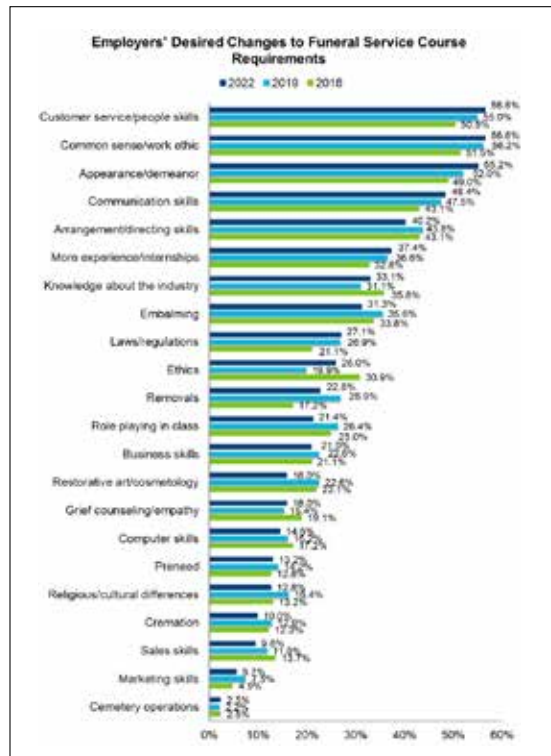


the ability to work collaboratively with a team. This list has not changed much since 2019.

The top qualities/skills employers believe new graduates lack are a willingness to work irregular hours, attention to detail, having commitment/dedication/work ethic and/or willingness to do non-funeral work.

Almost three-fourths of those surveyed (72.3%) believe it would be either valuable or very valuable for new graduates to have had arranger training, 48.8% thought it would be valuable if they were a certified preplanning consultant, 42.8% felt it would be valuable if they were certified as a crematory operator, and 36.7% felt it would be valuable for new graduates to have celebrant training.

In terms of being prepared to enter the profes-



sion, the survey found that 48.2% of employers either somewhat disagree (33.9%) or strongly disagree (14.3%) that students are well-prepared for their first funeral home position.

To better prepare students, then, for entry into the profession, employer respondents were asked what changes they would recommend to funeral service school course requirements. The top suggested changes include teaching on topics such as customer service/people skills, common sense/work ethic, appearance/demeanor, communications skills and/or arrangement/directing skills.

The study found that 35.8% of responding employers have hired a new graduate who is no longer with their firm. Of those, 37.7% quit to pursue another career outside of funeral service and 30.2% quit to work at another firm; 17% of employees were terminated.

Of employees who quit, 32.9% left due to the hours and 27.4% because of a compensation issue – a figure that jumped from 11.5 in 2019 (6.5% in 2016).

When asked how they advertise for a position, most employers said they find new employees by word of mouth (68.5%), through a funeral service school career center (50.4%), via networking (40.6%) and by using a job search engine (33.2%).

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Employers said the top characteristic that makes a candidate stand out in a job interview is professional appearance/demeanor, cited by 86.8% of respondents, which edged out the 2019 survey's top choice of good communication skills, which this year came in at 85.4%. Following were a willingness to learn (80%), a realistic understanding of the job (74.9%), honesty and trustworthiness (74.6%), strong ethics and morals (73.9%), a friendly personality (73.6%) and a strong work ethic (73.2%).

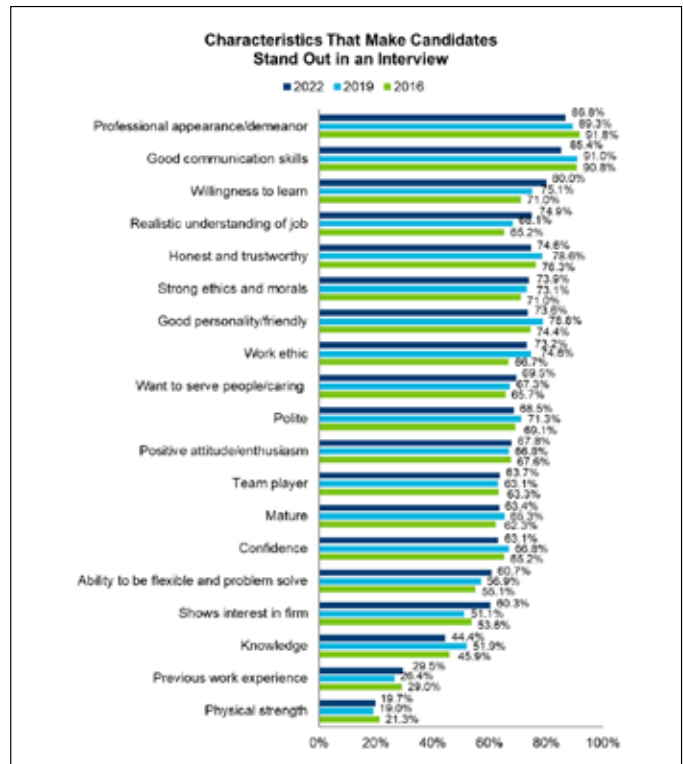
FIRM DEMOGRAPHICS

In the past 24 months, 87.3% of firms have experienced an increase in total overhead costs (a 16.8% increase from 2019), and 75.5% have increased employee salaries (an increase of 15.7% from 2019).

It's interesting to note that 26.4% of firms have increased the number of licensed staff members, while 21.6% have decreased the number.

In the next 12 months, 80.1% of employers expect their total overhead costs to increase (a 16% increase since 2019), and 71.1% anticipate being able to increase employee salaries (an increase of 15.9% since 2019). Also, 45.9% plan to increase the number of licensed staff members at their firms, up from 30.7% in 2019 for a 15.2% increase.

Almost three-quarters (74.3%) of responding firms



have offered an apprenticeship in the past five years, increasing significantly since 2016. Of those firms, 79.9% hired the apprentice.

Forty percent of firms reported an annual case-

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load of 151 to 350, 23.1% reported a caseload of 76 to 150, and 9.2% reported a caseload of less than 76.

INDIVIDUAL DEMOGRAPHICS

More than two-thirds of respondents (77.8%) were firm owners, principals or partners, and 8.4% were managers. Most respondents were between ages 40 and 54 (32.5%) and between 55 and 64 (29.2%).

While most responding employers were male (80.3%), most responding students were female (78.8%). Most respondents in both studies were white; however, a significantly larger portion of student respondents were Black/African American (19.9%) or Hispanic (11.7%).

METHODOLOGY

NFDA members listed as main contacts with a valid email address received an email invitation to complete the online survey. (It should be noted that all NFDA members are licensed funeral directors.) A reminder email was sent to potential respondents one week after the initial invitation was sent.

Of the 4,271 potential respondents with a valid email address, a total of 306 members completed the survey (7% response rate). Results for all respondents are projectable within a range of $\pm 5.4\%$ (with 95% confidence).

Deana Gillespie is NFDA research manager.

Ed Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.

Hillenbrand Exploring Strategic Alternatives for Batesville

Hillenbrand Inc. Board of Directors announced that it has initiated a process “to explore strategic alternatives for its Batesville business.” As part of

the process, the board will consider a range of potential alternatives.

“[This] announcement is a defining moment for Hillenbrand, building on the exceptional work

our teams have done to position our businesses for success,” said

Kim Ryan, president and CEO. “Through this process, we are focused on determining

the best path to benefit Batesville, its stakeholders and Hillenbrand.”

Hillenbrand has retained Evercore as the financial advisor

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for its evaluation of strategic alternatives for Batesville. There can be no assurance that the process will result in any transaction for Batesville or that any

transaction, if pursued, will be consummated. Hillenbrand does not intend to provide any additional information on the review of strategic alternatives

for Batesville unless or until the process is completed or terminated.

Hillenbrand also announced that it has signed a binding offer to

acquire LINXIS Group, a leading global provider of mixing, ingredient automation and portioning solutions for food and other higher-growth-end markets.

SPANN, WALKER ELECTED AS NFDA AT-LARGE REPS

Bobby Steven Spann and Brad R. Walker were elected to serve as at-large representatives on the NFDA Board of Directors. They will begin their two-year terms of service immediately following the 2022 NFDA International Convention & Expo in Baltimore (September 9-12).

On July 12, during the NFDA Leadership Conference in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, state association representatives elected the new at-large reps. Association representatives from each state cast a ballot on behalf of their state for the at-large representatives on the NFDA Board of Directors.



Steve Spann has been a funeral director for more than 40 years and owns Spann Funeral Home in Dickson, Tennessee, along with Humphreys County Funeral Home in Waverly, Tennessee. He has served as president of John A. Gupton College of Mortuary Science since 1994.

Spann has served in many leadership roles with the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association (TNFDA), including as chair of the Education Committee and Alkaline Hydrolysis Sub-Committee. His service to TNFDA includes its board of directors, culminating with a term as the 2016-17 president.

He served from 2018-21 on the NFDA Convention Education Task Force. He has been a member of the American Board of Funeral Service Education since 1994 and has served on the Curriculum Review Committee as chair of the National Board Exam Liaison Committee and as chair of the Committee on Accreditation. Spann is a past president of the University Mortuary Science Education Association, as well as its current treasurer.



A third-generation funeral director, Brad Walker grew up working in his family's firm, Walker Funeral Home, which has locations in Spanish Fork and Payson, Utah. He has helped to shape the next generation of funeral directors by teaching at Salt Lake Community College as an adjunct professor in the funeral service program.

Walker has also been an active volunteer leader with his state and national associations. He served as chair of the Utah Funeral Directors Association's Legislative Committee, as well as district director, secretary-treasurer, vice president, president-elect and president of the association's board of directors. He currently is a member of the NFDA Budget Task Force.

More information about Spann and Walker is available in the June issue of *The Director* and at thedirectoronline.org.

Spann and Walker emerged from this year's crowded field of candidates vying for the two at-large seats. The other candidates included:

- Anthony P. Guerra, Guerra & Gutierrez Mortuaries, Los Angeles, California
- Ellen Wynn McBrayer, Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Villa Rica, Georgia
- James M. "Jimmy" Olson, Olson Funeral Home & Cremation Service, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
- Timothy J. Schramm, Howe-Peterson Funeral Homes, Dearborn, Michigan.

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School Bells, Part 2

Ideas and opportunities to connect with and become a resource to schools and children in your community.

Last month, we explored the idea of developing community outreach activities and events that could involve local schools or children's organizations in your community. Many firms have found success developing such programs, as they help young people understand that funeral directors and funeral homes are not scary people and places; they are "helpers" the community can rely on for support. They're also a great way to connect with other audiences: teachers, school staff, parents, etc. Your firm could potentially garner great media coverage as well.

Last time, I shared ideas from two Pursuit of Excellence Award recipients – Funeraria San Vincente and Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes – that developed outstanding programs to connect with children and schools. Here are a few more of my favorites from recent years.

WEEKS' DRYER MORTUARY TACOMA, WASHINGTON

Many myths persist about funeral homes and funeral directors. To help show their community a different side to the profession and the people who serve grieving families, Weeks' Dryer Mortuary offers a quarterly family movie night.

These events, hosted at the funeral home, feature an animated or family-friendly movie, beverages and snacks (including popcorn), plus crafts and activities for the kids. For some, these movie nights are the first time they've been in a funeral home or in-

Weeks' Dryer Mortuary's quarterly family movie night often marks the first time some kids have been in a funeral home.

teracted with a funeral director outside of a funeral or memorial service.

In its entry, the funeral home noted, "Movie nights have been successful, and the numbers have continued to grow over the years... They have been a great opportunity for the community to know us better and for us to know them."

REYNOLDS-JONKHOFF FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATION SERVICES TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN

When children experience the death of a loved one, parents often find themselves struggling to answer tough questions. Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home found a way to help parents explain loss and grief through the use of Hannah Bear's Coloring Book, named after Hannah, a teddy bear given to children who come to the funeral home.

Reynolds-Jonkhoff's family resources are now also being used by local grief support organizations to help children and adults with special needs begin to heal.

The coloring book was created by the funeral home staff in collaboration with a grief expert and local illustrator. In it, Hannah Bear answers the common questions children often have about death and funerals.

In its entry, Reynolds-Jonkhoff stated, "The book and its teddy bear cuddly companion are available throughout our funeral home – in our family lounge, in our kid's playroom and in our resource room. We encourage our staff to offer them to families we serve. We also have them in all of our vehicles for our transfer team, so that if the death occurs

at a family home, our transfer team can give the children a bear and a coloring book.”

These helpful family resources have been a wonderful source of information and comfort and are being used by local grief support organizations to help children and adults with special needs begin the healing process.

Wrote the funeral home in its entry: “It feels much better to give than to take. Even though the book is a small consolation and nothing in comparison to their family member, it still feels good to give something as a token of our sympathy.”

While creating a coloring book from scratch may be a big project for a firm, offering children’s resources – and maybe a stuffed animal to offer comfort – to families is just as important as having grief resources on hand for adults.

MORRIS-BAKER FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATION SERVICES, JOHNSON CITY, TENNESSEE

When communities suffer the loss of a student, teacher or community figure, many times schools help children work through their feelings. But teachers, like most people, can have a hard time finding the right words. Morris-Baker Funeral Home’s goal was to help educators be better prepared to help children during these difficult times.

In its entry, the firm explained that grief education for schools is “...‘escrow learning.’ When a crisis happens, a teacher can’t hit the pause button so they can study up on grief. That knowledge must already be in the account, ready to be withdrawn.”

Partnering with local schools, the Morris-Baker staff organized special two-hour grief seminars for teachers featuring leading grief experts who, according to the funeral home’s entry, cover “age-appropriate grief responses, best practices for responding to the death of a student, the death notification, age-appropriate memorial options

Morris-Baker’s goal was to help educators be better prepared to help children during times of the loss of a student or teacher.

for schools and contingency plans for students returning to school after a loss.”

The feedback, the firm said, has been very positive, with attendees feeling more confident in their ability to help children process their feelings.

I hope these varied ideas have motivated you to think about ways your funeral home could reach out and connect with young people in your community. Even more inspiration from other Pursuit of Excellence Award winners is available at nfda.org/innovativeideas (organized by year and by category; look for “Community Outreach: Children, Teens and Schools”).

Jessica Koth is NFDA director of public relations. She can be reached at jkoth@nfda.org or 262-228-6332.

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MAXIMIZE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

BY CHRIS RAYMOND

The Tip of the HR Iceberg

A company policy governing staff use of mobile devices and social media is just the beginning of the array of challenging issues your firm could face. As an NFDA member, there's help.

Imagine that someone working at your funeral home photographs the remains of a horribly disfigured accident victim inside your prep room for some inexplicable reason. Then envision that one or more of these images somehow end up on Facebook.

Next, consider your reaction if you discovered that a firm employee has posted numerous videos to social media taken throughout your building and purportedly showing ghostly/paranormal activity. These videos pander to the tiresome "funeral service is macabre" stereotype, with the employee feigning fright because of the "creepy" environment.

Now ask yourself, if the family of the deceased in the first example filed a lawsuit against you, would you feel confident that your firm had in place, at the time, the appropriate, fully communicated employee policy about the use of personal mobile devices necessary to protect your business? In the second example, as an owner now worried about what families think of your supposedly haunted facility and wanting to help that employee find a "less frightening" career, do you have a clue if you could legally dismiss this person?

Unfortunately, the highly generalized examples I cite above are real! Moreover, far more instances exist of on-the-job funeral service staff inappropriately using mobile devices. Similar to the previous examples, such abuses could potentially trigger lawsuits, reflect poorly on employers, offend or hurt families served, drive off future business, etc.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Protecting your business these days involves far more than just having in place a policy about the use of cellphones, tablets, etc. Assess the confidence you'd have if you

faced any of the following employee- and business-related issues. Would you know what to do?

- If an employee is dismissed, am I required to pay accrued vacation pay?
- One of my employees has accused another employee of sexual harassment. How do I resolve this situation?
- An employee wants to see his or her personnel file. Am I required to show it?
- If an employee leaves and owes the company money, can I deduct that amount from the final paycheck?
- I heard an employee has a communicable disease. What should I do?
- If a salaried employee doesn't come to work, may I deduct from his or her salary?
- An employee has been absent for a week. May I place him or her on the Family and Medical Leave Act and count that week toward the 12 weeks?

Staying abreast of HR and employment laws and regulations on both the state and federal levels – and ensuring that your firm remains compliant – is a full-time job in itself. And while hiring a dedicated HR professional would be ideal, this might not prove feasible for your firm. Fortunately, your NFDA membership grants you access to the next best thing: SESCO Management Consultants.

HOW THIS BENEFIT CAN HELP YOU

Founded in 1945, SESCO Management Consultants is a leading human resources management consult-

ing and employment law firm with expertise in compliance with federal and state employment regulations, hiring, progressive discipline and termination, employee handbooks and policy development, representation before federal/state labor departments and employment agencies and more.

As a longtime NFDA Endorsed Provider, SESCO and its team of certified HR professionals and employment attorneys are available to discuss your day-to-day HR- and employment-related issues via email or NFDA's toll-free HR Hotline phone number. The consultations are free and unlimited for NFDA members.

In addition, SESCO provides an array of other services for NFDA members at reduced rates. One such service involves reviewing your existing employee handbook or policy manual against all federal and state regulations, as well as SESCO's own best practices, and providing a follow-up report with the company's recommendations. If your firm

does not have an employee handbook or written job descriptions, the company can help you develop those as well.

SESCO can also assist your firm in responding to unemployment claims, preparing contracts, auditing current HR management practices, conducting employee engagement/satisfaction surveys and much more.

ACCESSING THIS BENEFIT

To learn more about SESCO's services, visit nfda.org/benefits, log into your account, click on "Endorsed Providers" in the left sidebar and then on "SESCO Human Resource Services - HR Consultation."

You'll find the toll-free telephone number for the "HR Hotline," an email address to use when contacting the company and a link to the company's website. When you contact SESCO, be sure to mention your NFDA membership to gain priority assistance and access to the free or reduced-rate services.

Chris Raymond is the former editor of The Director magazine and runs funeralhelpcenter.com.

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ADVOCACY UPDATE

BY LESLEY WITTER

Protecting Their Dignity

Your support is needed to guard families against the devastating impact of body brokers.

In June, I was honored to serve as opening keynote speaker at the Independent Funeral Directors of Florida's (IFDF) 30th Annual Conference & Trade Show, where I discussed the issue of body brokers with a group that truly was interested in the topic – and in finding ways to help.

After speaking briefly about NFDA's advocacy efforts on behalf of funeral service, I discussed the Consensual Donation and Research Integrity Act of 2021 (CDRI; H.R. 4062) or, as we call it, the "body broker bill." A few years ago, two NFDA members alerted us to the practice of "body brokering" becoming widespread in Arizona and described horror stories about the families being impacted.

Now, I had heard about billboards offering "free" or cheap cremation, and I knew these advertisements often targeted the elderly and those living in impoverished areas, but as these NFDA members described the process of body brokering, I was skeptical.

Two NFDA members alerted us to the practice of "body brokering" becoming widespread in Arizona and described horror stories about families being impacted.

"Are you sure this isn't illegal?" I asked. "I mean, this is America, surely we have laws against this!"

After they assured me that the practice was indeed occurring, I did some research and found a 2016 Reuters series called "Cashing in on the Donated Dead – The Body Trade." Reuters reported that more than 20 bodies donated to an Arizona body broker were used in U.S. Army blast experi-

ments – without the consent of the deceased or next of kin. In fact, some donors or their families had explicitly noted an objection to military experiments on consent forms they signed.

The Reuters series highlighted some truly horrific cases, a few of which I shared with the audience ([reuters.com/investigates/section/usa-bodies](https://www.reuters.com/investigates/section/usa-bodies)), one involving neighboring tenants in Nevada who began complaining about a "mysterious stench and bloody boxes in a dumpster." According to Reuters: "Health inspectors found a man in medical scrubs holding a garden hose. He was thawing a frozen human torso in the midday sun. As the man sprayed the remains, 'bits of tissue and blood were washed into the gutters,' a state health report said. "The stream weaved past storefronts and pooled across the street near a technical school."

The Reuters series led me to more research, and I learned this was not even a new problem. In fact, in January 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had the Office of Inspector General (OIG) research and complete a report titled "Informed Consent in Tissue Donation – Expectations and Realities." Those findings touched on some of the same issues we face today. Another highly critical report, "FDA Oversight of the Tissue Bank Industry," was released in 2002 from Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America at Harvard Law School.

Regarding body brokering, it is important to note that we are not talking about the process of giving part or all of an organ, at the time of the donor's death, for the purpose of transplantation into another person. That process is highly regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, a regulation that occurred only after the OIG report was released. Prior to that, the FDA was hesitant to get involved in regulating human tissue.

In addition, the Health Resources and Services Administration, an HHS agency, oversees the donation and transplantation of vascular organs, such as hearts, kidneys and livers.

Whole-body donation, or anatomical donation, is how body brokers make money. They provide full bodies and dissected parts to companies and institutions that specialize in advancing medicine, as well as other trades, through critical training, education and research.

In almost every U.S. state, it's legal to sell the human remains of adults. That's why federal regulations are necessary to create oversight and accountability for those acting in bad faith – those contributing to a for-profit industry in which bodies are treated like a commodity in a largely unregulated national market. Because these body parts are not transplanted into other humans and are used for education, research or the advancement of medical, dental or funeral service science, they are considered “non-transplant tissue banks” and are not covered under the same laws that cover organ and tissue transplantation. Few state laws provide any oversight whatsoever, and almost anyone, regardless of expertise, can dissect and sell human body parts.

Often, the poor and elderly are encouraged to donate their loved one's body to science because some non-transplant tissue banks pick up the body, transport it and cremate it free of charge. Bodies and body parts can be bought, sold and leased again and again. As a result, not only can it prove difficult to track what becomes of donors' bodies, it's also nearly impossible to ensure that they are handled with dignity and returned to their loved ones following cremation.

With research in hand, NFDA took its concern, data and legislative proposal to Congress. I first met with U.S. Reps. Bobby Rush (D-Illinois) and Gus Bilirakis (R-Florida), who shared my initial reaction to the issue: “Are you sure this isn't illegal? Is this really happening in America? Surely we have laws against this?”

I shared NFDA's data and a draft version of a bill to address the problem, so we could work on creating a solution.

The federal bill will not negatively impact medical or mortuary schools or other similar organizations that have a long and well-documented history of handling donated bodies with respect and dignity. In fact, medical and funeral service schools will benefit from this bill since some have seen a decline in donations because they do not engage in the same aggressive marketing and solicitation tactics used by body brokers. NFDA emphasized how important access to anatomical donations is to surgeons, para-

medics, funeral directors and other healthcare professionals who use donated bodies and body parts for training, education and research.

Instead, the Consensual Donation and Research Integrity Act seeks to regulate the largely unregulated, non-transplant body- and tissue-donation industry by establishing minimum standards for registration, recordkeeping, labeling, packaging and disposition of remains for the acquisition or transfer of human bodies or body parts.

Funeral service schools will benefit from this bill since some have seen a decline in donations because they don't engage in the same aggressive marketing and solicitation tactics.

Registration is of critical importance because we currently have no idea how many body brokers there are in the United States. Among many things, the bill requires: “A person who acquires or transfers in or affecting interstate commerce a human body or human body part for education, research or the advancement of medical, dental or mortuary science (and not for use in human transplantation) shall register with the secretary at such time and in such manner as the secretary may require.”

In addition, each registrant would be required to pay a fee to register, which would cover the cost of the program and not add to the federal budget.

Inspection of facilities is another key requirement. Anyone engaged in dismembering human bodies for non-transplant purposes should do so in a professional facility, such as a university, hospital, medical or funeral service school, etc. It should not happen in warehouses or private-citizen garages, as some previous body brokers have been found doing.

Chain of custody is very important and should be the responsibility of the person who registers with HHS, not the funeral director. The registered entity is responsible for tracking documentation stating that the donor has knowingly consented, has the obligation to dispose of the human body or body part in line with a family's wishes, and must maintain accurate documentation of the name of the person, including any trade or business name, who transferred the body or body part to the registrant, if applicable.

The registrant must also include a description of the human body or body part being acquired or transferred, along with the medical history of the donor, including the autopsy report if an autopsy was conducted. This chain of custody protects funeral homes that are asked by brokers to cremate remains

The public doesn't differentiate between funeral directors, cemeterians and body brokers. These events affect everyone.

because it requires a complete history of where the body or body parts have been and, very importantly, what the person died from, along with the informed consent that protects the firm from liability.

Unfortunately, the CDRI bill's labeling and packaging language was misunderstood by outside entities, so a simple explanation using a typical Amazon delivery is in order. Imagine that your name and address are on the outside of the box, along with a label that indicates "Human Tissue Inside." Inside the box, there is a full list of contents, including the tissue types of the human body or body part; the cause

of the donor's death, if applicable and known; serological test results, if any exist; any known infectious disease agents of the human body or body part; and a "not for transplantation" statement.

Obviously, proper packing is important for public health reasons and to prevent any "leakage," so the legislation requires that each human body or body part be wrapped and packaged in a manner that mitigates potential contamination, cross-contamination and safety hazards and is sealed to prevent leakage, ensuring the integrity of the human body or body part.

Some want to know why funeral service care about this issue, with a few even saying, "Who cares what happens to the dead? They are dead."

Well, it matters because funeral professionals are often the only voice for the deceased and the only

voice for the grieving. The public doesn't differentiate between funeral directors, cemeteries, crematories and body brokers. The sad truth is that when these stories hit the headlines, they impact everyone in funeral service and paint everyone – dedicated to serving families or not – with the same brush.

For more information on how you can help your profession and grieving families, visit nfda.org/advocacy/current-legislation/body-broker-bill.

Additionally, you can become an advocate by contacting your members of Congress and asking them for their support on this vital legislation. Another great way to advocate is simply to spread the word by alerting families and other groups – such as hospice, veterans' groups, coroners, medical examiners and hospitals – and encourage them to support the legislation.

