

# Southern<sup>TM</sup>

◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

MAGAZINE

**Wishing You the Joy of  
Family, the Gift of Friends,  
and the Best of Everything  
in 2016!**

- \*50 Top Resolutions For a New Year
- \*What Does Holiday Shopping Have in Common With Burial Vault Purchasing by Mark Klingenger
- \*Planning your Preneed Strategy For the New Year-Understanding the Why's Before Setting the How's by Lindsay Eagan Bourgois
- \*Doric Products Celebrates 60 Years of Service
- \*Vantage Products Company Profile
- \*FDA of Kentucky Annual Expo and Convention Summary and Photos
- \*VitalBoard Launches Vital ICE App



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## ◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

### MAGAZINE

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December 2015

Southern Funeral Director Magazine®  
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## *notes from the editor*

**(special writer) by Santa Claus**

### **Christmas Story: For the Man Who Hated Christmas**

It's just a small, white envelope stuck among the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past ten years.

It all began because my husband Mike hated Christmas. Oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it – overspending and the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma – the gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties and so forth. I reached for something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way.

Our son Kevin, who was 12 that year, was on the wrestling team at the school he attended. Shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church. These youngsters, dressed in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes.

As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear, a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler's ears. It was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford.

Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class. Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly, "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved kids – all kids. He so enjoyed coaching little league football, baseball and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came.

That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes, and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed a small, white envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done, and that this was his gift from me.

Mike's smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year. And that same bright smile lit up succeeding years. For each Christmas, I followed the tradition – one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on.

The white envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning, and our children – ignoring their new toys – would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents. As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the small, white envelope never lost its allure.

The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief that I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree. And the next morning, I found it was magically joined by three more. Unbeknownst to the others, each of our three children had for the first time placed a white envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition has grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing to take down that special envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit will always be with us.

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## What Does Holiday Shopping Have in Common with Burial Vault Purchasing?

by: Mark Klingenberger, Vice President Sales & Marketing,  
Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc.

With the holidays upon us, the shopping frenzy is in full swing. Whether you shop online or in traditional brick-and-mortar stores, you most likely choose your purchases carefully and try to fully understand available options. In short, you make educated decisions. After all, you are selecting something for someone who means a lot to you.

As an example, say your spouse wanted a tablet but has no idea of what kind, best screen size, or even which platform. If you have a tablet, then you already have some knowledge to start from. But if you're also a neophyte then you research and educate yourself - online, talking to others, visiting an electronics store, anywhere where you can learn all the options so that you can make an informed decision.

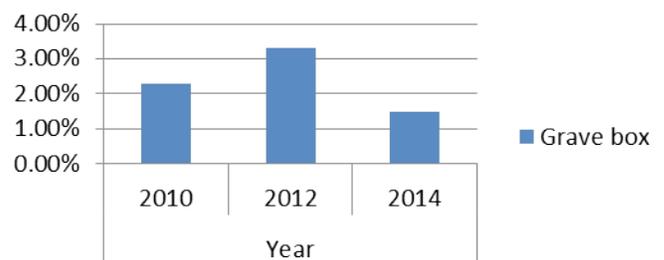
As you research and debate different product features and the price differences, you are engaged in an Educated Selection