NFDA is currently working with members of the U.S. House and Senate on minor technical changes to the bill to ensure that this important legislation is reintroduced in both the House and Senate when the new Congress begins in January 2023. Legislators always ask what their constituents think about legislation, so please let them know. Your support now will help move this process along.

Lesley Witter, MPA, CAE, is NFDA senior vice president of advocacy.



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FINANCE 301

BY DANIEL M. ISARD

My Knowledge Transfer Plan

Chapter 9: Trust But Verify

As this column has been memorializing the key points of knowledge I have acquired and want to pass on to you, here's another to remember: Nothing prevents problems better than writing things down. I have found that many life-changing matters can occur when business owners, employees or both go on nothing more than a handshake and their memory. President Ronald Reagan summed it up when he repeated an old Russian proverb: "Trust but verify."

Now, I am not an attorney, so I am not giving legal advice here. I have been a business owner for 40 years, however, as well as an employer, expert witness in more than 100 cases and one who has paid for a few points of litigation, so I have learned a few things about the law. In my experience, I tend to see funeral directors and funeral home owners/managers get into trouble when they "assume."

Sure, we all know the remark about what happens when you assume, yet I have repeatedly seen the same points violated because employees and employers didn't put matters in writing and instead assumed they knew the outcome. Please, if you have been guilty of this, then accept your good fortune and start protecting yourself by writing things down.

CONTRACT TYPES

Understand that there are three types of contracts: oral, written and a written contract that is orally amended. Is each binding? Well, any agreement between two honorable people that is executed in the best faith between the two parties is binding – but honorable people can still disagree. They can and do all the time. Regardless of whether a contract is in writing or oral, it can be disputed, which is why we have courts.

The types of contracts you might deal with include:

EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT When you offer someone a job and pay them an agreed-upon amount in an agreed-upon period, you might think there is no need for a written agreement. In actuality, there is a written agreement, even if you didn't write it, because

your state has laws, and those are in writing! As a citizen of that state, you must abide by them.

The problem is that state laws usually only provide a framework for constructing the agreement between you and an employee. There are some matters from which you cannot deviate and others from which you can. Minimum wage is one from which you cannot deviate. The number of vacation days your firm provides or how you define time off, though, are matters on which employers can be more generous.

An employee can use his or her state or federal wage-and-hour agencies to help fight any perceived injustice. The memory of the employee might selectively fail him or her, but an employer needs to prove what they have agreed to do. In other words, once you make the employment offer, write it down.

CONSUMER CONTRACTS Every firm has a "sales contract" that, along with the statement of goods and services, specifies the funeral services and merchandise a consumer is buying from you and that you promise to deliver (either at need or preneed).

I think the single greatest failure involving preneed is that firms do not have a specialized preneed document that codifies everything not in the agreement. Imagine "Mom" prearranges her service, for example. Upon leaving your funeral home, she calls her first-born and says, "I just left the funeral home and I took care of everything."

Naturally, the child files those words away and, upon learning of his or her mother's death, remembers them when entering your funeral home. You, however, tell him or her that the \$XXX for cash-advance items must be paid, thereby making his or her sainted, dearly departed mother a liar within 24 hours of her death.

"But Mom said she took care of everything with you!" he or she exclaims.

Proving that you explained cash-advance items to her and proving to the kid that she recognized this will remain an open-ended matter at the time of her death.

Similarly, the next great matter in the world of cre-

mation will deal with the receipt of the transfer of cremated remains. I have seen families fight over this. Suddenly, funeral directors become liable because they didn't create a written receipt showing who they turned the remains over to, when they did so, and that the recipient was authorized to claim them!

You can't get on an airplane without proving who you are. Shouldn't the person to whom the arranging party says you can and should turn over the cremated remains also show some modicum of identification?

NON-COMPETE AGREEMENTS Imagine you tell someone you're hiring, "If you leave our employment, you may not go to work for our competitor." Wanting employment, this person will likely say yes to almost anything.

After a few years, however, now thinking he or she is worth more than you think he or she is, that employee plans to jump to another firm, bringing your clientele along. Sure, he or she agreed not to go to work for a competitor, but that was years ago and you don't have anything in writing.

Most lawyers will tell you that non-compete agreements are not enforceable. They might be right, but your first line of offense should involve presenting an agreement outlining a non-compete promise in which the employee agreed to employment knowing that such employment would not be offered to him or her without agreeing to a promise not to compete. If you have a written agreement, you will have a better chance of winning your case or at least delaying the start of this former employee elsewhere.

Non-compete clauses should spell out who a competitor is and how long a person should be precluded from being employed by a competitor. In addition, the distance of non-competition should not be measured in a straight line but rather by a "marketing circle." Imagine that the employee says, "I will not go to work for any firm within 10 miles," but ultimately goes to work for a firm 11 miles away. Is that okay? How would you feel if that competitor markets within that 10-mile area?

Courts don't like to see people remain unemployed,

but if you prove that you and the employee agreed to an XX-month period of non-competition, that might be enforceable. By putting this agreement in writing, both you and the employee protect yourselves.

CONFIDENTIAL DATA USE Most firms do not inform their staff, in writing, of what is and what is not confidential data. Confidential data could comprise the list of preneed contracts the company has entered into, for example. I have often seen an employee or former owner leave a company and attempt to monetize his or her knowledge of who has a preneed agreement with their former employer. That person, who inevitably moves to a competitor, sends out 100 letters saying he or she now works at a new firm, and all 100 of those letters just happen to go to existing preneed contract holders. What a coincidence!

BUSINESS SUCCESSION PLANS "Come work for me, Young Person, and someday I will sell you this business!" says the soon-to-be-retiring owner.

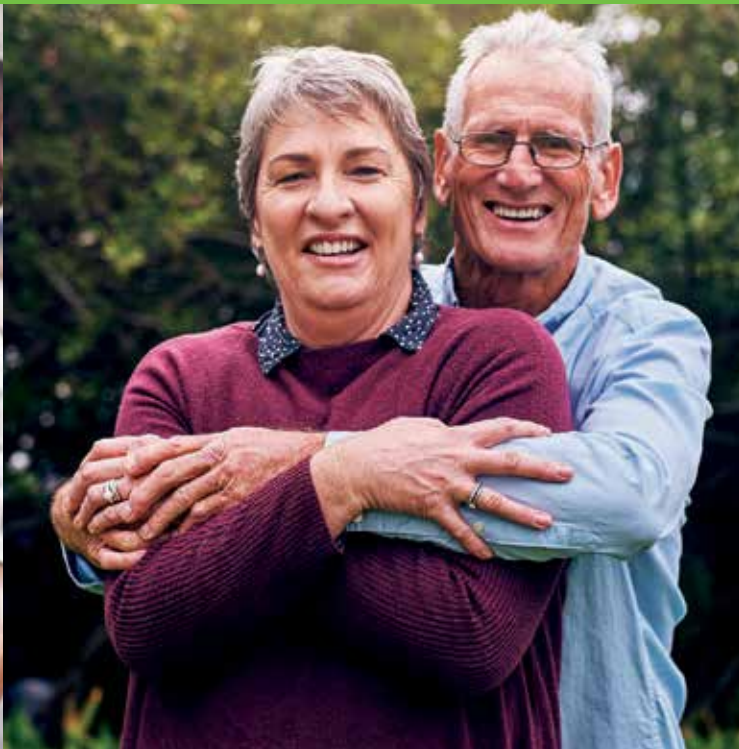
Of course, the terms, conditions, price and so many other points are omitted from that conversation. And even if they are discussed, what happens if the owner dies before the sale takes place? Unless these matters are written down, the single largest asset of someone's estate will remain unguarded.

An old Yiddish proverb states: "Man plans and God laughs." If the offer of future ownership is important to the employee, it should be in writing. Do not trust anything as fragile as life or memories.

Many people don't want to put these things in writing because they want to avoid legal fees. Trust me, failing to have good representation at the beginning of a contract will result in paying huge legal fees in the future! A single day in a courtroom requires about 10 days of a lawyer's time in preparation. Thus, your desire to avoid a few hours of a lawyer's time in drafting a document will increase twentyfold or more if you have to enforce what you thought was a previously established agreement. And that is just the lawyer's fees; expert witnesses (especially good ones) are expensive as well.

Dan Isard is founder of The Foresight Companies, which has served thousands of funeral homes nationwide for the past four decades. The articles in this series can be found on the Insights section of theforesightcompanies.com. Contact Isard at 602-274-6464 or danisard@theforesightcompanies.com.

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2022 NFDA CONSUMER AWARENESS AND PREFERENCES SURVEY

Listen To Them!

- ▷ Two-thirds of respondents have completed some or all of their funeral arrangements online.
- ▷ Directors must improve their community visibility.
- ▷ A funeral or memorial service with burial provides more solace and healing.
- ▷ And 45 other 2022 survey datapoints.

BY DEANA GILLESPIE AND
EDWARD J. DEFORT



No matter how hard we try to stay engaged with the public at large, we often find a gap between what we think the public wants and what they actually do want. One approach has always helped take the stress out of this process – simply asking.

With that in mind, NFDA presents its Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey annually to find out what the public thinks regarding funerals and memorialization. And with each survey round comes another layer of statistical significance in that we

are able to differentiate between real trends and aberrations. Over the past 11 years, the findings make it clearer what the public knows of funeral service and what they seek to get out of it.

Generally, the survey results point to areas in which the public is in

need of education and guidance in the areas of death, ceremony and memorialization by the experts – funeral directors.

And while there is a margin of error in any survey, with 11 years of remarkably consistent data, we can recognize trends.

The 2022 survey was conducted March 8-11. Invitations were emailed to an online consumer panel consisting of Americans age 40 and older. To frame this year's stats, nearly 59% of respondents were between 40 and 54 years old, which means this year's survey pool is slightly younger than last year's pool. Of note, the religious mix was about the same as last year, with nearly 60% stating Christian, while 20% said they had no religious preference. This year's group also had more experience in planning a funeral for a friend or relative; 63.5% of respondents have been personally involved (it was 52.8% in 2021).

It was reasonable to consider that COVID would be in the rear-view mirror by now, but that's not quite the case yet, as this year's numbers show us the lingering impact of the virus on consumer behavior and where we might be heading. But right now, it's too soon to make any definitive declarations.

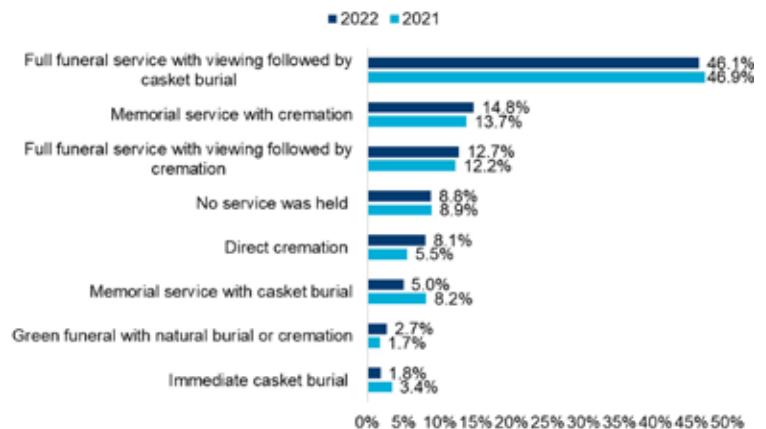
Thinking about their most recent experience regarding the death of a loved one, 46.1% of respondents said they attended a full funeral service with a viewing, followed by a casketed burial; 14.8% attended a memorial service with cremation; 12.7% attended a full funeral service with a viewing, followed by cremation; and 8.8% held no services. These numbers closely mirror last year's results.

Also in line with 2021 results were the number of respondents who attended a funeral or memorial service with burial and said they were significantly more likely to state that the service was very helpful in paying tribute to or commemorating the life of their loved one and was an important part of helping them begin the healing

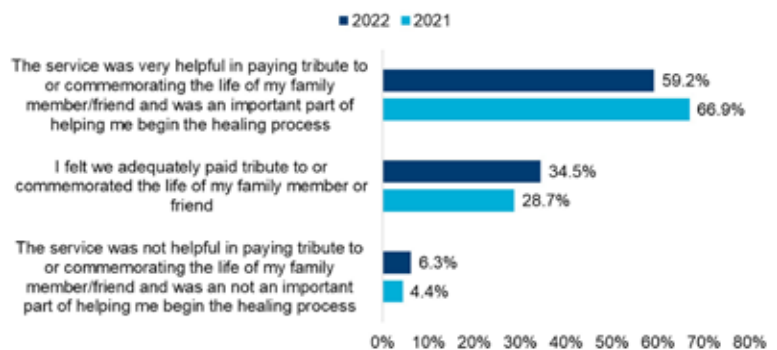
process, compared to those who attended a cremation service.

Of those who attended a burial service, 59.2% said the service was very helpful in paying tribute to or commemorating the life of their loved one and was important to their healing process. Slightly more than one-third of respondents (34.5%) felt the service adequately paid tribute to their loved one, and 6.3% said the service was not helpful in pay-

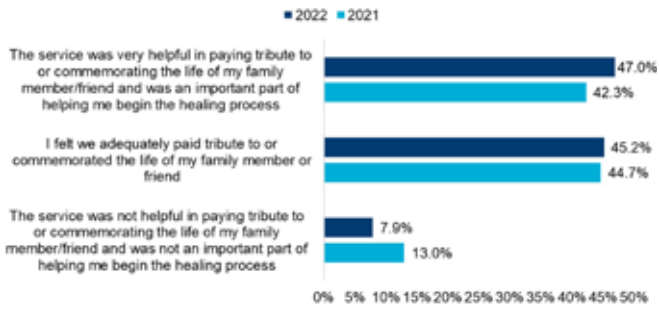
Thinking About Your Most Recent Experience Regarding a Death of a Loved One, What Type of Funeral or Memorial Service Was Held?



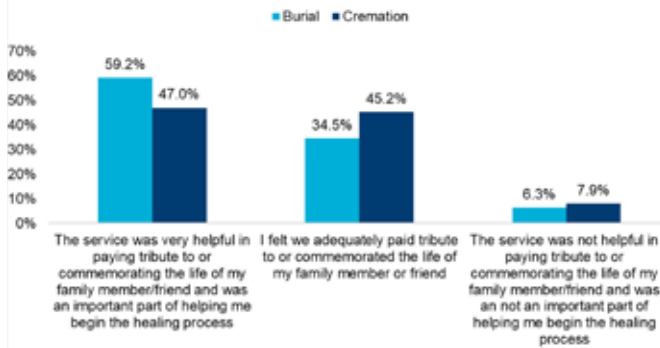
Which Best Describes Your Impression of the Service for the MOST RECENT Funeral with Burial You Attended?



Which Best Describes the Impression of the Service for the MOST RECENT Funeral with Cremation You Attended?



Impression of the Service for the MOST RECENT Funeral You Attended



ing tribute to or commemorating the life of a family member or friend.

Respondents who said they attended a cremation service were more evenly split between feeling that the service was either very helpful in paying tribute to their loved one or that it adequately paid tribute; 47% said the service was very helpful and 45.2% said it was an adequate commemoration. Another 7.9% said the service was not helpful at all.


While consumer satisfaction numbers for cremation improved slightly over a year ago, the numbers still point to “average” rather than “exceptional.”

So, why do consumers find burial more helpful than cremation? Said David Nixon of Nixon Consulting: “I can’t help but come to one conclusion... Are we really doing a good job providing the highest level of service when one level, burial, is consistently rated as very helpful in commemorating the life of a loved one as compared to cremation, which gets high marks for being adequate.”


“Our experiences show that American consumers choosing burial are more likely to celebrate a life than those choosing cremation,” said Jimmy Altmeyer, president of Altmeyer Funeral Homes & Crematory (Ohio, West Virginia and Virginia). “Our challenge is to explain to cremation consum-

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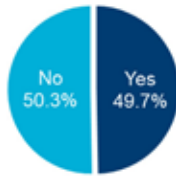


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When Planning the Funeral/memorial Service for Your Loved One, Did You Visit Any Funeral Home Website(s)?



Did You Make Funeral/memorial Service Arrangements Online with a Funeral Home?



ers that celebrating life and treasuring memories helps in the healing process.”

FUNERAL HOME WEBSITES

Of respondents who have personally been involved in planning a funeral, nearly half said they visited one or more funeral home websites during that planning time. Almost a quarter (24.9%) said they were able to make all arrangements online, and 39.9% were able to start the process online and finish making arrangements in person with a funeral director. Combined, that’s close to two-thirds of respondents who completed some or all of their funeral/memorial arrangements online. (The survey did not break out whether these arrangements went through the main funeral home or a discount provider.)

Nixon, who was surprised by these numbers, commented, “When online arrangements first came about, I thought, well, people aren’t going to want to do that. Apparently they do. This was probably exacerbated by COVID, during which consumers were more comfortable doing everything online rather than in person. You wonder if that’s going to change...”

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The good news for funeral directors when it comes to online arrangements is that consumers aren't completely factoring them out.

The good news for funeral directors when it comes to online arrangements is that consumers aren't completely factoring them out. Of respondents who made at least some arrangements online, more than half (53.7%) said it was a good experience, but they still needed the assistance of a funeral director. Slightly more than one-third (35.8%) said they were satisfied with the experience and accomplished everything they wanted/needed to online. This leaves 9.5% who said they did not feel like they received the personalized service they would have received in person with a funeral director; 1.1% said it was too impersonal and not a good experience for the family.

When it comes to online arrangements, funeral directors, much like consumers, are split on the process. Can firms be successful playing both sides of the arrangement coin? For the discount part of the business, having customers arrange online saves staff, but are regular funeral homes inviting consumers to a low-end option without a personal discussion with a funeral director?

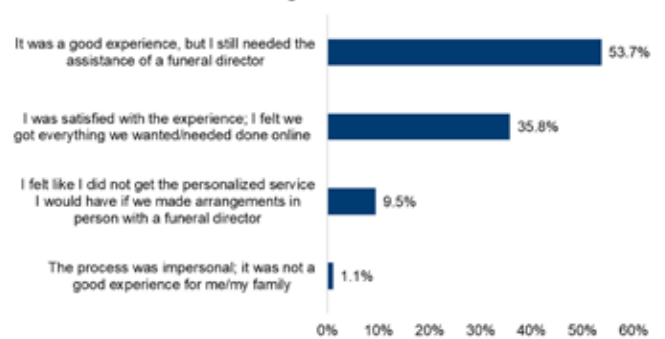
The first important clarifier is how "online arrangements" is defined. "The nomenclature means very different things to different people," said Jay Dietz, Vertin vice president of operations. "Fully making arrangements online without direct assistance of a professional is much different than utilizing technology to facilitate a virtual arrangement session. If funeral arrangers are adept at incorporating technology into virtual arrangement sessions, the process can be very positive for all involved.

"However, a completely consumer-driven online arrangement that does not incorporate a professional's guidance consistently produces a less satisfied customer," he continued. "This shows that while many things in our world have been changed by technology, grief still demands the attention and guidance of a trained, caring professional. In other words, embrace new approaches regularly, but never forget why we do this work."

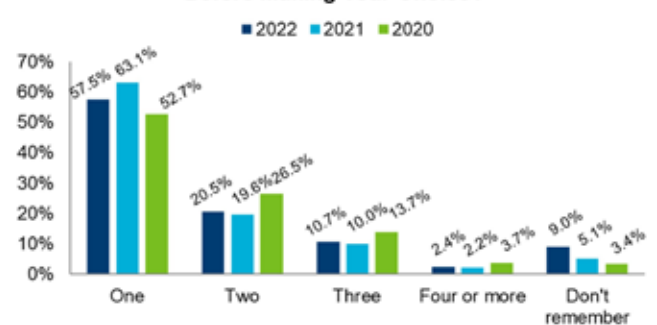
FUNERAL HOME SHOPPING

For years, this survey has suggested that most consumers already know what funeral home they will

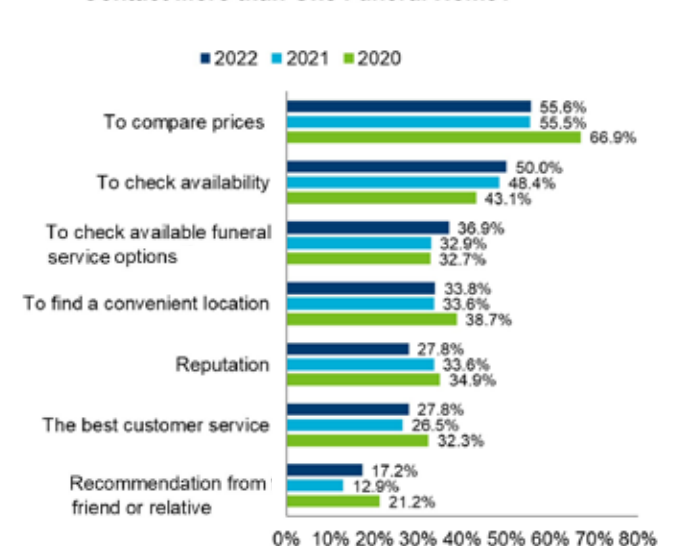
How Would You Best Describe the Process of Making Arrangements Online?



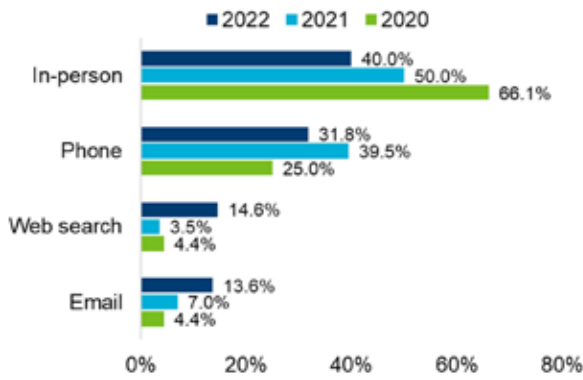
How Many Funeral Homes Did You Visit or Call Before Making Your Choice?



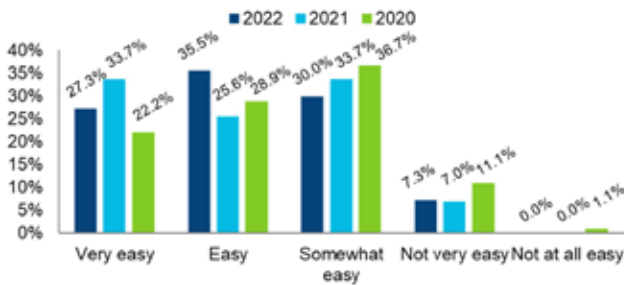
Why Did You Visit or Contact More than One Funeral Home?



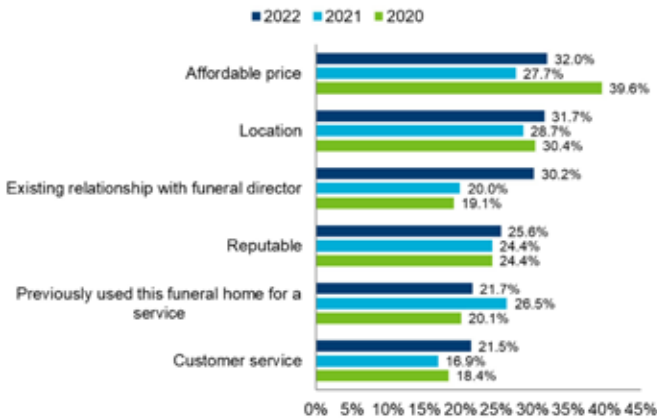
How Did You Obtain Pricing Information?



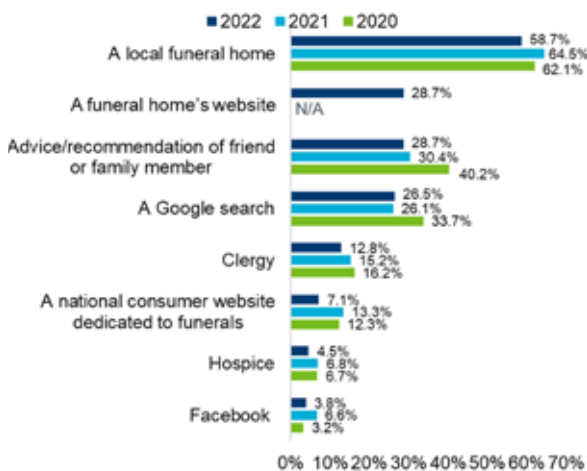
Ease of Obtaining Price Information



Top Reasons for Choosing Funeral Home



If You Needed to Plan a Funeral or Memorial Service, Where Would You Most Likely Seek Information?



utilize to care for a loved one. 2022 is no exception, as only one-third of respondents called/visited more than one funeral home when they planned a funeral.

Of the 33.5% who called/visited more than one funeral home, the main reason for doing so was to compare prices, cited by 55.6% of respondents (just a tick above the 55.5% last year). An increasing number checked to see if the funeral home was available, a figure certainly affected by COVID, considering the pandemic's impact on the death rate. From 2019-20, the death rate spiked nearly 19%, and in 2021, the number of deaths rose nearly 1% over that 2020 spike.

Of those who contacted more than one funeral home to compare prices, 40% obtained pricing information in person, down from 66.1% in 2020 – again, not surprising given the social precautions due to COVID. Another 32% obtained pricing information over the phone, down from 39.5% in 2021. Consequently, web searches became much more of a factor last year as nearly 15% obtained pricing via a web search, up dramatically from 3.5% in 2021.

With a review of the FTC Funeral Rule looming, consumer groups are lobbying for all funeral price lists to be available online, which raises the question: Do funeral directors care if their prices are posted online?

“If your prices aren’t online, is that a competitive disadvantage?” poses Nixon. “People who advocate for them to be online say it is, but I’m not so sure; the survey also found that consumers are having no trouble at all finding price information currently. These results might have some COVID influence. I think the question is worth watching to see where the numbers trend when the cloud of COVID clears.”

As Nixon mentions, respondents feel it is still relatively easy to get pricing questions answered. Of those who contacted more than one funeral home to compare prices, 52.8% said that obtaining price information was very easy/easy and another 30% said somewhat easy – numbers that have been consistent throughout the survey years. Only 7.3% felt it was not very easy/not easy at all to obtain price information, which is close to last year (7%) but down from 11.1% in 2020.

As to why respondents selected the funeral home they did, one-third cited affordable price, up from 27.7% a year ago (but down again from 39.6% in 2020). “Location swayed their decision” was cited by 31.7%, up from 28.7% a year ago. Furthermore, 30.2% attributed their selection to an existing relationship with a firm or funeral director. Curiously, placing sixth on the list was customer service.



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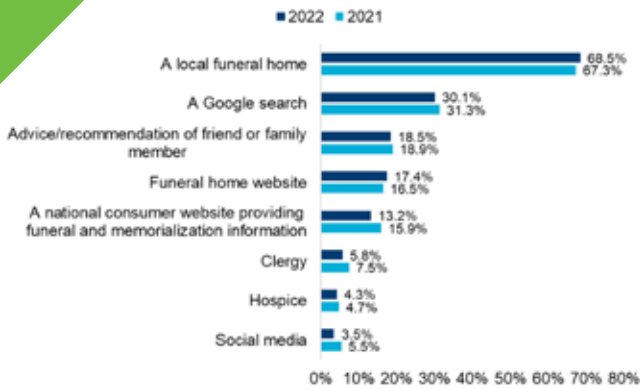
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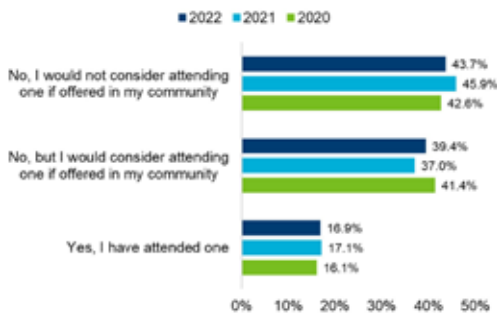
2022 Expo Floorplan



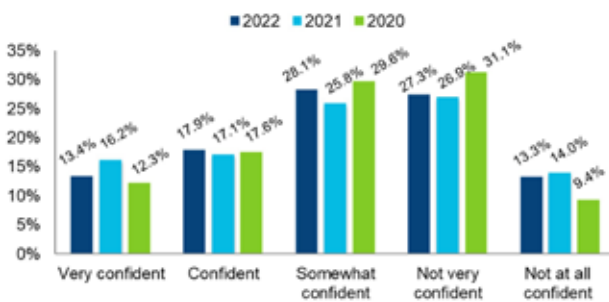
Where Would You Most Likely Seek Price Information for a Funeral?



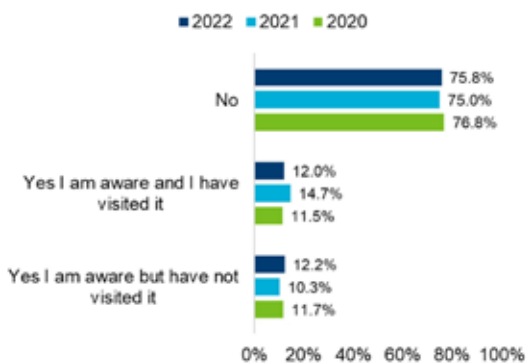
Have You Ever Attended a Luncheon or Other Public Event Where a Funeral Director Presented Information About Funeral Arrangements, Cremation/burial Options or Preplanning?



How Confident Would You Feel in Planning and Executing a Funeral/memorial Service Without the Help of a Funeral Director?



Awareness of RememberingLife.com



If consumers needed to plan a funeral or memorial service, most would seek advice from a local funeral home (cited by 58.7% of respondents). A distant runner-up response was a funeral home’s website at 28.7%, the same as advice or recommendation from a friend or family member. Close behind at 26.5% was a Google search.

“Hospice is 4.5% – that still surprises me,” Nixon observed. “More than half of deaths now involve hospice – are people blowing up how much influence hospice is having on families? Something’s not aligned.”

Two-thirds of respondents (68.5%) said they would seek funeral price information from a local funeral home, up slightly from 67.3% in 2020. About 30% said they’d do a Google search (similar to last year’s 31.3%). Clearly, these numbers suggest that it’s the funeral home that’s the top information resource in a community – as it should be.

However, when it comes to maintaining that position of community information hub, the survey suggests that funeral homes have neither been maintaining existing relationships nor building new ones. Only 16.9% of respondents have attended a luncheon or other public event in which a funeral director presented information about funeral arrangements, cremation/burial options or preplanning.

While it’s obvious that this number would be directly impacted by COVID, it has remained consistent over the past several years, even before COVID restrictions. So, too, has the number of respondents who have not been to such an event, nor would they attend, which has hovered at about 43%.

Still, the key number here is the 40% of respondents who have not attended such an event but would consider it if one were offered in the community, creating an inviting scenario by which to build relationships and maintain the presence of the funeral service information hub.

“This result has been in a holding pattern because of COVID, of course,” Nixon said. “But still, 57% of consumers said they have attended or would consider attending a presentation in their community. Being the first to offer such a program in your market would seem to give you a head start.”

Underscoring the need for community engagement and education, nearly 60% of respondents say they have some level of confidence in planning a funeral without the help of a funeral director. This staggering number has been a consistent finding since this question was asked four years ago. Consumers see themselves as event planners, a term many funeral directors bristled at when it was first suggested more than two decades ago.

For its part, NFDA unveiled its Remembering a Life.com consumer website to serve as an information hub and resource for consumers. Respondents' awareness of the site has remained relatively steady over the past three years; this year, 24.2% of respondents had heard of the site, down a tick from 25% a year ago.

YOUR OWN FUNERAL

When asked what would be most important to consumers at their own funeral or memorial service, their desires are relatively low tech. Photographs is the overall top choice, cited by 56.2% (up from 48% a year ago). By comparison, videos were mentioned by only 27.9% (up slightly from 24.7% in 2021).

Also resonating with consumers is a personal eulogy by family/friends, cited by 49.9% of respondents (down from 56.9% a year ago). This was followed by flowers/flower arrangements and personalized music. Here, cost was mentioned by 36%, up from 35.1% in 2021.

RELIGION

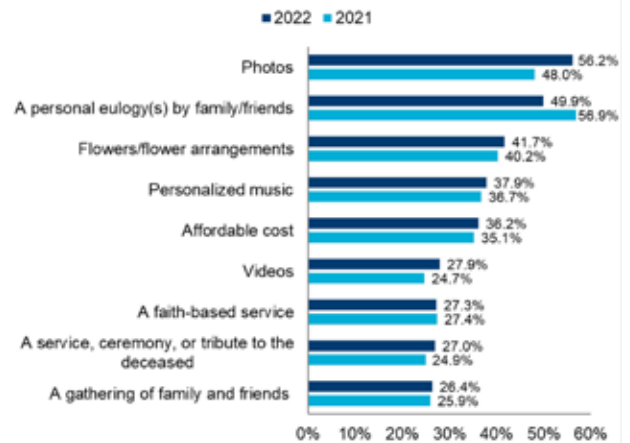
Numbers on the importance of religion as a component of a loved one's funeral have been perplexing. For the first eight years of the survey, the percentage who found religion very important or somewhat important steadily declined – from 77.3% in 2012 to 62.5% in 2019. But that all changed in 2020 (note that these data were collected prior to the pandemic). That year, the percentage of respondents who cited religion as a very important or important component of a funeral rose to 74.3%; in 2021, it rose to 75.7%. This year, it landed at 73.7% – still well above the declining trend of the last decade.

Is it a new trend? An aberration? Eight years of declining numbers followed by three years of significantly higher numbers would suggest that religion is once again becoming an important component in a loved one's memorial.

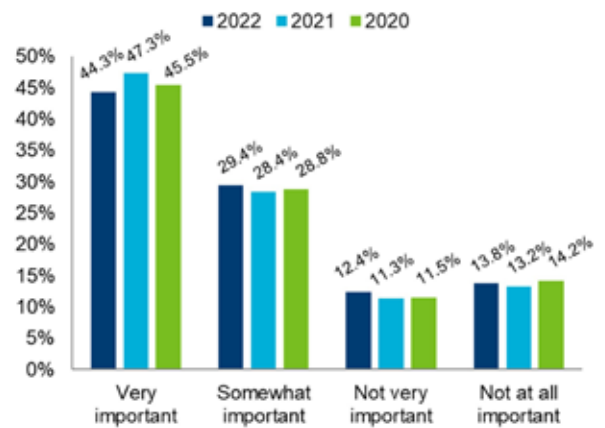
We understood this year that asking about attendance at memorial services during COVID might skew the numbers. In 2022, 66.2% of respondents said they have attended a memorial service, compared with just 51% in last year's study. On the surface, this number makes sense because restrictions were far more lax in last year than in 2021.

Since the survey's inception in 2012, we've asked respondents to tell us how important having the body or cremated remains present for the funeral service was to them. Over the course of the survey, this number has ranged from the 42% in 2014 who said it was very or somewhat important to the 71.6% in 2020 and last year's 72.2%. In 2022, the

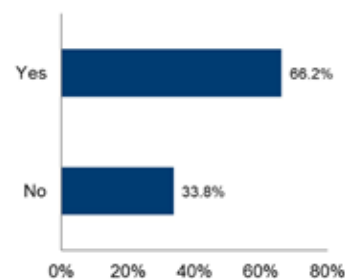
Most Important Arrangements or Items Consumers Want in a Funeral



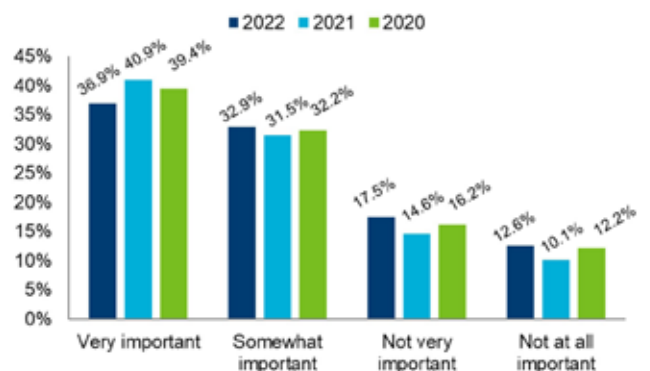
Importance of a Religious Component in the Funeral of a Loved One

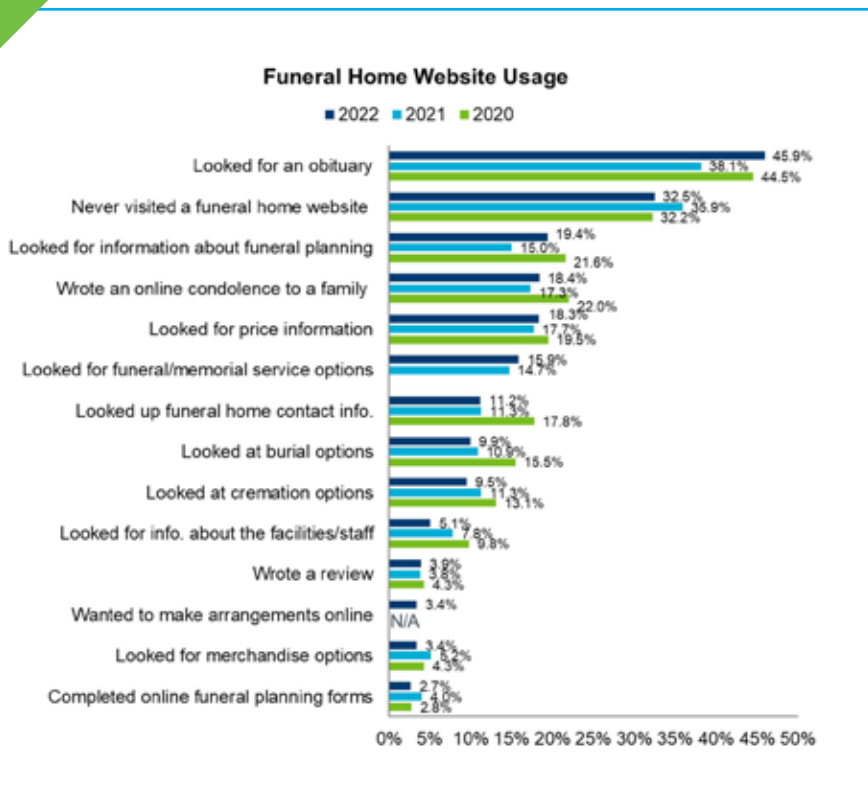


Have You Ever Attended a Memorial Service?



Importance of Having the Body or Cremated Remains Present for a Funeral Service





number was 69.8%, suggesting that consumers are looking to say goodbye to a loved one, perhaps indicating a more personal trend in cremation services.

THE INTERNET

Approximately two-thirds of respondents say they have visited a funeral home website; the overriding reason was to look for an obituary. A related survey question asked about the preferred methods of informing those outside the immediate family of the death of a loved one. A phone call was at the top of the list, not surprisingly, but newspapers were close behind. Third came a funeral home website.

Since the obituary is the main reason consumers visit a funeral home website, a question should be considered: What can be done to enhance this offering?



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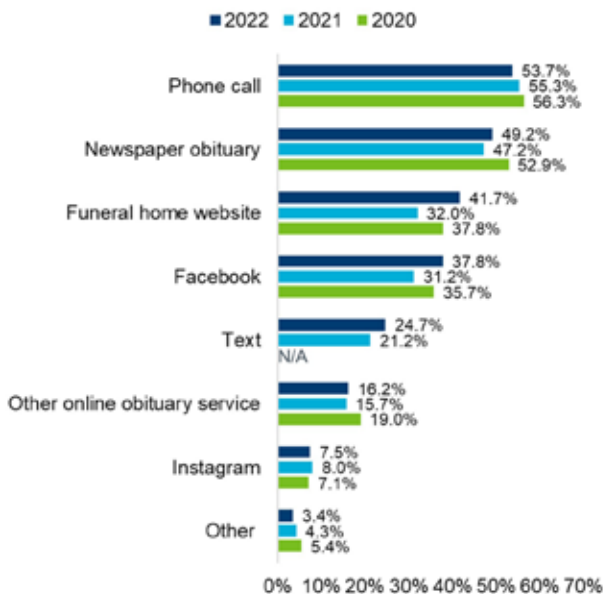


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When Informing Those Outside the Immediate Family of the Death of a Loved One, What Methods Would You Use?



“The funeral home’s website is one of many opportunities to showcase the creative talents of funeral directors,” offered Lacy Robinson, veteran funeral service educator and consultant. “To further enhance funeral home owners’ and managers’ skill set, I recommend that they provide obituary writing training to their funeral directors. Give them the meaningful phrases that will evoke emotion; show them the different samples of great tributes – some that are short and others much longer, some honoring a young person’s life and others telling the stories of people who lived long and remarkable lives.

“If you’re curious about partnering with a professional obituary writer, I encourage you to reach out and explore the possibility for a partnership,” Robinson added. “When families read the obituaries your funeral home provides, they will feel more motivated to place a well-written tribute to their loved one on your website and share it with family and friends.”

SOCIAL MEDIA

Each year, the survey looks at consumer interactions on social media – because if you aren’t on social media by now presenting your services, you

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It was reasonable to consider that COVID would be in the rear-view mirror by now, but the numbers show its lingering impact on consumer behavior.

are ignoring connecting with people literally where they live.

Facebook is by far still the venue of choice to connect with consumers, but Instagram is making strides, as is TikTok, a short-form video-sharing app that allows users to create and share short videos on any topic.

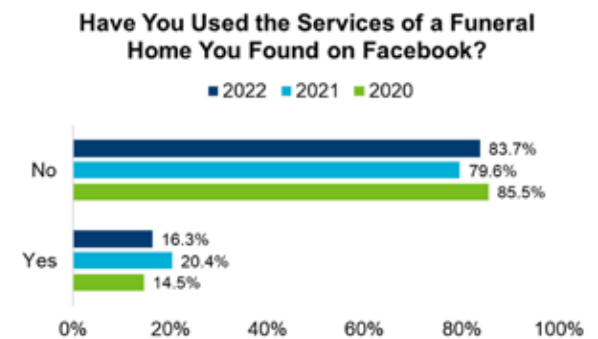
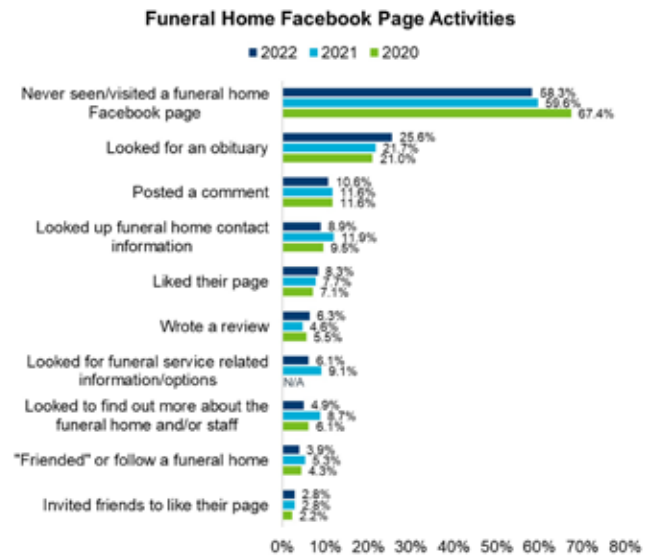
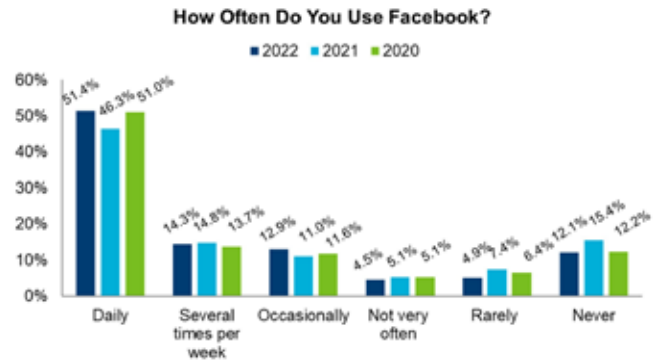
It might be worth exploring TikTok, if for no other reason than to see what types of videos about funeral service resonate with its users. This is not to suggest that every funeral home need add an account, but TikTok does reach a younger demographic, and it's never too early to begin community education.

Moving back to the more familiar territory of Facebook, the survey found that most respondents (87.9%) have used Facebook, and of those who have, two-thirds use it daily or several times per week.

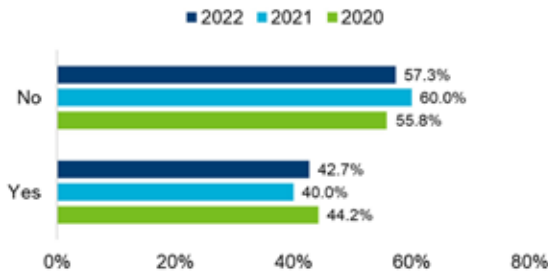
Looking specifically at funeral homes' Facebook pages, the data over the past few years has shown that about 60% of consumers do not visit a funeral home's Facebook page. Those who do primarily looked for an obituary. Only 6.3% of visitors wrote a review about a funeral service and just 3.9% friended or liked a funeral home's Facebook page.

Funeral home pages on Facebook garner mixed results, depending on how they are utilized. If a firm is only using the page to post obituaries, consumers probably won't engage often. A more effective use is posting about community events, as well as employees and your firm in the community, providing a forum by which consumers can see the other side of the funeral home and the impact of its presence in their community.

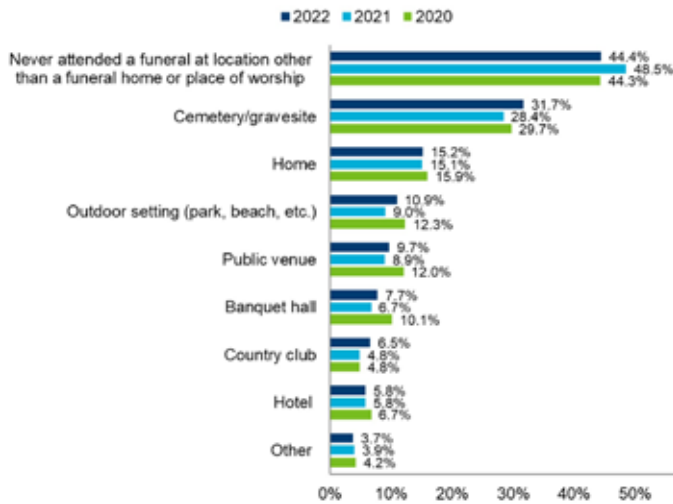
If you're looking for the return on investment for your Facebook presence, the 2022 survey found that only 16% of respondents have used the services of a funeral home found on Facebook. This number has fluctuated over the past three years, landing at a high of 20.4% in 2021 and a low of 14.5% in 2020.



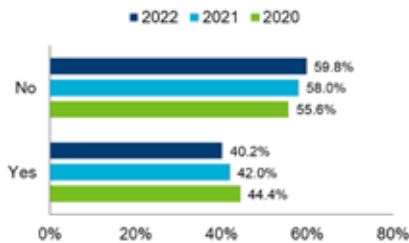
Have You Ever Received an Invitation to a Funeral, Memorial Service or Life Celebration?



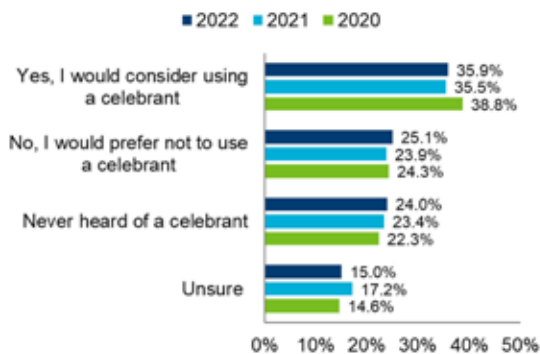
Funeral Attendance at Nontraditional Location



Have You Planned/Attended a Funeral Where Someone Other Than a Member of the Clergy Presided Over the Service?



Would You Consider Using a Celebrant to Officiate a Service for a Loved One?



EVENTS/LOCATIONS

With more cremation services and fewer full-service funerals, consumers are holding private events to memorialize loved ones. This year, the survey found that 42.7% of respondents have received an invitation to a funeral, memorial service or life celebration (holding steady from 40% a year ago and 44.2% in 2020).

Also, more consumers are attending funerals or memorial services at locations other than a funeral home or place of worship – 55.6% of respondents this year have attended a funeral at a nontraditional location. This number will be worth a closer look once the impact of COVID is reduced since restrictions severely hampered options.

The most common location people have gathered is at a cemetery/gravesite, cited by 31.7% of respondents (up from 28.4% last year and 29.7% in 2020). It doesn't appear that the hotel banquet room, cited by 5.8%, has really challenged funeral homes for services, as was feared; perhaps it is an option appealing to the more affluent consumer. The real challenges have been local alternatives, such as the home (15.2%), an outdoor setting like a park or beach (10.9%), a public venue (9.7%), banquet hall (7.7%;) and country club (6.5%) – all of which posted gains over last year's survey.

When it comes to attending services using non-clergy officiants, the numbers haven't changed much over the years. This year, 40.2% of respondents said they have attended a funeral service or memorial in which someone other than a member of the clergy presided over the services (down from 42% last year and 44.4% in 2020).

Respondents' opinion of celebrants has not changed much over the years either. In 2022, 35.9% said they would consider using a celebrant (35.5% in 2021), 25% said they would prefer not to use a celebrant (up from 23.9% last year); 24% have never heard of a celebrant and 15% are unsure whether they would ever use one. Again, these numbers appear fairly static, so we must ask what can be done to raise the profile of celebrants?

"You want to know what these statistics are saying when it comes to the public knowing about or embracing the concept of celebrants?" asked Glenda Stansbury, a certified celebrant, licensed funeral director/embalmer and vice president of marketing and development at Insight Books. "It is completely dependent on the funeral arranger saying the words. Unless we are offered, we cannot serve."

"Funeral directors are the gatekeepers to offering service options to families. Their community will not know unless they are informed and educated," she added. "I hear some of the statements from di-

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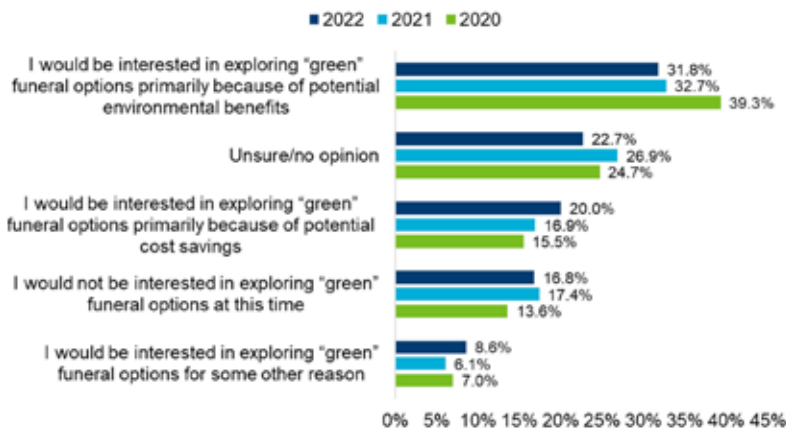
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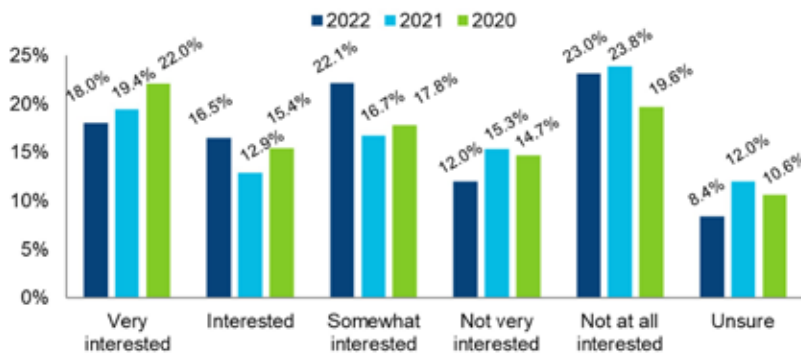
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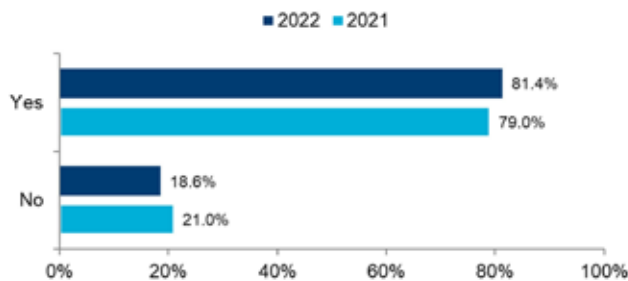
Interest In “Green” or “Eco Friendly” or Natural Burial Funeral Services



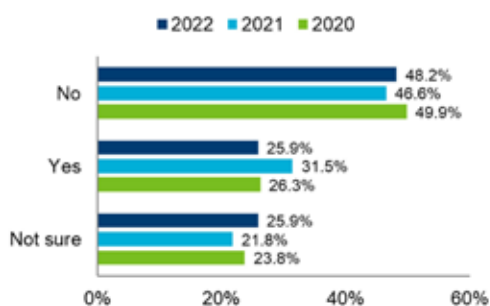
Interest in Donating Your Body for Medical Research



Are You Aware that a Family Choosing Cremation May Select All of the Same Services Traditionally Associated with Burial?



Would You Wish to Have a Funeral Service with Viewing and Visitation Prior to Cremation?



rectors: ‘I don’t know what celebrants do,’ ‘I don’t want to offend my clergy.’ If a funeral professional does not know what celebrants do, that tells me they have not picked up a professional journal in about 20 years. We’ve had over 200 articles in all the magazines explaining celebrants and what we do for families and how we work. The information is available and within their reach.”

Looking at alternative methods of disposition, 60.5% of respondents said they would be interested in exploring green funeral/natural burial options, up from 55.7% a year ago. Most cite potential environmental benefits and/or cost savings as the reasoning behind their selection.

Regarding body donation, respondents remain evenly divided when it comes to donating their bodies for medical research – about a third were very interested or interested, another third were not very interested or not at all interested, and the remaining third were somewhat interested or “unsure.”

CREMATION

How well do consumers know cremation? Quite well, according to the survey, with 81.4% aware that a family choosing cremation may select all the same services that are traditionally associated with burial.

“Funeral homes have to let families know what their options are when it comes to cremation,” said Mike Nicodemus, NFDA vice president of cremation services. “You can do the same things with cremation as with burial. So, remember: every option, every family, every time.”

But is the word really getting out? The survey indicates that more education may be in order. Of those respondents who would choose cremation for themselves, only 25.9% said they would like

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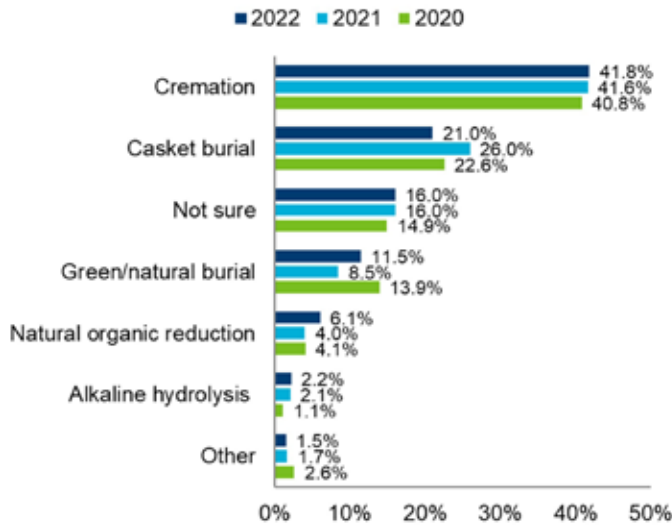
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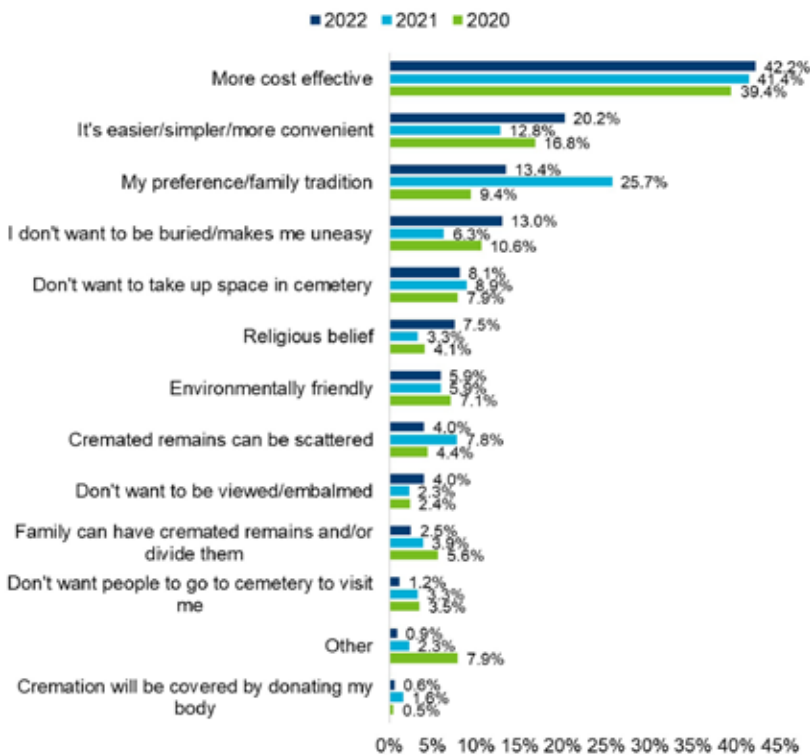
A conversation with Dr. Sara Murphy about mass-fatality events and grief

RememberingALife.com/**podcast**

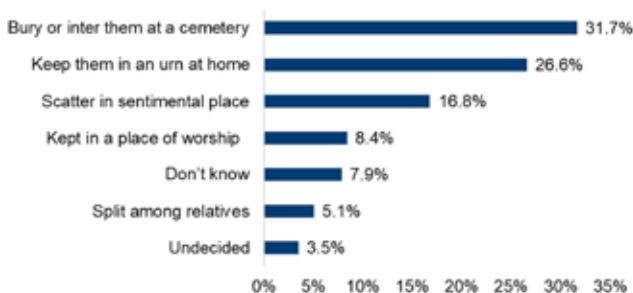
Which of the Following Do You Think You Would Prefer for Yourself?



Main Reasons for Choosing Cremation



If Your Loved One Was Cremated, What Did You Do With Your Loved One's Cremated Remains?



to have a complete funeral service viewing and visitation prior to their cremation, which is down from 31.5% last year. This could be a case of the younger demographic holding sway on the numbers, which could also suggest that they are not tuned in to Nicodemus' "every option, every family, every time" mantra.

When asked about their preferences for themselves, 41.8% of respondents indicated that they would choose cremation as part of their own funeral, a number that has held steady since 2019. Casketed burial dropped to 21% (from 26% in 2020), while green/natural burial ticked up a bit over last year, up to 11.5% from 8.5%. The same is true for natural organic reduction, which rose to 6.1% from 4% last year.

The top reasons respondents said they would choose cremation for themselves are that it is more cost effective, cited by 42.2%, and easier/simpler/more convenient (20.2%). Taken with earlier findings showing that families are finding cremation less fulfilling than burial when it comes to meeting their needs, it seems families are not taking their time in considering the disposition of loved ones, opting for convenience over ceremony.

As we all know, cremation is not final disposition. Of respondents who were involved in planning a funeral that included cremation, 31.7% buried or interred the remains at a cemetery, 26.6% kept them in an urn at home, and 16.8% scattered them in a sentimental place. In a particularly odd statistic, 7.9% of respondents "don't know" what happened to the remains and another 3% are still undecided on what to do with them, underscoring the point that funeral directors must further educate consumers about cremation disposition in the long term.

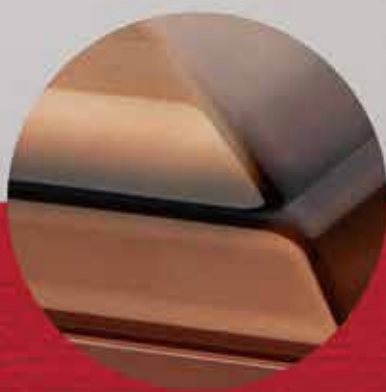
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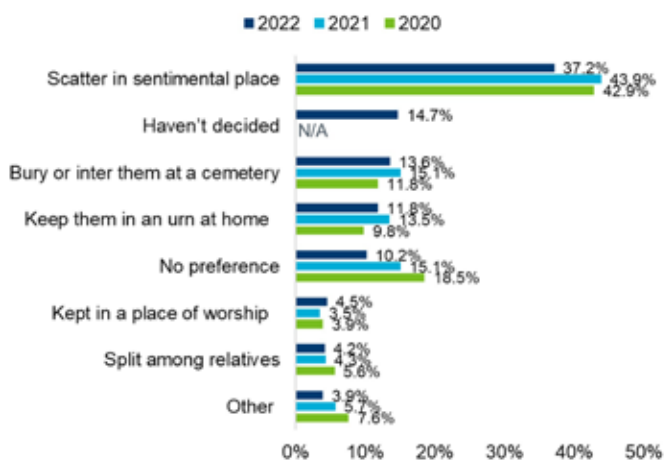


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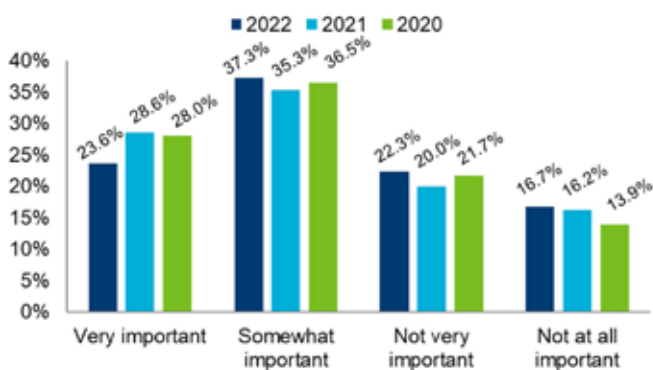


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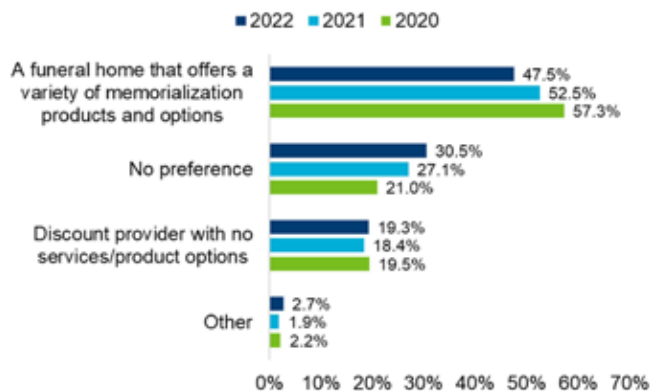
Where Would You Prefer Your Cremated Remains Be Placed?



Importance of Using a Funeral Home That Has a Crematory Onsite



If Planning a Cremation, Which Type of Provider Would You Prefer?



Of those who chose cremation for themselves, 37.2% would prefer to have their remains scattered in a sentimental place, 13.6% would prefer to bury or inter them at a cemetery, and 11.8% would choose to keep them in an urn at home. Of note: 14.7% haven't decided and 10.2% said they had no preference.

"When it comes to disposition of the urn, I'm not sure if funeral homes are following through on what the family's wishes are," said Nicodemus. "Just under 50% know what they want to do with the urn, but that's also 50% who don't know!"

He suggested that funeral directors ask families a series of questions; an important one is where they are planning to scatter the cremated remains. "What might be a nice little park [now] might be a Walmart parking lot in three years," said Nicodemus by way of example. "Ask questions: What are they going to do with the remains? Are they going to keep them at home? What if they decide to move? Follow through as you would with burial. Instead of asking which cemetery they are going to use, ask the family what they're going to do with the urn."


This year, 60.9% of respondents said they felt it was very important or somewhat important for a funeral home to have an onsite crematory, which, surprisingly, is down from 63.9% in 2021 and 64.5% in 2020.

Said Nicodemus: "The survey said 61% of respondents felt it was important or very important that a funeral home has its own crematory, and I couldn't agree more. But funeral homes need to get that message across to the families they serve – that their loved one never leaves [the firm's] care and custody, and that the firm knows where [their loved one] is at all times.

Put the fact that you own and operate your own crematory front and center on your website, he suggested. "I think that's becoming more important to people the more they read about litigation and [such cases as] having a third party cremate the wrong body."

This year, just under half of respondents (47.5%) said they would prefer using a full-service funeral home for a cremation, which is down from 57.3% last year, while 19.3% said they would prefer a discount provider, a number that has remained steady over the past few years. The number of respondents expressing no preference increased to more than 30% – up from 21% in 2020.

"No preference' is what I've said to my wife when she asks what I want for dinner," said Nixon. "I used to say, 'I don't care,' but that just doesn't sound right. But 'no preference' and 'I don't care' when choos-



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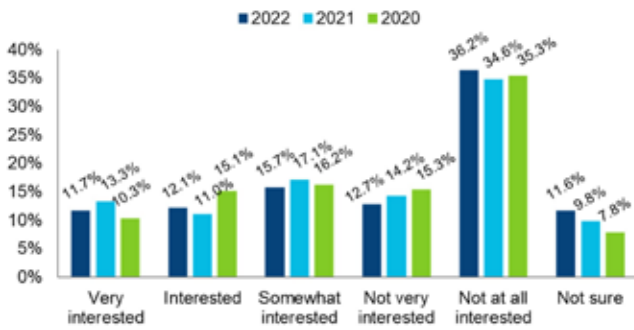
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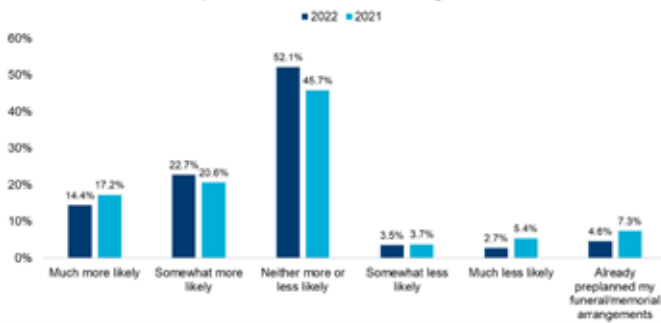
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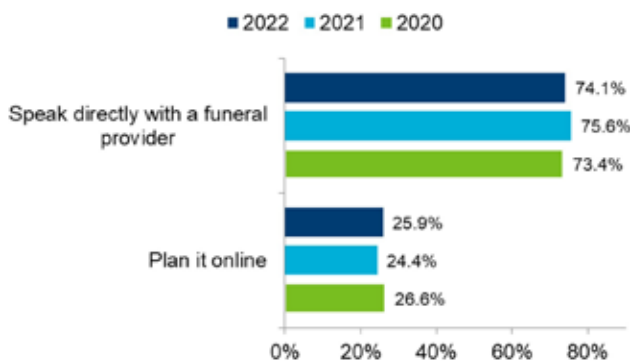
How Interested Would You Be in Witnessing the Start of the Cremation For a Loved One?



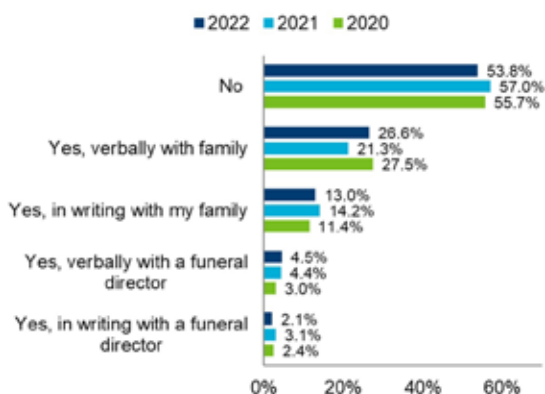
Since the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Are You More or Less Likely to Preplan Your Funeral/memorial Arrangements?



Preferred Way of Making Funeral Prearrangements



Have You Made Any Prearrangements for Yourself?



45% said the cremation service they attended only adequately commemorated the life of their loved one; 7.9% said it was not at all helpful.

59.2% said the burial service they attended was very helpful in paying tribute to a loved one, and 34.5% felt it adequately paid tribute.

ing a funeral home? This seems an area in which consumers need to learn that not all funeral service providers are the same, and it's a point I think needs to be made immediately."

The needle hasn't moved much when it comes to the number of consumers who would want to witness the start of the cremation process. Almost one-quarter (23.8%) said they would be either very interested or interested in witnessing the start of the cremation process, while 36.2% would not be interested at all. These numbers have remained consistent over the course of the survey.

PREARRANGEMENTS

The COVID pandemic has not shown much of an impact spurring people to preplan their funeral services. Since its onset, more than one-third of respondents said they are either much more likely or somewhat more likely to preplan their own funeral/memorial arrangements. Just over half say they were neither more nor less likely to preplan. Of note, 6.2% of respondents said they were less likely to preplan.

A little more than one-quarter of respondents (25.9%) would prefer to make funeral prearrangements online versus speaking directly with a funeral director, a number that has held steady over the years as well.

The survey also found that only 15.1% of respondents have made written prearrangements –

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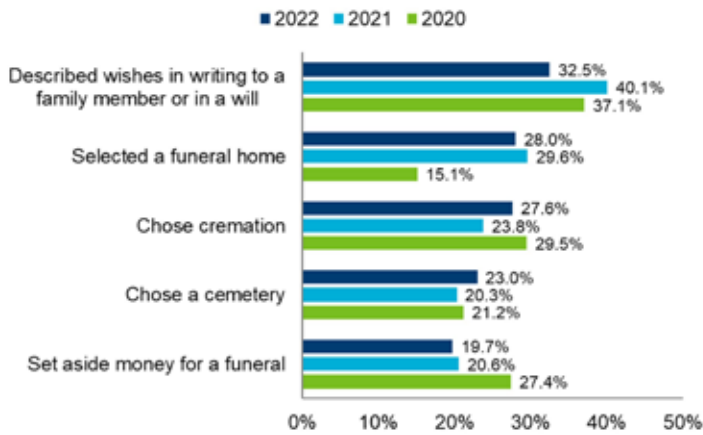
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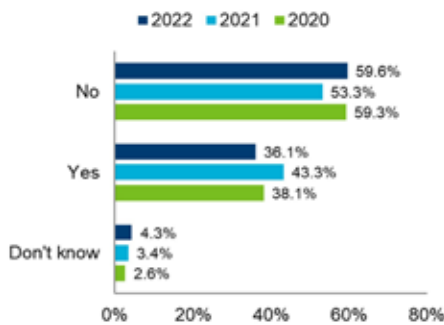


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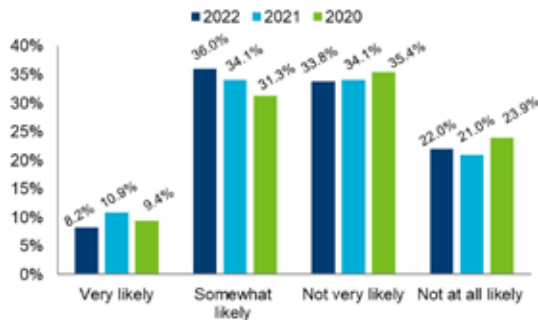
Top Prearrangements Made



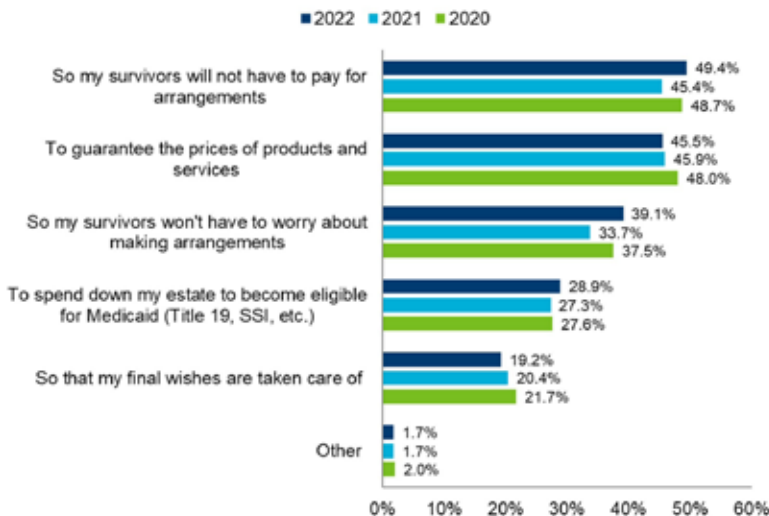
If You Have Prearranged, Have You Prepaid for Any Funeral Arrangements?



If No, Likelihood to Prepay at a Funeral Home Within the Next Five Years



Main Reason for Prepaying for These Arrangements



13% putting their wishes in writing to family and just 2.1% in writing with a funeral director. This year, 53.8% said they have not made any prearrangements, which is down from 57% a year ago, which stands to reason given the younger demographic of this year's survey group compared with that of a year ago.

Of the respondents who claim to have made prearrangements, the most common actions included describing their wishes in writing to a family member or in a will (32.5%), selecting a funeral home (28%), choosing cremation (27.6%), choosing a cemetery (23%) and setting aside money for a funeral (19.7%).

Of the respondents who have made prearrangements, only 36.1% have prepaid for them (down from 43.3% in 2021). Of the 59.6% who have not prepaid, 44.2% said they were very likely or somewhat likely to prepay within the next five years.

Of those who have prepaid, 49.4% said they did so their survivors would not have to pay for those arrangements and/or to guarantee the prices of products and services (45.5%).

Putting a bow on the 2022 consumer survey numbers, Nixon said the takeaway is once again the importance of community education. "We can't reverse the online arrangements, we can't reverse the cremation," he said. "What we can impact is educating consumers about the options with cremation."

When he entered funeral service more than 40 years ago, Nixon shared, almost everyone had a relationship with the funeral director, [and] the funeral directors were out in the community.

"What's changed? People don't have roots anymore, and what is the level of community involvement?" he queried. "I understand [the limitations brought about by] COVID, but this is a conversation we've had *before 2020*." ☰

Deana Gillespie is NFDA research manager. Ed Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.

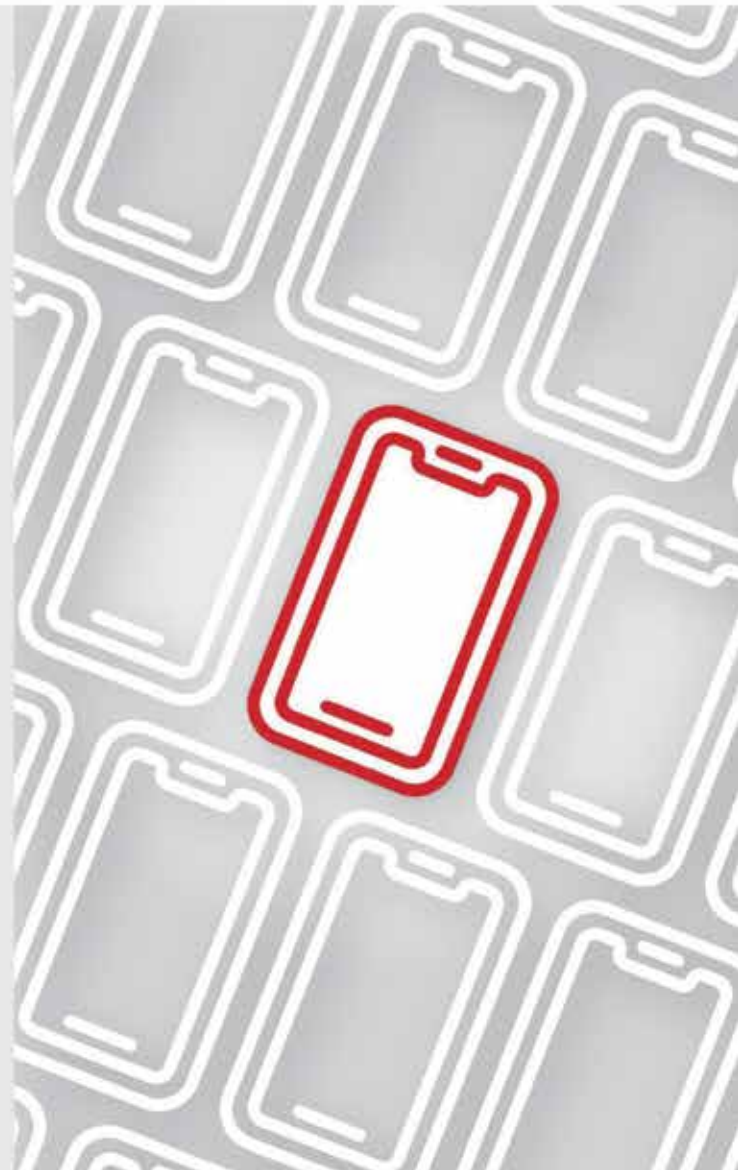


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THE PANDEMIC YEAR 1 STATS

With a dearth of information on funeral service, client statistics can provide some insight on changes propelled by the pandemic.

BY DAVID NIXON

Any article on statistics prompts one of two reactions from people: They either love stats or they don't. I like to think that the funeral home owner stat lovers understand their own business financials and at least have a fundamental grasp of industry data. Unfortunately, those uninterested in stats often don't look at their financials or tax returns beyond the need to

file taxes. While not exactly an indictment, I believe that unless one studies their own profession, they are in the dark.

Frankly, there is a dearth of information on funeral service, and a huge deficit exists on funeral home statistics. Funeral service is classified as a small industry, so you can pay for outside reports on the funeral business, but the number of entries remains minimal. From values paid for a funer-

al business to details on employee salaries, there just isn't enough available data to provide great information. In order to help fill in the void, we offer our business numbers for your perusal.

First, let me qualify the nature of our statistics. We work with a number of independent funeral home owners, many of whom we met more than 40 years ago. Our 2020 statistics represent results from clients entailing over 12,000



funeral calls that year. Some may question this small number, but I feel it is representative.

Several years ago, John Rodenberg, the former owner and president of Federated Funeral Directors of America, told me he believed that a more controlled survey of funeral home statistics would provide more stable findings than larger surveys with many changing participants.

I like to believe our survey encapsulates the more focused group approach that Rodenberg mentioned.

Much has been written and communicated about funeral service results due to the pandemic. Some have even suggested that there was no increase in calls and no change in the cremation rate. One funeral home owner went so far as to state that COVID-19 had generated no additional calls and he had no COVID deaths in his community.

Keep in mind that the numbers presented here represent a consolidation or blend of all of our clients – from S Corps to C Corps to LLCs, including both accrual and cash-basis clients. Also remember that the pandemic impacted only 10 months of 2020, since the onset of additional deaths did not start in earnest until March.

Now, let's get to the stats. For comparison purposes, they reflect our results from 2011-20, as well as the 10-year, five-year and one-year increase or decrease. Our comments focus primarily on the one-year change prompted by the pandemic.

Let's dispel the notion that there were no additional calls from 2019-20. Call volume definitely increased. In my 43 years of working with funeral directors, clients saw some occasional volume spikes higher or lower,

but 5% was probably the largest change in one year. Over that 40-year period, most of the firms stayed relatively the same regarding number of calls, with some minor deviations.

Never in my career have I seen call volume sway as it did in 2020. Our client volume jumped 15% from 2019-20 – an unprecedented event. When family and friends question the real impact of the pandemic, I tell them that general news sources may not meet their criteria for impartiality, so I look at funerals. To me, that is the best reflection of what happened. A 15% increase says it all, in my opinion. Whatever the cause, it happened, it was real and it proved deadly.

Next, let's tackle the question of cremation rate. As many of you experienced, there was an increase in the number of cremations and, therefore, the cremation rate rose in 2020. In the past, the U.S. cremation rate rose as much as 2% per year. More recently, that number had dropped to about 1.6% annually.

For our clients, the 2019 average cremation rate was 44%, which is low compared to some areas of the country, but our clients include areas of 30% cremation rate as well as those areas over 70% cremation. In 2020, the client average cremation rate rose to 49%, a 5% increase in one year.

The conclusion from these first two measurements revealed a definite increase in calls and a more-than-usual advance in cremation.

The chart on the next page showcases comparatives in a summary profit and loss model. We'll briefly go over it line by line to give some perspective.

REVENUE PER CALL

Now the standard for measuring revenue performance, revenue per call (RPC) provides a quick

and beneficial look at a firm's growth (or its loss of ground). The chart shows a 3.3% decrease over 10 years (2011-20). The five-year growth rate was -1.3%, and the one-year rate (2019-20) decreased further, to -3.4%.

Notice that the actual RPC hit \$7,205 in 2011 but was just \$7,210 by 2019, showing no real revenue gain in nine years. You might argue that stagnant revenue portrays a negative outlook for profit as expenses rise. However, look at the 2020 RPC of \$6,968. That 3.4% decline undoubtedly resulted from government restrictions on ceremonies and gatherings. We expect to see the RPC rise again, as evidenced in early results from 2021 and 2022.

COST OF SALES

Over 10 years, average cost of sales (primarily merchandise) showed a steady decline from \$1,121 in 2011 to \$963 in 2020, a 14.1% decrease. As a percentage of revenue, cost of sales saw a decrease of 1.7% over the 10 years. Interestingly, the 2019-20 change reflected a 0.2% increase.

GROSS OPERATING PROFIT

Gross operating profit (GOP) is really just a reflection of revenue versus cost of sales. As revenue rises or falls and cost of sales decreases (historically declining), GOP merely mirrors the outcome of those two components.

TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES

Total operating expenses (TOE) represent the ongoing expenses of a business. On a per-call basis, total operating expenses hit \$5,552 in 2011 and remained rather flat through 2019, when the average TOE registered \$5,544. In 2020, the TOE average fell to \$4,965. The percentage of revenue hovered around 76% or 77% – from



Nixon Consulting, Inc. 10 Year Client Averages

	YEARS ENDING:										10 Year		10	5	1
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average	Median	Year Inc/Dec	Year Inc/Dec	Year Inc/Dec
PER CALL MEASUREMENTS															
Revenue Per Call	\$7,205	\$6,882	\$6,916	\$6,928	\$7,179	\$7,057	\$7,085	\$7,254	\$7,210	\$6,968	\$7,068	\$7,071	-3.3%	-1.3%	-3.4%
Cost of Sales	\$1,121	\$1,073	\$1,093	\$1,063	\$1,088	\$1,015	\$1,012	\$1,023	\$985	\$963	\$1,044	\$1,043	-14.1%	-5.1%	-2.2%
As a % of Revenue	15.6%	15.6%	15.8%	15.3%	15.2%	14.4%	14.3%	14.1%	13.7%	13.8%	14.8%	14.8%	-1.7%	-0.6%	0.2%
Gross Operating Profit	\$6,084	\$5,809	\$5,823	\$5,865	\$6,091	\$6,042	\$6,073	\$6,231	\$6,225	\$6,005	\$6,025	\$6,058	-1.3%	-0.6%	-3.5%
As a % of Revenue	84.4%	84.4%	84.2%	84.7%	84.8%	85.6%	85.7%	85.9%	86.3%	86.2%	85.2%	85.2%	1.7%	0.6%	-0.2%
Total Operating Expenses	\$5,552	\$5,113	\$5,182	\$5,094	\$5,242	\$5,385	\$5,243	\$5,452	\$5,544	\$4,965	\$5,277	\$5,243	-10.6%	-7.8%	-10.4%
As a % of Revenue	77.1%	74.3%	74.9%	73.5%	73.0%	76.3%	74.0%	75.2%	76.9%	71.3%	74.6%	74.6%	-5.8%	-5.1%	-5.6%
Net Operating Profit	\$532	\$696	\$641	\$771	\$849	\$657	\$830	\$779	\$681	\$1,040	\$748	\$734	95.5%	58.3%	52.7%
As a % of Revenue	7.4%	10.1%	9.3%	11.1%	11.8%	9.3%	11.7%	10.7%	9.4%	14.9%	10.6%	10.4%	7.5%	5.6%	5.5%
Other Income	\$100	\$57	\$93	\$16	\$5	\$61	\$70	\$9	\$81	\$1	\$49	\$59	-99.0%	-98.4%	-98.8%
Other Expense	\$279	\$362	\$318	\$298	\$234	\$251	\$274	\$305	\$293	\$257	\$287	\$286	-7.9%	2.4%	-12.3%
Net Profit Pre-Tax	\$353	\$391	\$416	\$489	\$620	\$467	\$626	\$483	\$469	\$784	\$510	\$476	122.1%	67.9%	67.2%
As a % of Revenue	4.9%	5.7%	6.0%	7.1%	8.6%	6.6%	8.8%	6.7%	6.9%	11.3%	7.2%	6.8%	6.4%	4.6%	4.7%
Book EBITDA	\$722	\$869	\$785	\$799	\$988	\$841	\$949	\$860	\$879	\$1,151	\$884	\$865	59.4%	36.9%	30.9%
As a % of Revenue	10.0%	12.6%	11.4%	11.5%	13.8%	11.9%	13.4%	11.9%	12.2%	16.5%	12.5%	12.1%	6.5%	4.6%	4.3%
Casket & Service Average	\$6,897	\$7,609	\$7,778	\$8,069	\$8,108	\$7,897	\$8,132	\$8,013	\$8,095	\$7,664	\$7,826	\$7,955	11.1%	-2.9%	-5.3%
Cremation Sales Average	\$3,130	\$3,642	\$3,720	\$3,673	\$4,080	\$3,990	\$3,955	\$3,831	\$3,926	\$3,108	\$3,705	\$3,775	-0.7%	-22.1%	-20.8%
Cremation Recovery %	45.4%	47.3%	47.8%	45.5%	50.3%	50.5%	48.6%	47.8%	48.5%	40.5%	47.3%	47.8%	-4.8%	-10.0%	-7.9%

Includes S Corps, C Corps, LLC as well as Cash & Accrual Basis

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77.1% in 2011 to 76.9% in 2019. In 2020, the operating expenses dollars dropped 10.4% from the prior year, averaging just 71.3% of revenue. A few items under total operating expenses yielded significant changes from 2019-20:

- Personnel/benefits were down 16% from 2019-20. Certainly, the lack of ceremonies held while state governments imposed restrictions reduced the need for overtime, casual labor and corresponding reductions in payroll and payroll taxes to a degree.
- Auto expenses fell 29% in those two years. Obviously, a lack of ceremonies pushed new-auto purchases lower, as well as general auto operating expenses.
- Marketing expenses dropped 25% as firms held back on advertising and promotion during the early part of the pandemic.

NET OPERATING PROFIT

Net operating profit (NOP) indi-

cates a 10-year improvement of 95.5%, a rather steady increase beneficial to funeral homes. From 2019-20, net profit rose 52.7%, reaching \$1,040 per call in 2020, the highest NOP in 10 years. Over the last two years, firms experienced a 3.4% decline in revenue per call in combination with a 10.4% reduction in operating expenses, yielding sizable financial improvements for funeral homes.

OTHER INCOME AND EXPENSE

“Other income and expense” consists of non-operating revenue or expenses with minimal changes in dollars from 2019-20.

NET PROFIT PRETAX

Net profit pretax results reveal a 67.2% improvement in the latest one-year statistics and a jump of 122.1% from 2011-20. As mentioned, the heart of improved profit centered on expense management. As a percentage of rev-

enue, the 10-year average was 7.2%; it started out at 4.9% in 2011, rose to 6.5% in 2019 and then to 11.3% in 2020, the highest mark in 10 years.

BOOK EBITDA

Book EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) is not the same as normalized EBITDA used in valuations. Book EBITDA simply provides a glimpse at a firm’s cash flow – to see how it rises or falls year over year.

Book EBITDA showed relatively stable results from 2011-19. Some observers might call the results boringly dull. Keep in mind that 2011 was still within the grasp of the Great Recession. From 2019-20, book EBITDA increased 30.9%. Once again, management control of expenses proved beneficial.

CASKET AND SERVICE AVERAGE

The casket and service average,

once the staple of funeral home measurements, revealed a 10-year increase of 11.1%. As it's a slowly diminishing part of funeral service, we expect the increase to resume, but with fewer burials each year, the revenue contribution will decline.

The casket and service average fell 5.3% from 2019-20 and showed a five-year 2.9% reduction. Meanwhile, with cremation rates above 50% for many firms, this bastion of funeral service success – casket and service – no longer provides real insight into future funeral business profitability. Certainly, the revenue from caskets and burial services remains strong for some firms; in our 2020 client statistics, casket and burial service constituted nearly 60% of total revenue, but that is 5% lower than in 2011.

CREMATION SALES AVERAGE

In funeral service these days, the cremation sales average represents the true barometer of funeral service revenue. We sell fewer and fewer caskets and outer burial containers each year as consumers embrace cremation.

You may find it hard to understand, but most funeral home owners have not grasped the importance of cremation sales. Mired in caskets, they readily know a specific solid bronze or copper model in all its fine detail. Yet many do not see the same intricacies with cremation.

Cremation is the future of funeral service. Some would rightly argue that cremation is already their main business.

(You and your staff may want to take The Fluency Test outlined on page 85.)

With cremation sales at the heart of funeral service, it was troubling to see that the cremation sales average dropped 20.8% from 2019-20. As mentioned

earlier, the pandemic restricted gatherings, which also impacted cremation. What is more troubling is the five-year decline of 22.1%. That the 10-year average fell 0.7% adds fuel to the fire. Starting at just \$3,130 in 2011, the cremation sales average fell to \$3,108 in 2020. We already mentioned that the pandemic reduced gatherings and therefore revenue. Will the average grow once again or will it stagnate? My guess is that many firms' averages will languish while more confident firms will see growth.

CREMATION RECOVERY PERCENTAGE

Nearly 30 years ago, I introduced the phrase "cremation recovery percentage." In the beginning, CRP was a bit above 30%, steadily increasing at times but decreasing during turbulent economic periods.

CRP measures the revenue recovery of a cremation revenue versus the revenue of a burial. The chart shows a cremation recovery percentage of 40.5% for 2021. CRP was calculated by



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dividing the cremation sales average (\$3,108) by the casket and service sale average (\$7,664).

Another way to look at the recovery is to divide the casket and service average by the cremation sales average to get a multiple. Using the same numbers from 2021 (\$7,664 divided by \$3,108), we find that it took 2.47 cremations to match the revenue from one burial. At its peak in 2015 and 2016, we found that it took two cremations to equal one burial in revenue.

The chart shows rather steady improvement starting at 45.4% in 2011 to 50% in both 2015 and 2016. Then CRP remained

rather flat from 2017-19 (48.6%, 47.8% and 48.5%, respectively). I observed great reluctances to increase cremation prices and burial prices following the end of the Great Recession, which the numbers support. Recession and fear of discount providers seemed to influence owners' decision-making.

The CRP drop-off in 2020 is no real surprise. Governmental restrictions on ceremonies were again at the heart of the decline. On the other hand, this intrusion on ceremonies seemed to exacerbate funeral home owners' fears of discount cremation providers, prompting many to hold

their prices rather than offset rising expenses. In many ways, the gains in CRP from 2011-19 (45.4% to 48.5%, respectively) more than disappeared in one year as the measurement fell to 40.5% in 2020. Seeing CRP declines of 4.8% from 2011-20, 10% from 2016-20 and 7.9% from 2019-20 clearly confirms the trend in cremation recovery – a trend needing reversal if many funeral homes are to survive.



e've covered the numbers at a high level in this article, but you may find more telling trends inside the numbers. Here are some

THE FLUENCY TEST

Whether you offer goods, services or both, it pays to know your product, your service and your consumer. Funeral service is no different in that regard. Being able to communicate with people is crucial.

In a simple but effective test, you and your arranging staff may be able rate your proficiency in burial and cremation offerings. Let's try The Fluency Test.

First, gather a few fellow staff members. Let them know this is a test of knowledge, nothing more, and that you'll take it first. As you mull over your offerings, focus on your favorite casket. Then talk about that unit, describing it to your colleagues in detail and relaying why you like that particular casket and why you love to tell other funeral directors about it or often present it to client-families.

Next, think of cremation services. Tell your co-workers about the firm's cremation services, in particular describing your favorite service and explaining why it's your favorite. Did you select a traditional service ending in cremation as your favorite? If you did, perhaps you are still geared toward a burial-like experience. Is traditional the most popular cremation choice of your client-families? If so, you are probably fairly fluent and successful.

If traditional service ending in cremation is not your most frequently chosen client-family service, how fluent are you in describing cremation with a memorial service, or even direct cremation?

In 1979, when I first began working with funeral home owners, it was amazing to hear them talk about caskets in glowing

terms. Funeral directors would cite, in detail, their favorite casket: the shell, the color, the interior, the gauge. And they not only knew the details of the caskets on their showroom floor but quite often the details of competitors' caskets. Years ago, there were many casket companies around the country, and most funeral directors knew most of them as well.

Despite the slow decline of casket sales, the focus on caskets continues. Perhaps casket knowledge just stays with you because the recall of current caskets remains strong. In my experience, talking about caskets still overrides talking about cremation.

This test is to determine how fluent you are at describing your favorite casket as opposed to your favorite cremation service. Ideally, you would appear

equally fluent in both, with the same degree of elegance, effortlessness and enthusiasm.

At the end of your test, ask for opinions on how you did. If staff can be honest, you may get some helpful feedback. Then have your staff tackle the test. They have advance knowledge about its true intent, but the results will still be revealing. You might find out which arranger better explains cremation.

It's a simple test but one that reveals whether your mindset has yet shifted to this cremation-focused business. When any arranger can cite cremation services as fluently as their favorite casket, you will know they are truly presentation ready.

By the way, how well did you do on The Fluency Test? Can you speak "cremation" as well as you speak "casket"?



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additional, unpublished stats you might find interesting:

- Our clients averaged 17.6% of their total revenue from cremation services and containers (no urns) in 2011. In 2020, that number rose to 23%, a slow but steady transition. Over that same period, some high-cremation firms saw their revenue from cremation jump from 40% to 60% of total revenue, while other firms experienced increases from 22% to 40%. When a firm hits a cremation rate above 50%, the impact on revenue magnifies while revenue from burial caskets diminishes as much as 6% or more. Interestingly, revenue from bur-

al services consistently averaged 39% of total revenue in 2019 and 2020, up from the 2011 average of 37.8%.

Perhaps the most important finding is that burial service revenue generally held steady or rose slightly from 2011-20, while casket revenue declined nearly the same percentage (6%) as cremation services revenue increased.

In summary, what do the stats tell us? Call volumes rose in 2020 an unprecedented 15% increase as funeral home owners watched various governments place restrictions on gatherings and ceremony. Owners responded by controlling spending, a frequent practice during the Great Reces-

sion, but most voted not to raise their own prices. The result was a productive and profitable 2020.

Will call volume continue to rise? Will client-families return to ceremonies and gatherings? How will funeral home owners respond to prices and expenses? The early indications of 2021 show that some firms increased their service charge and additional fees, and some client-families did embrace ceremony.

It appears to be a mixed bag on volume for 2021 in preliminary results. Call volume was high again last year for some firms, while others already felt the impact of the call volume correction – lower volume than in 2020. A few funeral homes served notably fewer calls in 2021 than in 2019, but the 2021 stats will most likely set that record straight.

In light of the current near-recession economy, we may see many client-families opting for reduced services again, akin to the findings of the Great Recession, when consumers chose to hold on to their money. After the recession, cremation rates did not fall back but continued their steady rise, which eventually led to installing cremation as king of funeral service.

As noted earlier, real funeral service statistics are hard to find, qualify and quantify since the profession, in dollars, is small. As a consultant, statistics and averages are always intriguing and sometimes enlightening. However, I am reminded of famed Greek philosopher Mediocrates, who reportedly stated, “Eh... good enough.”

Though Mediocrates seems mythical, the point is well taken: Who wants to be average? ☰

David Nixon, CMC, is president of Nixon Consulting in Chatham, Illinois.



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CREATING QUALITY CONTENT

Working with outside writers and editors on your firm's marketing? Start them on a solid foundation with a content brief.

BY WELTON HONG

Content marketing trends come and go, but I always tell people that the stable ground on which they can stand is quality content. Google shakes up things with every algorithm update, but its aim is always to rank high-quality content relevant to searcher intent.

Consumer needs and their deathcare preferences evolve over time, but trustworthy, informative content will always help you connect with families and increase your chances of converting them into clientele.

And there's another thing that never changes: Creating that high-quality content on a regular basis can be difficult. It takes time, creative energy and writing talent – resources busy funeral directors often find themselves short on.

According to the most recent NFDA statistics, the

average funeral home has about seven employees, with only about three of those working full time. Consistently writing blog posts, social media posts and other content for deathcare marketing can put a burden on smaller teams and even potentially impact the quality of service provided to at-need families and those preplanning.

Outsourcing content creation or writing reduces the burden you place on in-house staff. It also lets you benefit from a larger well of creativity and writing talent, increasing your chances of publishing high-quality content that may help your pages rank higher in search engine results.

These benefits are more likely if you start with a solid foundation when working with writers outside your team. That foundation comes in the form of a content brief.

WHAT IS A CONTENT BRIEF?

A content brief is a guiding document for anyone working on marketing content for their business. It tells writers, editors and others who your target audience is, what your value proposition is and what types of preferences you have for content.

You can create content briefs at three main levels:

BRAND BRIEFS define the voice and style for your firm, so all content across all channels is consistent.

PROJECT BRIEFS define specifics for each project, as what you need for blog posts might be different than what you need for social media or email marketing.

TASK BRIEFS provide specific instructions for an individual piece of content, such as an outline for a blog post.

Comprehensive briefs ensure that writers and editors have the information they need to create consistent copy that sounds like it comes from the same source – your funeral services firm.

If you work with anyone outside your internal team to create content for social media, your death-care blog, emails or even direct-mail brochures, you need a content brief. Even if you write all content in-house, a brief can help your team stay on the same page with content requirements.

BRAND BRIEFS

A brand brief should provide everything writers need to create content that matches the normal voice and tone for your firm's marketing content. Include the following in your brand brief to achieve this:

TARGET AUDIENCE When content creators know who the target audience is, it's easier for them to write content that meets reader needs. A business-to-business firm that sells deathcare supplies to funeral homes creates content that sounds different than content for a funeral home marketing to potential clientele. A funeral home specializing in unique/luxury memorial options shouldn't have marketing content that sounds the same as one specializing in cremation options.

UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION Let content creators know what makes your firm unique and what sets you apart from the competition.

IMPORTANT INDUSTRY SPECIFICS It's always good to work with content creators who understand your profession, but don't assume that people outside your internal team will know important deathcare specifics. For example, you might want to

include a basic description or links to information about the FTC's Funeral Rule or include a glossary of niche words such as columbarium, grave liner or cremation retort if you expect writers to use these phrases.

VOICE AND TONE CUES Provide guidance about voice and tone. Let writers know whether you want formal or conversational content (the article you're reading right now is conversational, by the way). You can also provide words that describe your preferred tone, such as serious, professional, humorous or playful. Voice and tone can be difficult to describe, though, so include links to content that demonstrates the voice and tone you want. This can be content on your pages or on another site you like; it doesn't even have to be content related to deathcare.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE PREFERENCES Finally, detail any grammar and style rules you wish to keep consistent across all content, including:

- Do you use the Oxford/serial comma?
- Should titles and subheadings should be in title case or sentence case?
- How to treat numbers/measurements
- What style conventions do you follow (e.g., Chicago Manual of Style or AP Stylebook)?

PROJECT BRIEFS

The project brief offers information writers need to create a specific *type* of content, such as social media posts or blogs. You should have a project brief for each type of content you hire people to complete.

If you only work with others on one type of content, such as blog posts, you can combine the brand and project brief into a single document for convenience. Either way, the project brief should include:

TYPE OF CONTENT AND ITS PURPOSE Let writers know whether they're working on blog posts, landing pages, marketing emails or social media posts. Include your goal for the content type so writers know how to position the content to help you achieve desired results.

WORD OR CHARACTER COUNTS Let writers know how long you expect content to be. This is especially important if you're paying by the word because you need writers to stay within appropriate word counts for your budget.

DESIRED STRUCTURE Give a basic overview of the structure you want. For example, you might say you want a social media post that includes a hook, question or interesting fact, along with a link or call

Outsourcing content creation or writing reduces staff burden and lets you benefit from a larger well of creativity and writing talent.

But even if you write all content in-house, a brief can help your team stay on the same page with content requirements.

to action (CTA). Or you might ask for a blog post that includes an introduction, supporting points and a conclusion with a CTA.

GENERAL DETAILS Provide information about any details you want included in *all* content that falls under this project. This might include:

- Use of primary or secondary keywords in certain locations, such as the first paragraph or subheadings
- A certain number of subheadings, such as at least four for 1,000-word blog posts
- Calls to action, such as a link to your “contact us” form or preplanning sign-up page at the end of every blog post
- Internal links to other pages on your site
- External links when a writer includes specific statistics or facts that might need backing up.

TASK BRIEFS

Task briefs should be short and include only the specific details writers need to complete the project parameters. Some examples of items you might include in task brief are:

- Keywords for that piece
- Internal or external links to include
- Research or inspiration links to help the writer get started
- Talking points or outlines for the piece
- Quotes or stats you want included in the piece.

The task brief fills in all the blanks left in the project brief. For instance, if the project brief notes that writers should include the primary keyword three times and include the required internal links in the body copy, the task brief must provide that keyword and those links.

If you have more than one target audience or service option, you can also let writers know what’s most relevant to the task at hand. For instance, you might want three blog posts that all follow the same project brief, except the audience is slightly different for each. Let writers know in the task brief that one is about preplanning targeted to luxury spenders, one is about preplanning for millennials and one is about at-need budget services.

A FEW LAST TIPS

While it’s important to cover your preferences completely, you should also keep all content briefs as concise and user-friendly as possible. Use bullet points, tables and subheadings to organize instructions so your team and external writers/editors can scan them quickly when looking for a specific point.

Remember to maximize whatever resources you decide to use for deathcare content marketing. If you work with external writers or writing teams, ask them for feedback about your content briefs and instructions. They can help you dial things in to ensure that you’re providing everything writers need to create copy that aligns with your business and audience needs. ☰

Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing and author of Making Your Phone Ring With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes.





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RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Evaluate the potential risks if you're considering posting about a public issue on your firm's social media profiles.

BY JENNY MCCLANAHAN AND CAITLIN BRAY

Those in funeral service are no strangers to personal and others' loss and tragedy. But when devastation strikes en masse, causing a nation or even the world to grieve, what role do funeral professionals play in the social analysis of such an event? Simply, should a funeral home post about it on social media?

Adding even one small post to a larger conversation on a mass shooting, for instance, may seem a harmless enough gesture, especially since it's driven by only the best intentions – to offer support to those affected.

In a poorly executed post, however, such factors as timing, rhetoric and overall sensitivity have the potential to turn your well-intentioned message into a controversy that poses a risk to your firm's brand reputation.

While the content of your firm's social media profiles is ultimately up to you, there are a few potential risks to consider if you're wondering whether to post about a public issue on your funeral home's social media. If you think the risk to your firm's brand is too great, you can always post to your personal social media accounts in support of those affected or to voice your thoughts.

advertise one's product or brand.”

This was an especially popular marketing tactic used by many brands during the pandemic, a worldwide event that saturated the news and created opportunity for businesses to capitalize on a shared experience. While it can be a very effective tactic in some circumstances, newsjacking can sometimes also be seen as desperate or insensitive if done improperly, especially if the news is negative in nature.

Before posting to your firm's social media about a piece of news, ask yourself: Is my motivation to post about this topic grounded in a desire to market my business? If so, you'll need to use your best judgment to determine whether it's appropriate – and, most importantly, whether your target market will believe it's appropriate – to use current events as a marketing opportunity.

And even if the purpose of the post isn't to market your funeral home's services, remember that intentions matter little when it comes to social media. There are many consumers of the belief that any communication from a business counts as marketing. Therefore, any message you put out in regard to the event may be perceived or interpreted by your audience as newsjacking. Yes, even

online, creating a very public issue that could affect your brand's reputation in the community. If you still believe the message is worth posting, you'll need to either accept this risk or take measures to mitigate it.

RISK: PRECEDENT

Unfortunately, we live in a world in which tragic events happen every day, and though you're not doing so intentionally, posting about a certain national or world event sets a precedent that your social media profile will continue to address current events. Can you remain committed to that standard? How will you judge which events merit a post? What happens if you miss a piece of news or decide not to post about it?

At best, your social media profile will have an inconsistent presence. At worst, the sporadic posting may be seen as a statement on the issues your funeral home supports or doesn't support, potentially costing you the business of families that disagree with the interpreted statements.

What's more, you must remember that your social media profile lives on in perpetuity. If someone makes their way to your profile and peruses old posts, it could be somewhat shocking or upsetting to be reminded of a tragic event,

Even if the purpose of the post isn't to market your firm's services, remember that intentions matter little when it comes to social media.

RISK: NEWSJACKING

Though you may not be aware of the term, it's likely you've witnessed “newsjacking” in action. Coined by David Meerman Scott, who wrote a book on the subject in 2011, newsjacking is defined as “the practice of taking advantage of current events or news stories in such a way as to promote or

if you don't offer your services or put your logo on the post, it's likely, if not guaranteed, that someone with a deep-seated mistrust of funeral homes will see your message as an attempt to exploit the news to your firm's advantage in some way.

What could be worse is that they may see fit to share their opinion

especially if they are dealing with a personal tragedy at the time.

Out of the context in which that event was at the height of the news cycle, the post may seem disarming and out of place. Once again, this is a risk that may be weighed differently depending on the funeral home, but it's a risk nonetheless.

CHECKLIST

If you feel the urge to make a post about something in the news, this list of questions can help you determine the risk level and whether the post is worth it.

1. Is your funeral home directly connected to the event in some way?

The closer the connection between your funeral home and the event in question, the less likely you are to receive backlash for a message about it. This connection could be due to geography, interpersonal relationships or other circumstances.

2. Do you have something unique to add to the conversation, or have you taken any action to affect the situation directly?

Though thoughts and prayers are

a kind gesture, it's likely that those affected by a tragic event have already received an influx of such gestures. A donation or some such action contributes something positive and is a more solid message to send.

3. How likely is it that your post will reach anyone directly affected by the event?

While your message may be directed to those affected by tragedy, it's unlikely to actually reach them if they are outside your community.

4. How familiar is your community with your funeral home?

The existing connection with your community will influence the way your message will be received. If the community feels familiar with your firm's brand, the message may be better received than if this

is their first encounter with your funeral home.

5. Does anyone expect your firm to address this issue for any reason?

Again, your standing in the community will influence the way your message is received. If you've been in the community for many years and hold a position of authority, it may be that some people look to you for guidance or comfort during troubled times. If you're newer to the area or don't have much of a connection with the community, people may wonder what gives you the authority to speak on the issue.

6. How often do you post on your funeral home's social media profile?

If you're consistently active on your social media, a post about something unrelated to your fu-

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neral home may stick out less than if you rarely post to your profile.

7. How likely is it that you will post about a similar event in the future?

Consider the precedent you're setting and whether you want to commit to posting about other tragedies or crises in the future.

The need to help during times of crisis or tragedy is an overwhelming feeling, especially for funeral professionals whose entire lives are dedicated to doing exactly that. When public crises and tragedies do arise, we encourage you to follow that urge to help, whether it means raising money, volunteering your services, providing caskets, etc.

But be sure that if you do make any public displays of support, you've thought them through carefully and considered the impact your actions could have on your funeral home.

In tense situations, it's easy to become reactive and make too-hasty decisions for fear of feeling left behind or out of touch. To avoid this, consider sitting down with a few trusted stakeholders ahead of time and putting together a plan for how your firm will handle such situations. ☰

In her role as @need Marketing's creative director, Jenny McClanahan oversees the many creative projects the company produces for partners. Paired with her design expertise, her extensive background in managing operations, creatives and art direction enables her to produce some of the most effective and engaging art in the funeral marketing space.

Caitlin Bray serves as agency copywriter for @need Marketing. Her education and background in writing and strategic brand communication lend to the precise and engaging language she provides for creative projects.



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VIOLENCE ANGER

**Understanding it, mourning it
and using it to effect change.**

BY ALAN D. WOLFELT, PH.D.



Editor's note: Nearly 50 people were killed in the mass shootings in Buffalo, New York; Uvalde, Texas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Highland Park, Illinois, over the course of seven weeks this summer. Dr. Alan Wolfelt, recognized as one of North America's leading death educators and grief counselors, has been fielding calls, emails and texts from journalists, colleagues, friends and family.

Can you speak to what people reaching out to you are saying?

What they are experiencing in the aftermath of these deaths is traumatic grief, which is normal grief that has the added component of intense symptoms caused by the violent nature of the incident. Traumatic grief typically includes many heightened emotions, but one of the most pronounced is often anger.

And almost everyone I've heard from is angry about these recent shootings.

Having some involvement with the funeral home and funeral directors who have provided services for the families in Uvalde has put me over the edge. I, too, can no longer tolerate or stay silent in the face of the mass murder of children, teachers, moviegoers, shoppers and those attending worship services.

As we reflect on these realities, let's talk about our anger spurred by violence and how to mourn it.

While anger, rage and blame in grief can feel unpleasant and sometimes even scary, they're normal human emotions. It's important to understand that anger is a form of protest. When we don't like something that's happened, especially if we think it's unfair, we naturally get mad. It's built into our biology.

Children are often our best teachers about grief. Think of toddlers when their favorite toy is yanked out of their hands. The toddler wants the toy; when it's taken, their instinctive reaction is to scream or cry or hit. When something we care about is taken from us, our instinctive reaction may be much the same. We protest by getting angry.

Relatedly, the explosive emotions are rooted in the concept of fairness. Whenever we believe that something "should be" a certain way, we often feel angry if it doesn't turn out that way. Again, our anger is in protest to what we perceive as an injustice. It's

Anger is a form of protest. When we don't like something, especially if it seems unfair, we naturally get mad. It's built into our biology.

an emotion based on our expectations and understanding of social norms. If a child is shot and killed, we understandably feel that the death is unfair. Young people should not die. We might rage over this injustice. I have heard a lot of people raging since the Uvalde massacre.

And carrying around such anger can be debilitating...

Explosive emotions such as anger tend to feel active and powerful. When we're angry, we're riled up. We've got righteousness in our corner and we're fixing for a fight. If we act out in anger, we may feel like we're at least "doing something."

Similarly, anger may give us a false sense of control over things that are out of our control. It is often (but not always) directed outward. It focuses on other people and situations and tries to tell them what they should have done, what they should do and how they should be. This is part of the power construct of anger.

You've said that anger exists and accepting it as a normal human emotion is the first step toward mourning it.

Anger is also functional. As a "fight" response to an immediate threat, anger's evolutionary purpose is to spur us to respond aggressively when we need to, in the here and now, in order to save our life or the lives of those we love. In the modern world, we rarely have to fight for our lives, but still, anger can move us to take necessary action. If we use anger to motivate us toward effective problem solving, for example, we're putting the evolutionary utility of anger to good use.

In grief, anger is a bit like the numbness and denial we naturally experience right after a loss. In the early days, numbness and denial protect us from the full

force of what has happened, allowing us to absorb the reality slowly over time. In fact, I often call them the “shock absorbers of grief.” They help us survive.

After traumatic loss, our anger similarly often protects us from our more helpless, painful feelings, such as fear, guilt and sadness. I often call these explosive emotions “survival-oriented protest.”

So, we can honor and thank our anger – for a time. But just as we must work to soften our numbness and denial in grief, we must also work to soften our anger, so that we can fully encounter the necessary pain it has done such a good job of guarding us against.

You’ve also said that while anger can feel powerful, active and even good, it’s not meant to be an

So, we can honor and thank our anger – for a time – but we must also work to soften it, to encounter the necessary pain it has done such a good job of guarding us against.

emotion that our bodies sustain for a long period of time.

Evolutionarily, it’s meant to give us a quick burst of energy. When anger is prolonged, on the other hand, it stresses the body. Studies have shown strong correlations between anger and high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease and weakened immune system. Anger makes people sick; it even kills them.

In the emotional arena, scientists have found that anger is linked to anxiety and depression. Again, while anger is a normal human emotion, feeling angry all the time is not normal. A tendency toward volatile, angry outbursts is also physically, emotionally and socially damaging.

Spiritually, wrestling with anger is largely about wrestling with the big “whys” of human existence. Why do bad things have to happen? Why are we here? In this way, anger and spirituality may naturally go hand-in-hand. But over the long term, ongoing, unrelenting anger can also get in the way of spiritual experiences such as awe, gratitude and joy.

It’s normal to have anger when bad things happen, as you said, but...

Our anger is a natural symptom of our grief, but we shouldn’t live in a constant, ongoing state of anger, however, because it’s bad for our bodies, minds and spirits.

What we can do is mourn our anger. Mourning means taking our inner grief and expressing it outside ourselves. When we cry or talk about happened, we’re

mourning. When we pray or meditate on peace, we’re mourning. When we attend vigils or light candles in memory of the victims, we’re mourning.

Mourning softens our anger. It tempers the biochemical stress reaction in our bodies and helps move us from crisis mode to functional-living mode. It helps us to integrate our grief and continue on.

We can also take the naturally active nature of anger and use it to effect change, a key component of the utility of anger. When we use our normal anger to do something *about* a problem, we are both mourning and helping craft progress. We’re using our anger as fuel to prevent at least some unnecessary future loss and grief.

Those angry about the violence can now use their anger as fuel to create positive change. I encourage everyone to educate themselves about the options and then support those you learn are likely to be most effective. Not only can your advocacy make a difference, but it can also help heal your personal anger.

My hope is that understanding and even embracing your anger over such violence will not only help you mourn and integrate your normal and necessary grief but also help our country find a safer, less violent way forward. ☐

Alan Wolfelt is recognized as one of North America’s leading death educators and grief counselors. He is scheduled to speak in Uvalde, Texas, September 20-21.

His books on grief for both caregivers and grieving people have sold more than a million copies worldwide and are translated into many languages. He is founder and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado, and a past recipient of the Association of Death Education and Counseling’s Death Educator Award.

Contact Wolfelt at 970-217-7069, drwolfelt@centerforloss.com or centerforloss.com.

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2022 NFDA International Convention & Expo

Seminars and Workshops

EXPO HOURS OCTOBER 10: 12 – 5 P.M. OCTOBER 11: 12 – 5 P.M. OCTOBER 12: 9 A.M. – 12 P.M.

PRECONVENTION SEMINARS

All NFDA Preconvention Seminars require separate registration. Sign up at nfda.org/preconvention.

**Friday, October 7 –
Sunday, October 9**

Certified Celebrant Training

**Friday 1 – 6 p.m.
Saturday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Sunday 8 a.m. – 12 p.m.**



*Glenda Stansbury, InSight Institute,
and Matt Bailey, President, Bailey
Family Funeral Homes*

As families' wishes evolve, it is important for a firm to offer a variety of services to meet their needs and exceed their expectations. Fewer families are incorporating religious rites into memorial services now, so how do you fill that gap? Many firms look to celebrants and find it most economical to train staff to accommodate these cus-

tomized services. A certified celebrant works with a funeral director to provide a personalized service that reflects the personality and life of the deceased. (17 CE hours through InSight Institute)

Separate registration is required.

\$865 NFDA members or eligible non-funeral directors; \$995 nonmember funeral directors. Includes three-day seminar, light meals and refreshments.

Saturday, October 8

NFDA Cremation Certification Program

8 a.m. – 4 p.m.



*Mike Nicodemus,
NFDA Vice President
of Cremation Services*

Whether you currently own and/or operate a crematory, are thinking of opening one or want to evaluate a third party, this training is essential for your success. The program covers best practices for safe, proper and ethical crematory operations; sets the standard for excellence, compliance and integrity in cremation services; and provides the information you require to address potential cre-

mation liability issues. NFDA offers the only cremation certification program specifically created to protect funeral directors and the families they serve. The seminar and test are based on the NFDA Cremation Standards for Funeral Service Professionals manual. CE and certification require passing the online cremation certification test. (7 CE hours)

Separate registration is required. Onsite registration available 7:30-8 a.m.

\$525 NFDA members and qualifying nonmembers; \$695 nonmember funeral directors; \$160 funeral service students. Includes refreshments and lunch.

NFDA Arranger Training

8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.



*Melissa Posey
Loose, MA, LFD,
NFDA Training
and Development
Manager*

Learn how to deliver attentive service before, during and after the arrangement conference with NFDA's own creative five-step process. This high-energy, interactive program provides those meeting with families the tools they need to convey the value of the funeral

and design unique, life-honoring events. Through both small- and large-group discussions, problem-solving and creative collaboration, attendees will leave with fresh approaches for meeting families' needs both inside and outside the arrangement conference. (Up to 8 CE hours)

Separate registration is required. Onsite registration available 7:30-8 a.m.

\$495 NFDA members and qualifying nonmembers; \$625 nonmember funeral directors; \$160 funeral service students. Includes refreshments and lunch.

Sunday, October 9

Extreme Restoration Case Solutions: What to Do and Use

8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.



*Karl Wenzel, CFSP,
Founder of Canadian
School of Advanced
PREP*

Wenzel will illustrate step-by-step techniques

to make viewing possible when faced with the worst restoration cases imaginable, including how to chemically treat and restore individuals at various levels of decomposition and trauma. Expand your knowledge and comfort level to tackle the most difficult cases. Chemical selection and techniques will be discussed and new prep room products/techniques presented. Join the discussion on how to solve these modern-day dilemmas in the preparation room. (4 CE hours)

Separate registration is required.

\$180 NFDA members before September 20 and \$205 after September 20; \$255 nonmember funeral directors before September 20 and \$280 after September 20; \$90 funeral service students.

A Note About Continuing Education

2022 Convention seminars and workshops are approved for continuing education by the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice, most state boards and many Canadian provinces. CE information for individual states will be posted onsite near the workshops and listed in the NFDA app. State and province CE approval varies and may be pending. It is the individual participant's responsibility to verify approval for CE in the state(s)/province(s) in which the individual is licensed. Schedule subject to change.

For everything you need to know about the entire NFDA International Convention & Expo, visit nfda.org/convention.

WORKSHOPS

**SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 9**

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Boost Preeed With a "Before I Die" Festival

Gail Rubin, the Doyenne of Death and author of *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die*

How do you encourage people to come to your funeral home when they're not attending a funeral? Invite future customers to a Before I Die festival. With a one- or two-day event at your firm, you can address the public's curiosity, educate them about new deathcare trends, build your preeed customer pipeline, generate great local media stories and connect your funeral home to complementary end-of-life businesses. Utilize behind-the-scenes tours, panel discussions and outside-the-box activities to engage the community. Learn how several funeral homes have leveraged Before I Die festivals. (1 CE hour)

Online Deathcare: Evolving Consumer Expectations

Scott Ankerholz, Vice President of Marketing, and Lee Senderov, Chief Marketing and Digital Officer, Foundations Partners Group; Luke Frieberg, President of eFuneral; and Sally Camm, Director of Digital Engagement, Astound Commerce

The past two years have seen a quiet transformation in the way consumers talk about death and deathcare services, particularly online. This panel discussion featuring digital marketing experts will reveal new data to help you understand those changes and how digital habits and evolving consumer expectations about online deathcare services will impact the way we offer those services in the future. (1 CE hour)

Death in Color: Understanding Black American Funeral Culture

Vanessa Misoon, Funeral Service Apprentice

As the world becomes more aware and more interested in understanding the cultural experiences and plights of Black Americans, glimpses into typically closed traditions and customs are becoming integral to facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how to best serve the community. This session is intended to provide funeral service professionals of all backgrounds with a historical overview of the Black funeral home and Black funeral culture in America. (1 CE hour)

New Sustainable Disposition Options

Ed Gazvoda, President, Fireless Cremation

Inconvenient truth: Operators of crematories and cemeteries are facing increasing regulatory pressure. Denying trends does not stop them from happening, while clinging to the past is a recipe for fail-

ure. No business wants to become the next Polaroid Corporation. Understanding the outside forces shaping the funeral industry is vital to your business' ability to thrive. Discover new options to offer the families you serve. (1 CE hour)

Understanding The Millennial Professional

Antonio Green, Funeral Director, James H. Cole Home for Funerals

The typical funeral home in the United States is owned and/or operated by an individual of the baby boomer or early Gen X age range. Millennials, who will soon become the successors in these business-

es, act and operate very differently, changing how businesses operate and carving new paths in almost every industry, including death-care. Understand why millennials are so different than previous generations and learn how to engage and motivate these employees as your best asset. (1 CE hour)

1:15 - 2:15 p.m.

Ethical Issues: Where Do I Draw the Line?

Jeff Zealley, Associate Professor, Salt Lake Community College

Certain situations in funeral service require that ethical decisions be

made. Laws, regulations and policies governing our profession do not always dictate what is right or wrong in a particular issue. Attendees will examine the moral principles of ethics, learn how to make difficult ethical decisions and identify guidelines to use when facing ethical issues at work. (1 CE hour)

Design Inspiration for Funerals

Karen Bussen, Founder and CEO, Farewelling

The way we host funerals is changing rapidly. Requests for celebrations of life are on the rise, and families want to personalize their tributes in unique ways that align with their values and their interests. Discover 50 ideas to help you impress families with enhanced design details, great interactive moments and the latest reception concepts. Enhance your offerings by adding streamlined style to your tribute events and create opportunities for attractive upselling. (1 CE hour)

Grief, Humor and Healing

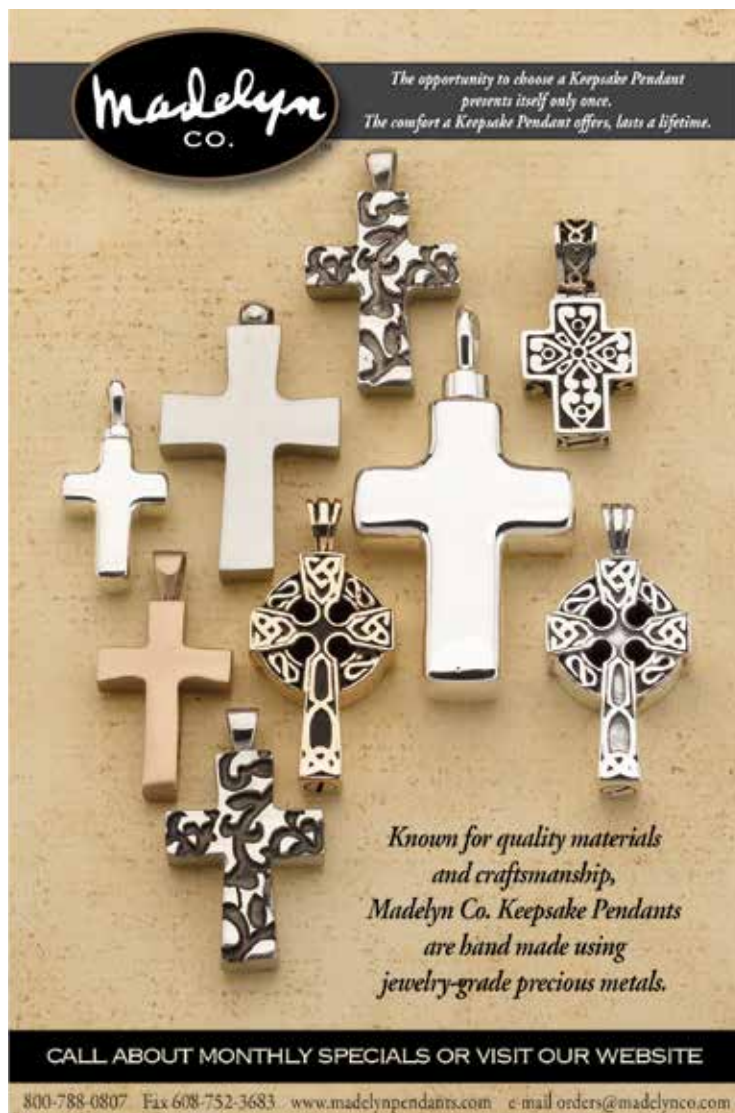
Joseph Thomas, CFSP, Funeral Director, Shackelford Funeral Directors

People often believe the funeral home is no place for fun or laughter, but as funeral professionals, we know that families and friends laugh in our buildings all the time. The fact is those families that allow themselves to embrace humor during grief tend to grieve in a healthier way than the ones that refuse. Understand why so many families are uncomfortable in the funeral home and learn how laughter can remedy the discomfort and set them on a path to healing. Humor can be just as powerful and an effective coping tool for funeral professionals, too. (1 CE hour)

Creating Meaningful Cremation Rituals

Alexandra Jo, Content Manager, Parting Stone

It's no surprise that ritual is an important part of the grieving pro-



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cess. Learn how to create meaningful rituals for families choosing cremation. Discover the six main types of rituals contemporary death planners are looking for and many of the options available to cremation families today. Uncover how focusing on ritual- and experience-building will help funeral professionals reframe rising cremation rates as an opportunity instead of a challenge. More options for building ritual bring more intrinsic value to cremation services in the eyes of consumers and help families see cremation as an investment instead of a purchase. (1 CE hour)

Embalming: Let's Do Better

Dana Goodell, Director of Sales, The Embalmers Supply Company

Embalming is not the same today as it was even five years ago. With the introduction of new medications, COVID-19, a longer life expectancy, delayed embalming

and other changes, it is vitally important that embalmers recognize these changes and adjust their approach in the preparation room. Understand the need to be flexible in your approach, sharpen specific embalming techniques and learn best practices for every embalming case analysis. (1 CE hour)

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Navigating OSHA: Upside Potential And Downside Risk

Mark Harrison, President, Certified Safety Training

Do you know which deathcare facilities are most at risk for OSHA violations? Or that the average OSHA fine is more than \$13,000? Certified Safety Training, an NFDA Endorsed Provider, outlines how to build and leverage a culture of safety to eliminate the largest OSHA fines before they exist. We'll look at top OSHA fines, distill complex technical regulations into plain English and

show how to award yourself for "proactive safety." (1 CE hour)

Distracted Driving: What Is Important To You?

Stewart Van Duzer, First Vice President and Director of Special Projects, Federated Insurance

Not only is distracted driving a serious problem, but it's also an epidemic. With each new mobile device, the potential for behind-the-wheel distractions increases and so does your business' exposure to risk. Learn how to implement a mobile device/driving policy at your company, educate your employees on this hazard and discover technology solutions that can aid you in restricting mobile phone use in vehicles. It's up to each of us to make ending distracted driving a priority. The lives of those who are important to us may depend on it. *Sponsored by Federated Insurance.* (1 CE hour)



The poster features a background of warm, bokeh-style lights in shades of orange, yellow, and red. In the top left corner, there are three logos: the NFDA logo, the National Funeral Directors Association logo, and the "remembering a life" logo. In the center, there is a stylized flower logo with five petals in blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. Below the flower, the text "Remember Together" is written in a large, serif font, with "a Day of Remembrance" in a smaller font underneath. In the bottom right corner, there is a QR code. At the bottom of the poster, there is a dark blue banner with white text that reads: "Plan a meaningful COVID-19 Day of Remembrance event in your community: nfda.org/RememberTogether".

The Price Is Right: How to Compete On Service

Danielle Burmeister, Director of Marketing and Communications, Homesteaders Life Company

Too often, funeral providers who pride themselves on offering exceptional service spend most of their time talking to families about out-of-pocket costs. Or they find themselves in a difficult, unsustainable position after lowering prices to compete with low-cost providers. What do you do if you discover that your profit margin is no longer enough to support your historic service levels? Discover actionable steps for how to compete as a service leader in your market, shifting conversations away from what consumers pay and toward the long-lasting value of your goods, services and expertise. (1 CE hour)

Livestreaming 2.0

Bruce Likly, President and Co-founder, TribuCast

As a result of the pandemic, funer-

al homes had to quickly pivot to livestreaming services, which often meant far more remote attendees than in-person guests at funeral services. Explore ways in which directors can build their virtual brand by adopting best practices to create an online environment that closely matches the in-person experience, enabling loved ones to grieve effectively regardless of location/circumstances. Understand the importance of the remote-attendee experience and how it impacts your brand. (1 CE hour)

From Legislative To Legal

Lesley Witter, NFDA Senior Vice President of Advocacy, and Chris Farmer, NFDA General Counsel

It's a challenge to keep up with ever-changing state and federal public policy, especially when your priority is ensuring that families receive the care and attention they deserve. Discuss a comprehensive review of both legislative and legal issues facing funeral service today. (1 CE hour)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

What the Heck Should I Do With All This Tech?

Zack Garbow, Co-founder, Funeral Innovations

The wide array of tech solutions for funeral homes can be overwhelming. Learn what's available, how they can benefit your firm and the families you serve, and how to determine which solutions make the most sense for your firm. We'll talk broadly about the benefits of case management and marketing automation software, online payment platforms and websites. (1 CE hour)

7:30 – 9:30 a.m.

Suicide Death And Risk in a Post-COVID World

Sara Murphy, Ph.D., CT,

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**Lecturer of Thanatology,
University of Rhode Island**

There may be no cause of death more stigmatized and misunderstood than death by suicide. As a leading cause of death and public health crisis, suicide often hides in plain sight within private and public spaces. Persons at risk and those bereaved by suicide loss frequently don't receive the support needed. Explore factors contributing to complicated grief and suicide risk in the context of the pandemic. Gain insight on offering opportunities to contribute positively to professional and community responses to suicide. (2 CE hours)

**Dover Port Mortuary
Full-Body Wrap
Demonstration**

**Danielle Wilk, Mortuary
Specialist, U.S. Air Force
Mortuary Affairs Operations**

Dover Air Force Base has been the mortuary's home since 1955; here, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations provides America's fallen with the utmost dignity, honor and respect. See firsthand an alternative to a closed casket for nonviewable remains and learn the standard process and how to personalize this method to each individual served. (2 CE hours)

**Cracking the Code
To What Customers
Crave**

**Georganne Bender and
Richard Kizer, Partners,
Kizer & Bender Speaking!**

We live in a world in which great customer service is expected but sometimes just isn't good enough. Consumers complain that service isn't what it used to be and that they're distracted by too many options to buy the products/services you sell. Has your customer service kept up with the times? Are your customer-winning strategies still connecting with consumers? Learn how successful directors ensure great service, plus how to rate your customer service experience, tap into the services customers crave, connect between time-

of-need visits and more. Evaluate your current state of service and garner the knowledge for what to do next. (2 CE hours)

**TUESDAY,
OCTOBER 11**

9:45 – 10:45 a.m.

**Funeral Rule
Compliance and
Update on FTC
Funeral Rule**

**Chris Farmer, NFDA General
Counsel, and Melissa Dickey,**

FTC Funeral Rule Coordinator

Learn the top Funeral Rule compliance issues and the steps your funeral home can take to avoid FTC Funeral Rule violations. Hear the latest information on the FTC review of the Funeral Rule, which kicked off at the beginning of 2020, as well as a discussion of how the review process will play out. (1 CE hour)

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**Annette March-Grier, RN,
CFSP, Co-founder and**



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President, Roberta's House

A pioneer in bereavement care, March-Grier tells her intriguing life story of growing up in a three-story row house funeral home in Baltimore. She shares how she witnessed things most children never experience and how her life evolved to bring change to her community and city. Her divine calling as an adult, a mortician and registered nurse, was no small feat. She faced many challenges, fears and the unknown to create a resource that did not exist in her city or state, a family grief support center that has served more than 7,000 children and adults. (1 CE hour)

When Words Aren't Enough

Michele Neff Hernandez, Founder and CEO, Soaring Spirits International

Some deaths leave even seasoned professionals speechless. Walking with people through tragedy, out-of-order deaths and complicated family situations is emotionally, mentally and physically challenging. How can you offer comfort during these times? How do you care for yourself while carrying this burden beside the bereaved? Gain practical suggestions for assisting grieving people (with a focus on the widowed) both in the moment and in the future. (1 CE hour)

Closing the Deal: Growth by Acquisition

Jeff Smith, Owner, Smith North Little Rock Funeral Home

Today's funeral environment benefits larger operators that can consolidate resources and dominate a market. We went from serving 450 families a year to more than 3,000, and we did it without investing our own money. You can, too! Learn step by step how to create a plan for growth by acquisition and then execute that plan: what's involved, who you need on your team, how to determine a good target and fair value, obtaining financing, combining the companies after you close and more. (1 CE hour)

Caring for Donors

Kelley Romanowski and Melinda Van Waus, Partner Support Liaisons, LifeSource

Learn best-practice restorative techniques for post-tissue recovery. Discover practical and inventive ideas on the care of a tissue donor, as well as essential supplies for the funeral home. Explore the challenges and importance of reconstructing a donor for a public viewing or an identification viewing. We'll discuss concerns of funeral service practitioners and ways to collaborate to improve relations through education, training and support. (1 CE hour)

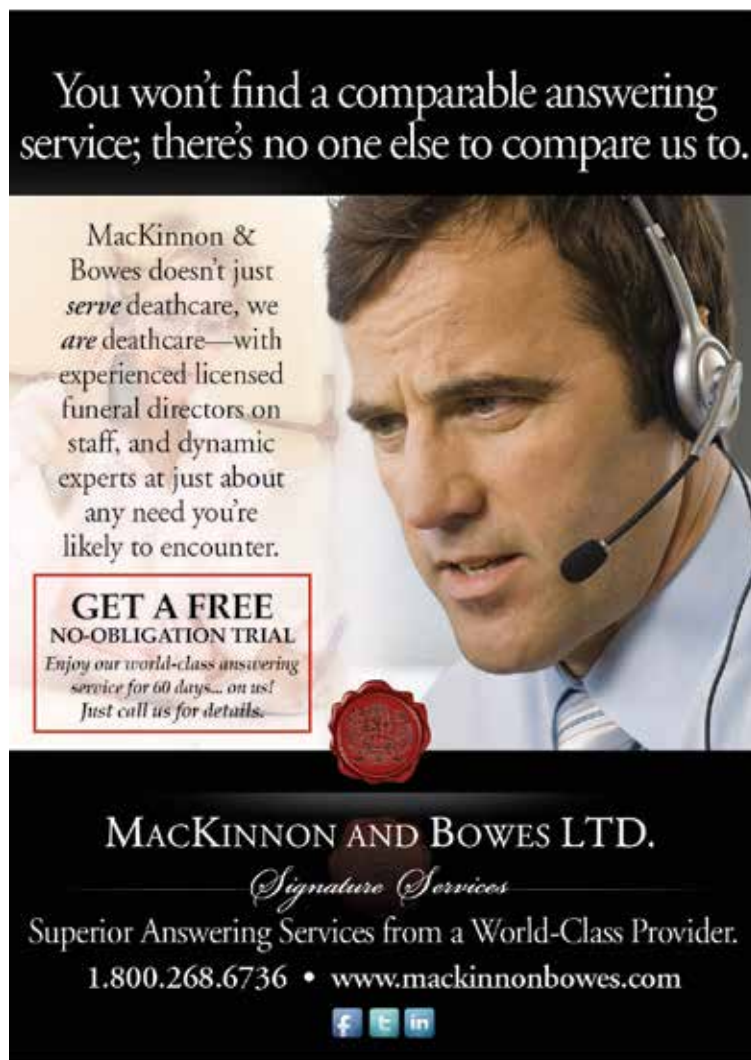
12:30 – 2 p.m.

CONVERSATION CAFÉS

Recruitment and Retention Strategies For Funeral Homes

Matt Bailey, President, Bailey Family Funeral Homes; Jay Dietz, Vice President of Operations, Vertin Group; Todd Harra, Vice President, McCrery & Harra Funeral Homes; and Jamie Hasty, Senior Vice President, SESCO Management Consultants

More employees are quitting their jobs in favor of those that come with better compensation, benefits and work/life balance, along with more meaningful work. It's obvious the pandemic brought many






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changes to the labor market, and many funeral homes are in the midst of a major labor crisis. What is driving the “Great Resignation” and how do we curtail it? The answers are complex and require a deep dive into the organization and commitment by leadership to address the challenges. We’ll explore ways leadership can engage and retain their current workforce. Funeral home owners and operators will share strategies for employee recruitment and retention, and our human resources expert will offer practical recommendations to avoid screening and hiring snafus. (1.5 CE hours)

The Defense Never Rests

Chris Farmer, NFDA General Counsel; Mike Nicodemus,

NFDA Vice President of Cremation Services; and Victor March Sr., CPA, CFSP, CPC, President and CEO, Marcorp Ltd. & Subsidiaries

Are you keeping your funeral home, crematory, cemetery and individual funeral directors out of legal trouble? Join our expert panel to discuss how you can reduce the risk of lawsuits and claims against your business. (1.5 CE hours)

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12

8 – 9 a.m.

Crossing and Closing the Experience-Perception Gap

Melissa Posey Loose, MA, LFD, NFDA Training and Development Manager

According to the 2020 NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey, 59.5% of respondents felt some level of comfort in planning and executing a funeral or memorial service without a funeral director’s input, yet 62.1% said they would still contact a funeral director for help. What is the source of their trust in us? How can we keep that trust and do a better job of gaining the missing 37.9%’s confidence? Posey Loose marries time-tested research, personal insight and valuable resource tools to illustrate how to bridge the gap between funeral professionals and grieving families to ensure delivery of first-class service each and every time. (1 CE hour)

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Five Keys to Cremation Success

Mike Nicodemus, NFDA Vice President of Cremation Services

Are you the cremation expert in your area or do you just go through the motions because it's "just a cremation family"? With more than 50% of families nationally choosing cremation, it can no longer be business as usual. Nicodemus examines five key factors for success in cremation and how to develop a clear message for why families should choose you. Excellent customer service isn't the only reason a family may decide to use you. Learn what other factors help a family decide who handles their loved one at the time of death. Discover how to become the go-to funeral home for families' cremation needs. (1 CE hour)

The EPA and How the NFDA Formaldehyde Exposure Study Will Impact the Future of Funeral Service

Lesley Witter, NFDA Senior Vice President of Advocacy; Marisa Kreider, Ph.D., Cardno ChemRisk; and Jzyk Ennis, Ph.D., Jefferson State University

Formaldehyde has been used in embalming fluids since the early 1900s and is still the preservation agent overwhelmingly preferred by most embalmers. According to the EPA, however, workers are exposed to formaldehyde during the embalming process, and the agency is currently reviewing what risk

may exist from that exposure. As previous literature and research are dated and do not reflect modern practice, NFDA commissioned a study to determine current formaldehyde exposures. We'll share an update on the EPA's review, results of the research study and how all this may affect you and your business in the future. (1 CE hour)

How Can I Help?

Sherrie Dunlevy, Founder, Graduating Grief

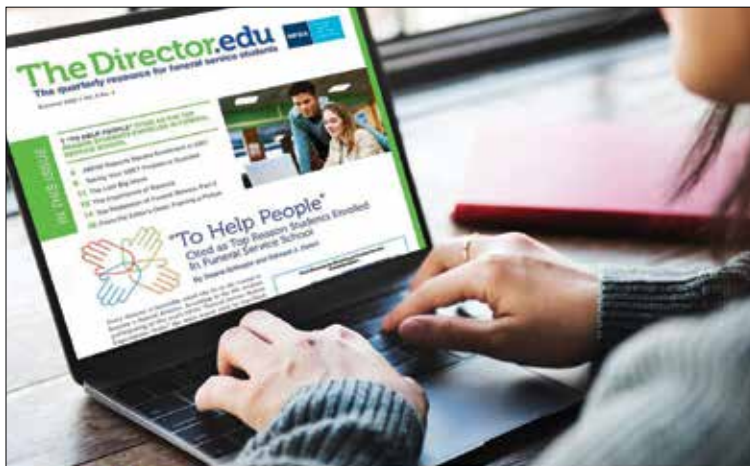
Believe it or not, at a time when they need the support of family and friends the most, some grieving people get ghosted. Often the very people the bereaved thought they could count on simply disappear from their lives. Dunlevy shares her personal experience following the death of her son and offers ideas as to why this happens and what you can say and do during these difficult times to support those who have lost a loved one. (1 CE hour)

8 – 9:30 a.m.

Family-Assisted Dress Experience

Monica Torres, Owner, NXT Generation Mortuary Support

Torres will share ideas on how to create your own home funeral experience centralized on the body and help families fill the void and disconnect between the time of death and cremation or burial. The FADE program, designed with cremation families in mind, is a new twist on a centuries-old concept that will help your firm recapture lost revenue and give insight to funeral directors and embalmers of all experience levels. We'll discuss ethics, arrangement counseling, marketing, cosmetic postmortem rejuvenation, legal authorizations and how to legally overcome the challenges of preparing the unembalmed body. (1.5 CE hours)



Hey, students!
We've got news for you

Each **free** issue of the quarterly **The Director.edu** is packed with current topics, creative ideas and practical material to help keep you informed and engaged as you work toward a meaningful career in funeral service.

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nfda.org/thedirectoredu

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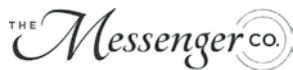
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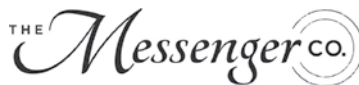
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LendingUSA's mission is to create lasting business partnerships by providing innovative point-of-need financing solutions for important moments in life. As the exclusive financing partner of NFDA, LendingUSA is committed to creating the best point-of-need financing experience available for funeral directors and the families they serve. Our proprietary lending solution leverages both traditional and next-generation underwriting and fraud detection techniques to approve loans as quickly as possible. LendingUSA works closely with its funeral home partners. For more information, visit lendingusa.com.



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Nomis publishes the most widely circulated media for the U.S. deathcare industry. *Funeral Home & Cemetery Directory* contains listings of firms and cemeteries. *The Buyer's Guide* lists industry supply and service companies, as well as those offering pet loss services. *Funeral Home & Cemetery News* offers a forum to publish firm news, employee achievements and other pertinent news. All publications can be accessed in print and online. 800-321-7479; info@nomispublications.com; nomispublications.com



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It's Up to Us



The annual NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey results are always interesting, and this year, they perhaps give us the first meaningful glimpse into how consumer preferences may be shifting as a result of the

pandemic. In my opinion, one key finding is that in each of the past two years, just over 37% of respondents said they are either much more likely or somewhat more likely to preplan their own funeral/ memorial arrangements since the onset of the pandemic. I think that's a pretty significant statistic – one we shouldn't ignore.

Clearly, the pandemic has inspired or frightened many of us into thinking about our own mortality and how being prepared can help a family reduce its level of stress when the unexpected happens.

The pandemic may also have had an impact on what people find to be helpful and meaningful as they begin their grief journey. This year, 59.2% of respondents said the “casketed burial service” they attended was very helpful in paying tribute to or commemorating the life of a family member or friend and that it played an important role as they began the healing process. Comparatively, only 47% reported the same feelings following a cremation service.

This is huge! When given the opportunity, or in this case a lack thereof, people real-

ly did find value and comfort in having the body present and having the ability to say their last goodbyes.

These statistics are an excellent reminder of the importance of communicating the value of a service and viewing, the benefits of embalming and the service choices available. While it may be easiest to presume a family wants a direct cremation when they simply request “cremation,” family members could be unaware of the option to have a viewing and visitation prior to cremation.

Actually, many people don't realize it. And it's up to funeral professionals to explain their options and their importance. Families may have also dismissed the idea of having a viewing and casketed burial without the consideration it deserves. Thus, it's critical that you have in-depth conversations with families about their options and how what they select could help them and other loved ones begin their grief journey.

Consumer preferences, funeral service and your business will continue to evolve in the wake of the pandemic. But the silver lining could very well be that people are more inclined to talk about death than ever before. If you find this true in your community, take the opportunity to engage families in meaningful discussions about how they want to be remembered.

I'm confident the results of this year's Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey will inspire you to start that conversation. You'll gain a new perspective on consumer trends overall, plus learn how you may be able to interpret them to better serve the families in your area. Turn to page 28 to start reading!

NFDA Mission Statement

The National Funeral Directors Association is the world's leading, largest and most trusted association to support funeral directors. We provide our members with critical information, innovative tools, resources and the professional community they need to serve families, run sustainable businesses and become pillars in their communities.

Serving One Family Two Ways

FROM THE **NFDA** BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BY LINDA L. ALLAN-EARL

I recently made arrangements with a family that had just lost a loved one. Like many people, the deceased wore many hats in her family. She was a wife, mother, grandmother and sister. Her impact on each of these complementary individuals was varied and different, as one would expect.

During the arrangement conference, I learned a lot about what was important to each of these individuals. The deceased's husband, unfortunately, was unable to be with us due to his deteriorating health. Both of her sons preferred cremation, while her daughter opposed the idea. I explained to them that they must come to an agreement as a group and then we could continue to make the necessary arrangements for whatever they decided to do.

Her daughter and grandson felt it was very important that the deceased be viewed and subsequently buried next to her parents in a small country cemetery. The family reviewed many legal documents, discussed the options at length and leaned heavily on their faith in God. Eventually, they decided to move forward with a traditional service with viewing and burial.

Five days later, the family's dad and grandfather passed away; this time, they were in agreement that he would prefer to be cremated and buried in the casket with his wife and their mother and grandmother.

The timing of their deaths allowed us to accommodate these wishes, providing them both with the services they each desired. And after more than 60 years of marriage, they were able to be together in the end.

I tell you this story as a reminder of what an enormous impact we have on the lives of the families with which we work. One of the main goals of our profession is to provide families the opportunity to grieve and celebrate the life of their loved ones the way they wanted to be remembered.

I look forward to seeing everyone in Baltimore next month for the NFDA International Convention & Expo! Be sure to check out all the speakers and great CE opportunities, not to mention the fun and fellowship.



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NAMES IN THE NEWS

COLORADO

The Center for Loss & Life Transition (Fort Collins) recently created a new sub-division to focus on training clinicians in “companioning” griever relative to the natural complications that can result from the death of a loved one. These training efforts are in response to concerns surrounding the new medical diagnosis of Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD). Center Director Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., believes that pathologizing grief and mourning only compounds unhealthy cultural stigmas surrounding death and that this new diagnosis is a projection of social taboos against despair.

The PGD diagnosis criteria – intense yearning, preoccupation with thoughts/memories, identity confusion, disbelief, avoidance of reminders, intense emotional pain and loneliness, difficulty engaging with others/life, emotional numbness, feelings that life is meaningless – often last beyond the PGD-allowed six months for children and one year for adults. Thus, individuals run the risk of being diagnosed with a “mental disorder” based on an inappropriate linear timeframe.

The Center for Loss & Life Transition will now put more emphasis on training caregivers in Wolfelt’s model of understanding, identifying and “companioning” (not treating) grievers.

In other news, the center announced the dates and locations of its remaining 2022 educational workshops.

September 7-8 Appleton, Wisconsin	October 11-12 Maryville, Tennessee
September 12-15 Fort Collins, Colorado	October 13-14 Albuquerque, New Mexico
September 20-21 Uvalde, Texas	October 18-19 Port Huron, Michigan
September 21-22 Lubbock, Texas	October 19-20 Detroit, Michigan
September 26-27 Salt Lake City, Utah	October 26 (virtual) Victoria, BC, Canada
September 28-29 Colorado Springs, Colorado	November 1 (virtual) Batesville, Indiana
October 3-4 Palm Harbor, Florida	November 3 Las Vegas, Nevada
October 5-6 St. Charles, Missouri	November 7-10 Scottsdale, Arizona
October 10 Baltimore, Maryland	December 5-8 Scottsdale, Arizona

Finally, Companion Press recently published a new book by Wolfelt titled *Complicated Grief: How to Understand, Express and Reconcile Your Especially Difficult Grief*. In this compassionate resource, readers will learn how complicated grief is different, what they can do to soften and eventually reconcile it, and how to inventory the reasons their grief is complicated. centerforloss.com

CONNECTICUT

On June 17, the Connecticut State Department of Veterans Affairs and the **Connecticut Funeral Directors Association** (CFDA) held a military funeral ceremony for the unclaimed cremated remains of four military veterans:

- Pfc. Robert Benson, U.S. Marine Corps
Served 1951-53; April 9, 1931-August 19, 2008; died in New Haven
- Cpl. Loren Milton Cubbison Jr., U.S. Army
Served 1953-55; November 4, 1932-February 7, 2021; died in New Haven
- Capt. David L. Groher, U.S. Army
Served 1943-46; May 9, 1919-November 14, 2008; died in Bridgeport
- Radarman 3rd Class Morris Meyer, U.S. Navy
Served 1944-46; January 11, 1914-July 19, 2004; died in Bridgeport.

At 9:40 a.m., the Connecticut State Police and Connecticut Patriot Guard Riders escorted three CFDA hearses containing the cremated remains from the VA Rocky Hill Campus to State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, where the public portion of the ceremony began. Connecticut VA Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi led the ceremony, supported by the directors of funeral homes from across the state; Connecticut National Guard; state, local and federal officials; and leaders of many veterans’ organizations. Saadi, CFDA President David W. MacDonald and other dignitaries delivered remarks during the ceremony, which also included the posthumous presentation of Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medals.

This is the eighth such ceremony hosted by the Connecticut VA in coordination with CFDA since 2009. That year, Connecticut established new protocols to identify unclaimed cremated remains of honorably discharged U.S. veterans in Connecticut funeral homes with the goal of providing them a dignified burial with full military honors. ctfda.org

GEORGIA

CEO Paul Haarer recently announced that **Pinnacle Funeral Service** (Norcross) has acquired three new

firms: Brintlinger and Earl Funeral Homes, Decatur and Cerro Gordo, Illinois; Purath-Strand Funeral Home and Crematory, Racine, Wisconsin; and Delehanty Funeral Home, Loves Park, Illinois.

“These acquisitions are just the start of a new era of exponential growth for Pinnacle and continue to solidify our presence in the Midwest,” explained Haarer. “We have found a great synergy in the region of like-minded funeral professionals who trust us to carry their traditions of service into the future.”

Pinnacle Funeral Service currently owns 25 locations across five states. pinnaclefunerals.com

KENTUCKY



Immediate Past President Grant Bolt (right) passes the Association Gavel to Bill Mullins, who was sworn in as the new FDAK president at the 2022 convention.

Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky

(FDAK) held its 140th Annual State Convention June 7-8 at the Kentucky Expo Center and Crowne Plaza Hotel in Louisville. Its theme, “Kentucky Proud,” mimicked the state’s push for pride in Kentucky, participating in Kentucky businesses and using the state’s products and services. The

convention attracted attendees from six states.

On Tuesday afternoon, FDAK President Grant Bolt (Johnson’s Funeral Home, Georgetown) and his wife, Pam, cut the ribbon on the “Kentucky Proud” exhibits to officially open the trade show. The annual President’s Party was a sold-out event and included a “Kentucky Proud” buffet provided by the Kentucky Funeral Supply Sales Club.

Kentucky’s own nationally renowned comedian Etta May performed after dinner with her down-home Kentucky humor. FDAK board members donated Kentucky-themed gift baskets, which were given away as door prizes during the festivities.

Continuing education offerings included “All Stressed Out and Ready to Blow” and “Community Outreach: Building Connections to Your Business,” presented by Nancy Weil; “Book Smart: An In-depth Look at PRE-Embalming Analysis,” by Carrie Harris; and “Online Reviews: How to Get Good Ones/Fix Bad Ones” and “Turning Clicks Into Dollars” by Daniel Hug of Ring Ring Marketing.

Bill Mullins of Middendorf-Bullock Funeral Homes was sworn in as new FDAK president Wednesday afternoon by his wife and business partner, Nancy Mullins.

In his last official capacity as FDAK chairman of the board, Rob Riley of Carrollton swore in the remaining FDAK board members and district directors. Board members include Marty Jones, Morgantown, chairman of the board; Grant Bolt, Georgetown, immediate past president; Wesley Rominger, Manchester, president-elect; Brandy Harwood, Scottsville, vice president; Chad Townsend, Dixon, secretary/treasurer; and John Hill, Owensboro, sergeant-at-arms.

District directors include Louis Linnemann, Erlanger, Northern; Billy Butcher, Versailles, Central; George Sparks, Grayson, Eastern; Tony Floro, Hustonville, Southcentral; Kyle Wolfe, Hyden, Southeastern; Frank Giles, Hopkinsville, Western; and Lee Muster, Calhoun, Southern.

Gov. Andy Beshear issued a proclamation honoring the Kentucky funeral homes that served the families of the December 10, 2021, tornadoes that devastated western Kentucky. He also presented each of these funeral homes with a plaque of appreciation: Bandy Funeral Home, Nortonville; Barnett-Strother Funeral Home, Madisonville; Beshear Funeral Home, Dawson Springs; Bevil Brothers Funeral Home, Beaver Dam; Blalock-Coleman & York Funer-



Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshears (right) with Grant Bolt, FDAK immediate past president.

al Home, Murray; Brown Funeral Home, Mayfield; Byrn Funeral Home, Mayfield; Campbell-Fisher Funeral Home, Lebanon; Collier Funeral Home, Benton; Cone Funeral Home, Bowling Green; Dogwood Funerals & Cremations, Hopkinsville; Gatewood & Sons Funeral Chapel, Bowling Green; Goodman Funeral Home, Princeton; Harrod Brothers Funeral Home, Frankfort; Hornbeak Funeral Home, Fulton; Hughes Funeral Home, Paducah; J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Chapel, Bowling Green; Mason & Sons Funeral Home, Madisonville; Milner & Orr Funeral Home, Paducah; Morgan’s Funeral Home, Princeton; Pettus Rowland Funeral Home, Paducah; Stoess Funeral Home, Crestwood; Tucker Funeral Home, Central City; Vanover Funeral Home, Clay; and Young Funeral Home, Russellville.

During the convention, FDAK also honored 50- and 60-year-licensed directors, as well as firms that have been in business for 50, 75 and 100 years.

Finally, Marcia Caniff Davis, new scholarship chair, awarded the \$5,000 Pat R. Caniff FDAK Scholarship to Anna Mattingly of Versailles. fdaofky.com

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Conservation burial ground **Life Forest** (Hillsborough) recently received the Green Burial Council's "Shroud Certification" for its 100% wool cremation burial shrouds. When searching for biodegradable shroud options, Life Forest wanted to ensure that whatever was placed in the earth would not only act as an environmental protectant from the alkaline in the cremated remains but would also nourish memorial trees as the product biodegraded. The answer came in the form of wool, which, upon biodegrading, becomes a naturally rich compost by releasing sulfur, nitrogen and magnesium.

The company offers its wool shrouds at no cost to Life Forest burial families and also offers pre-packaged wool shroud kits that include step-by-step visual instructions. thelifeforest.com



Lloyd E.
Rankin



Michael S.
Schoedinger



Steven J.
Hartwig



Michael T.
Smith

OHIO

The **Ohio Funeral Directors Association** installed its new board of directors during its Annual Membership Meeting May 24 at the 142nd OFDA Convention and Exhibition: President Lloyd E. Rankin, Vorhis & Ryan Funeral Homes, Cincinnati; President-elect Michael S. Schoedinger,

CFSP, CPC, Schoedinger Funeral & Cremation Service, Columbus; Secretary/Treasurer Steven J. Hartwig, Gilberg-Hartwig Funeral Home, New Bremen; and Immediate Past President Michael T. Smith, CFSP, Snyder Funeral Homes, Marion.

In addition to the executive officers, the OFDA board includes Northwest Regional Director Jennifer M. Schlosser, Wapakoneta; Northeast Director Charles L. Wilson, Akron; North Central Director Geoffrey H. Gompf, Cardington; South Central Director William K. Taylor, Jackson; Southwest Director Tim W. King, Goshen; East Director Nancy K. Castellucci, CFSP, Alliance; At-large Director Karla D. Gregory-Martin, Steubenville; At-large Director Lauren N. Oxender, Montpelier; Ex-Officio Anthony J. Quahliero Jr., CFSP, Struthers; and Ex-Officio Joan E. Billman, CFSP, Ashtabula. ofdaonline.org

PENNSYLVANIA

StoneMor Inc. (Bensalem) recently expanded its existing strategic partnership with Sympathy Brands Co. (S2 Brands Inc.) to include all 302 of its cemetery properties. Since developing its strategic alliance in September 2021, Sympathy Brands has partnered with StoneMor funeral homes to provide comprehensive family care – from preplanning and at-need through continued care and memorialization services – that blends personal services with appropriate technology.

The partnership streamlines workflow and helps with the digitalization of all aspects of the cemetery. A customized user experience has been created specifically for cemeteries within the Sympathy Brands platform. The single connection point eliminates day-to-day logistical complexities, creates personalized interactions and helps drive revenue for cemeteries. stonemor.com

TEXAS

Legacy Funeral Group (Houston) recently acquired Combest Family Funeral Homes and Crematory. The family-owned and -operated business began in 1962 when Kevin Combest's aunt and uncle, Billie and Martin White, purchased Stanley Funeral Home (Tahoka).

In 2010, Combest and wife Tonya purchased the locations from his aunt. Today, Combest Family Funeral Homes comprises three locations: Lubbock, Tahoka and O'Donnell.

Post-sale, Kevin Combest will remain involved in the business, and longtime friend and associate Rex Johnson has agreed to become the new general manager.

Legacy Funeral Group owns and operates 145 funeral homes, cemeteries and crematories in eight states. legacyfuneralgroup.com

UTAH

Larkin Mortuary (Sandy) hosted its annual Memorial Day program May 30 at its flagship cemetery Larkin Sunset Gardens. U.S. Rep. Chris Stewart, a former USAF B-1 bomber pilot, served as featured speaker and talked about the importance of patriotism. He also honored all veterans, with special focus on those present in the audience.

The program also featured the Hill Air Force Honor Guard, the Minuteman Brass Quintet, Alta High School Madrigals and the Utah Firefighters Emerald Society Drum and Bagpipe Corps. Services featured a flag ceremony, patriotic speeches and songs



Larkin Mortuary welcomed 350 participants during its annual Memorial Day program. Now in its 23rd year, the event was held indoors due to inclement weather and featured a patriotic address by Utah U.S. Rep. Chris Stewart (at podium).



from each branch of the military.

“The Larkin family is always honored to serve the veterans in our community,” said Lance Larkin, firm president, “and that’s why our Memorial Day service is a major focus and priority for our company.”

In addition, on May 26, more than 200 youth volunteers from around Salt Lake Valley honored military veterans for

Memorial Day by placing 3,000 U.S. flags on the graves of service men and women at Larkin Sunset Gardens.

The youths, ages 11 to 18, worked in groups to interpret the cemetery map and identify the graves of veterans. Each veteran’s grave received a large flag to honor his or her service. Additionally, the volunteers swept and polished headstones and helped beautify the cemetery grounds.

Nearly 3,000 military service men and women and their spouses are buried at Larkin Sunset Gardens Cemetery. Due to the enormity of the task and to ensure that those buried there are not forgotten, Larkin Mortuary partnered with local community youth groups to coordinate the placement of flags on the 76-acre property. larkinmortuary.com



Charles M. “Chip” Billow

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Selected Educational Trust recently announced its 2022 Ambassador of the Year Award recipients. Ambassador of the Year/Funeral Service Professional was awarded to Charles M. “Chip” Billow, president and CEO of Billow’s Funeral Homes & Crematory in Akron, Ohio.

Kevin Czachor, CSO of ASD-Answering Service for Directors in Media, Pennsylvania, was named “Ambassador of the Year/Industry Partner Leader.”



Kevin Czachor

Established last year, these awards honor individuals for their contributions to the trust’s mission and vision, their contributions to the profession and their commitment to providing learning opportunities for those working in the profession. selectedtrust.org

Email your firm or association news, high-resolution images and caption information to fsnews@nfd.org.

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SUPPLIER NEWS



CRESSY MEMORIAL NAMES SARAH TEPE AS PRESIDENT

Cressy Memorial recently named Sarah Tepe, former director of business development, as president. Mary Lou and Ray Cressy will continue as owners and principals.

Tepe is an industry veteran with more than 15 years of sales and marketing experience, including inside and outside sales, as well as market strategy within a rapidly shifting industry.

“Mary Lou and Ray have been the visionaries for Cressy

Memorial and wonderful mentors over the years,” said Tepe. “I absolutely look forward to upholding their mission and launching from the momentum they have created for our company.”

Cressy Memorial Inc. operates as a sales and marketing agency for deathcare industry manufacturers. Representation includes Crowne Vault, Howard Miller urns and R&S Design marble urns. cressymemorial.com

THOMAS RETIRES FROM NMS

After more than 20 years of dedicated service, Suzanne Thomas of National Mortuary Shipping and Cremation recently announced her retirement. When asked what she will miss most, she stated: “I will miss my co-workers dearly, as well as our customers and vendors. I enjoyed learning all aspects of the funeral industry; there is something new to take with you every day.” Thomas plans to focus on herself during her newly found free time, as well as hit the casino!

Said President and CEO Angela Berwald: “Sue will be missed, and we can’t thank her enough for her years of dedication and loyalty. Her expertise in both domestic and international shipping has helped many funeral directors around the globe, and we are grateful she has shared her knowledge with everyone on our team.” natlmortuaryshipping.com

PREMIER PRENEED ADDS TRAINING VIDEOS TO 360 PLATFORM

Premier Preneed Marketing recently developed a series of preneed training videos. Currently found within the Premier Preneed 360 CRM platform, the videos were created by Craig Stewart, a licensed funeral director and funeral sales trainer, in his role as a sales training consultant to Premier. Stewart has been in the funeral profession for more than 25 years, primarily in preneed sales.

“These videos touch on several preneed topics, including how to be an effective preneed agent, as well as what questions are effective during a preneed conference with a family,” said Stewart. “This initial collection of training videos is a great addition to the Premier Preneed 360 platform. I look forward to working with the Premier Preneed marketing team to create additional videos for the training library.”

The Premier Preneed 360 platform captures preneed leads in a variety of ways, including landing pages, surveys, forms, inbound phone systems, two-way texting and prebuilt funeral home ads. The platform can automatically message leads via voicemail, forced calls, SMS messaging, emails, social media and other communication methods. The system also includes built-in tools to collect payments, schedule appointments, track analytics and the new training video library. premierpreneed.com

HANDWRITTEN AUTOMATES HANDWRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

After a service or burial, families find a handwritten note from their provider very meaningful. The problem, however, is the time it takes to write them or, for some people, their penmanship. Tech firm Handwrytten has solved both problems by inventing robots to do the writing at scale, thereby helping funeral providers ensure that each family receives a heartfelt thank-you for entrusting them with their loved one.

The handwriting on Handwrytten notes is indistinguishable from human handwriting. There are 23 handwriting styles to choose from, or you can upload your own handwriting and signature for a one-time fee. Users can select from more than 100 card designs or design their own online by uploading a funeral home logo, image or other custom graphic.

Providers can also use Handwrytten to send a remembrance note on the anniversary of a loved one’s death or burial, provide updates on gravesite maintenance or special plans for holiday decorations/services, or follow up with those considering purchasing cemetery plots.

“People understand the power of the personal note, but nobody has the time to sit down and ac-

tually pick up a pen and write one. This is why we built a platform to automate the process from end to end,” said David Wachs, Handwrytten founder and CEO. “By leveraging cutting-edge robotic technology, we are able to automate what is seemingly impossible to automate. These notes have been proven to drive incredible and lasting results for our clients.” handwrytten.com



NEW MEMORIALS DIRECT INTRODUCES GRANITE URN

New Memorials Direct recently added a rectangular granite urn to its offerings. Crafted from highly polished black granite, the urn measures approximately 10 inches tall by 8 inches wide by 5 inches deep and has a capacity of 170 cubic inches. Lending itself for use as a petite-adult urn or for a pet, the bottom features a screw-in panel for easy insertion of the cremated remains. Both the front and the back can be personalized with a laser-engraved photo and/or custom text engraving. An engraving proof is included with purchase, allowing the family to preview the layout prior to final engraving. newmemorialsdirect.com

FDLIC APPOINTS MILAM AS MARKET CENTER MANAGER

Funeral Directors Life Insurance Co. recently appointed Bradley Milam as market center manager in Louisiana. A graduate of Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, with a bachelor's degree in general studies, he has more than 15 years of experience in sales and insurance, including six years in sales leadership. During his career, Milam has served as an insurance agent, agency manager and customer service representative.

“As I am eager to begin this journey into a new industry, I am most excited to be a part of the Funeral Directors Life family,” he said. “The culture, people, values and direction of the company are a perfect match for me, and I could not be more energized

about what's ahead.” funeraldirectorslife.com

5,000+ FUNERAL HOMES ENROLLED IN LEGACY PRO

Legacy Pro, Legacy.com's latest program to enhance the funeral home search experience, recently surpassed 5,000 funeral homes enrolled. Once a funeral home claims its free listing, it receives a Legacy.com “Trusted Partner” badge to show visitors that the business profile is connected to the funeral home and offers the most up-to-date information.

The Legacy Pro upgrade allows funeral homes to claim a premium business page in the company's online funeral directory, where they can customize what visitors find about their business, including a listing of their professional services; details about how they help customers (e.g., handicap access, veteran services); an image carousel showcasing their facilities, locations, team, etc.; video uploads that offer a virtual experience; a larger custom-text area for better Google search results; and an up-to-date feed of current obituaries for upcoming funerals.

In addition, funeral homes enrolled in the Legacy Pro program receive extra benefits, including automatic inclusion of all obituaries in the Legacy.com search network, a dashboard to view monthly visitor analytics and revenue share on e-commerce from Legacy visitors. new.legacy.com

GEN-V MORTUARY COSMETICS LAUNCHES PRODUCT LINE

GEN-V recently launched its line of mortuary cosmetics, which aims to provide a more natural look for the deceased by merging old-line knowledge and experience with new innovations. GEN-V mortuary cosmetics offer the perfect way to create a warm, lifelike appearance for viewings.

Provided with colors that recreate any flesh tone, GEN-V products layer well and are forgiving for less experienced practitioners. The cosmetics are manufactured from FDA-approved and organic ingredients and allow you to create a lifelike, natural appearance for the decedent.

The company's step-by-step instructions make it easier to recreate someone's distinguishing facial dermis. GEN-V's products never fade or rub off, can conceal the effects of dehydration, are compatible with all (non-grease-based) mortuary cosmetics and reduce time spent color correcting.

“Our goal is to help make the embalmer's, funeral director's, mortician's and makeup artist's job more consistent and stress free,” said Bryan A. Isley, GEN-V president. genesis-v.com

We invite you to email your company news, high-resolution images and caption information to suppliernews@nfda.org.

SCHOOL NEWS

NSCC FUNERAL SERVICE PROGRAM RECEIVES ACCREDITATION

North Shore Community College's funeral service program, based in Danvers, Massachusetts, recently received its initial accreditation from the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE).

Launched in fall 2019 with the goal of providing a robust, accessible and affordable option for prospective funeral professionals in New England, NSCC's program was designed as a hybrid, offering a combination of face-to-face and online learning. It offers the benefits of online instruction, including convenience and flexibility of when and where students can complete some of their coursework. The program also incorporates in-person learning, providing structure, interpersonal skills, networking and a sense of community. "It's a bit of the best of both worlds," said Sarah Stopyra, program coordinator.

Additionally, NSCC offers a unique one-day-a-week program, with all courses offered on Tuesdays for the duration of the program. Students report being able to plan for work, childcare and other obligations more effectively during the two-year program because of this schedule. Along with the affordability of this degree, NSCC believes this will help eliminate some of the more widely reported barriers of entry to this field, stated Stopyra.

The NSCC program offers students an all-new classroom space with a fully functional and equipped embalming laboratory and merchandising room. Curriculum follows ABFSE guidelines.

"This program has an amazing amount of potential and will continue to evolve in anticipation of what our profession needs. We are building a program for today's professionals but also for the future of funeral service, which takes time and continued collaboration to be done properly. It's very exciting to think about where this program will be in five to 10 years," noted Stopyra.

The NSCC program is accepting applications for its fourth cohort, starting in fall 2022. For more informa-

tion, visit northshore.edu/academics/programs/fns/index.html or email sstopyra@northshore.edu.

TODD VAN BECK JOINS CCMS FACULTY AS DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION



Todd Van Beck

Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science has announced that distinguished educator Todd Van Beck will be joining the faculty as director of professional education. Van Beck brings with him decades of experience as both a practitioner and educator in the deathcare

profession, including a stint at CCMS in the 1980s. Most recently, he served as director of continuing education at John A. Gupton College.

In addition to his other achievements, Van Beck is a prolific writer who has published dozens of books and manuals, along with more than 300 articles throughout his career, with many of his books chronicling funeral service history. CCMS President Jack E. Lechner Jr. has called Van Beck "the pre-eminent historian of the deathcare profession."

Van Beck has also spent a great deal of time volunteering for various organizations and has served on many boards, including Children's Hospice Foundation of Vancouver, British Columbia, and the Free Store Food Bank in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is currently chairman the Front Porch: Center for Grieving Children Board of Directors and a board member of the International Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association Educational Foundation. Van Beck has also lectured internationally, addressing deathcare professionals in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Germany.

"We are honored and thrilled to be welcoming Todd back to CCMS," said Lechner. "It feels like a homecoming. He is an incredibly valuable addition to our college."

"It is both nostalgic and humbling to be returning to the old and venerable Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science," said Van Beck. "My intention is to make a worthy contribution to further enhance the excellence, innovation and creativity in the mission of funeral service education, which has been the noble heritage of CCMS since its founding in 1882. It is my honor to be once again a part of the CCMS culture." ccms.org

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IN REMEMBRANCE



DORIS J. JAMES

director/owner, Williams-James Mortuary, St Louis, Missouri, died April 28, 2022, at age 89.

James attended Stowe Teacher's College and also completed a medical technologist degree. Among her many "firsts": first African American member of St. Louis County Board of Education, the first serving on the Berkeley School District Board of Education, first serving on the St. Louis County Schools board and the first medical technologist at St. Joseph Hospital in Alton, Illinois. James was a member of the St. Louis Gateway Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association, from which she had received honors.

She is survived by husband Leon, daughters Sheila and Stacie, six grandchildren, two bonus granddaughters and four great-grandchildren.

LOUIS R. JONES

funeral director/president, Hollomon-Brown Funeral Home and Crematory, Virginia Beach, Virginia, died June 18, 2022, at age 86. Jones was city councilman and former mayor of the City of Virginia Beach.

He is survived by wife Ellen, four children, 12

grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

BRIAN L. KOCH

director/owner, Conner & Koch Funeral Home, Bellbrook, Ohio, died June 27, 2022, at age 56. He was managing director from 1990-99, when he acquired the firm from its owners, his parents.

Koch worked to make Bellbrook Plaza something the whole town was proud of. He originated Picnic in the Plaza, was involved in many organizations and passionate about Bellbrook Sugarcreek Chamber of Commerce, For Bellbrook By Bellbrook, Coffee With Champions and Bellbrook by Design.

He is survived by wife Donna; daughters Mackenzie, Addison and Brydon; son Cole; six grandchildren; parents Steve and Kathy Connor; and two siblings. Donna and Addison are funeral directors at Conner & Koch.

WILLIAM E. MCVEIGH SR.

director/owner, McVeigh Funeral Home, Albany, New York, died May 30, 2022, at 87. He graduated Simmons School of Funeral Directing and joined his father as the third generation at the firm.

McVeigh served as

board member and leader of various organizations: Albany-Rensselaer Funeral Directors Association (former president), New York State Funeral Directors Association (past president) and NFDA (past regional governor).

He also served on the boards of the Albany Executives Association, Senior Citizens Foundation, Visiting Nurses Association and St. Peter's Hospice Advisory Committee. McVeigh was a member of Irish Heritage Museum, Knights of Columbus and Elks Lodge #49. Dearest to him was helping establish Camary Statewide Services, which provides residential homes for autistic adults. Living Resources, of which McVeigh was a former board president, merged with Camary and still provides services to McVeigh's eldest son.

He is survived by children William Jr., Brian, Kristin and Laurel; and five grandchildren.

WAYNE D. MUSGROVE

retired director and owner, Murphy-Musgrove Funeral Home, Junction City, Oregon, died June 7, 2022, at age 91. He served in the U.S. Navy and attended funeral service college in Los Angeles. He was a 60-year member and past presi-

dent of the Downtown Eugene Lions Club, as well as past president of the Oregon Funeral Directors Association, the Oregon State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers, and the Eugene Active 20/30 Club.

Musgrove served on the boards of the Sacred Heart Medical Center Foundation, Lane County Cancer Society, Goodwill Industries and Lane County Council on Alcoholism. He was a board and Executive Committee member of Eugene Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Oregon Lions Eye Bank Operating Committee.

An avid Ducks fan, he and his family established a Musgrove Family Scholarship for local athletes.

After the tragic loss of his only brother, John, in Vietnam, Musgrove stepped forward as surrogate father to his children.

His life with wife Kay was cut short by her tragic death. In 2002, he married Ann Lamon. Together, they established a vocal scholarship in the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance.

He is survived by wife Ann, sons Mark and Jeff (NFDA past president and Policy Board member, respectively), daughter Jan, 11 grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

Please send death announcements to obits@nfda.org. Submit names for inclusion in the 2022 NFDA Service of Remembrance at nfda.org/membership/service-of-remembrance.

EVENTS CALENDAR

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Call 800-228-6332

Email nfda@nfda.org

Online nfda.org

Always check with
your state or national
association to confirm
event information.

September

8 NFDA Virtual Roundtable: "Conveying Value: Are You Prepared?" with Mike Nicodemus and Melissa Posey Loose

8-10 Wyoming Funeral Directors Association Annual Convention, Laramie wyomingfda.org

14 NFDA Free Webinar (no CE): "Meet the NFDA Trailblazers," with Sara Moss

16 NFDA Student Arranger Training Program with Melissa Posey Loose, Florida State College of Jacksonville

20-22 New Jersey State Funeral Directors Convention and Expo, Harrah's Waterfront Conference Center, Atlantic City njsfda.org

21-22 NFDA Cremation Certification Program: 21st: refresher; 22nd: full day. Piedmont Technical College, Greenwood, SC

21-24 Selected Independent Funeral Homes Annual Meeting, Grand Hyatt Washington, Washington, D.C.

28 NFDA Arranger Training Program, Arapahoe Community College, Littleton, CO

30 NFDA Cremation Certification Program, Goodwin University, East Hartford, CT

October

7-9 Insight-Hosted Celebrant Training, Baltimore, MD

8 NFDA Preconvention Seminar: Arranger Training Program, Baltimore, MD

8 NFDA Preconvention Seminar: Cremation Certification Program, Baltimore, MD

9-10 KAVOD Fall Meeting, Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD nijfd.org

9-12 NFDA International Convention & Expo, Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD

13-16 Hawaii Funeral and Cemetery Association Convention 808-935-1074

November

4 NFDA Arranger Training Program, Funeral Service Association of Canada, Toronto, Ontario

9 NFDA Student Arranger Training Virtual Program for Canadian College of Funeral Service

14 NFDA Cremation Certification Program, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home

15-16 Maine Funeral Directors Association Annual Convention. mainefuneraldirectors.org

December

1 Connecticut Funeral Directors Association Annual Convention. ctfda.org

DIRECTOR'S CUT

BY DUANE WEEKS, PH.D.



We Minister. We Companion. Do We Counsel?

One year, I attended an Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) conference, during which a psychologist took funeral directors to task for calling themselves counselors. He said we obtain neither the necessary education nor the professional training to call ourselves counselors. He was right, sort of.

In April, I was reading a guest column in our local Yuma, Arizona, newspaper. My wife and I love living in our small town of Enumclaw, Washington, until sometime in October, when our hearts and bodies begin to move toward Yuma, where we can avoid the raindrops and enjoy the sun's rays. So, as we basked in the sun, I was reading the *Yuma Sun*, a small daily newspaper with enough grammatical errors in any given issue to easily upset a former English teacher like me, even though I enjoy the vitriolic letters to the editor.

The guest columnist was Dick Polman, a national political columnist based in Philadelphia and a University of Pennsylvania writer-in-residence. His topic that day – mourning the loss of a loved one is not a disease – affects us funeral directors and our clients.

Polman, a widower after 45 years of marriage, has been widowed for six months. He hurts, he misses his wife. And he reads that the American Psychiatric Association (APA), in its “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,” says that if he cannot resolve and get over his grief in six more months, he should be considered mentally ill. Well, to paraphrase Polman, “Who do these fine folks think they are?”

How long should we grieve?

Apparently, Polman does not believe the answer is to be found in the APA's diagnostic manual. And I would suspect that the answer to the question lies somewhere between a short grief span and a prolonged grief span and involves several factors or variables.

SHORT GRIEF SPAN

From your own experience, you probably have stories of attempts to minimize grief by getting everything completed as soon as possible – no muss, no fuss, no bother. For instance, some of you have prepared to conduct a funeral, called a son or daughter, asked where they were and were told they had more important things to do than attend their father's funeral. Others have been told by families to do what-

ever they must do with the body – just do not involve them.

Our neighbor, Tom (not his real name), didn't experience a long grieving period when his wife died. A well-respected businessman, he lived across the street from us. When his first wife died, he was lonely for only a few weeks. Then He and Marla (not her real name either) began to show interest in one another. They dated and married within a month.

Townpeople were shocked. For instance, my secretary was appalled about the suddenness of this romance between Tom and his sister-in law, the divorced wife of Tom's brother. However, Tom and Marla moved into his home, were wonderful neighbors and lived happily for a decade until Tom's death.

PROLONGED GRIEF SPAN

Perhaps the best illustration of prolonged bereavement is the reaction of Queen Victoria to the death of her husband, Prince Albert, in December 1861. For nearly 40 years following his death (39 years, one month), every morning, the queen had a servant deliver warm water to Prince Albert's room for his shaving needs, she refused to have his room changed or rearranged during her lifetime, and the queen wore black every day from the prince's death until she died. Unusual? Perhaps. Mental illness? She was the queen. Who would dare diagnose her?

Another thing Polman wrote about that should be important to us has to do with what he called American impatience – “Get over it,” “Move on with your life,” “She's been gone two weeks; you need to get back to work.” My most disturbing example of American impatience occurred several years ago when a local man employed by a large aircraft manufacturer was told by his supervisor, “Listen, I know you are hurting, but your daughter was killed two weeks ago, so you need to take her photo off your desk. It's bothering other workers.”

Bereaved people, Polman suggested, should not be chained to a timetable. Writing about his fellow grievers, Polman contends, “We, the walking wounded, are grappling with life's worst disor-

ders, navigating at our disparate speeds. That doesn't mean we are sick.”

Well, if they are not sick, perhaps bereavement is not an illness and maybe the bereaved do not need physicians or medicine.

Mourning a death is not a disease. It cannot be healed; it can be experienced, and those surviving can move from their grief into the next phases of their lives. We, among others, will help them: physicians, clergy, teachers, family, friends and funeral directors. Most are not licensed counselors, yet we all do counsel.

That psychologist at ADEC was right, sort of. We are not licensed counselors. We are receptionists who meet and sometimes hug people as they come, frightened, into our facilities. We are women and men who make first calls and comfort families with our careful handling of their loved one's bodies. We are attendants who greet folks as they come in for visitations and funerals. We are cemetery workers who dig graves, bury urns and prepare the area for graveside rituals. We are preneed sales workers who help folks arrange death rites for themselves or others. We are funeral directors who work long hours into the night attempting to erase the horror of accidents, fires or diseases that have laid waste to the physical body. We take time to encourage and visit with those who are grieving. We provide the comfort that is most needed.

Polman is correct. Mourning is not a disease. It is a condition, a condition caused by death and relieved, not healed, but relieved by friendship, honesty, warmth, compassion and listening. The majority of those who are bereaved will return to normal lives without medicine and without some psychiatric declaration that lengthy mourning is a disease to be treated.

With death, we do not treat a disease, yet we help many live better. Says grief counselor Alan Wolfelt: “We companion people.” That is an excellent description.

A retired attorney in our town has repeatedly said that our funeral work is a ministry. Maybe your work is a ministry, too.

A licensed funeral director since 1959 and a licensed embalmer since 1965, Duane Weeks, Ph.D. (CFSP, FT), wife Fay and their children own seven funeral homes in the Puget Sound area of Washington State. They also own or operate three cemeteries and three crematories.

Earning his doctorate at the University of Minnesota, Weeks was mentored by pioneer death educator Robert Fulton, who, with Weeks, designed an extensive survey and presented early research on the AIDS virus and college/university student susceptibility.

After more than 55 years of licensure, Weeks remitted his funeral licenses to Washington State, realizing that it was time for younger people to replace him in working with the bereaved. Formerly an international speaker and author, Weeks still enjoys writing occasional articles.



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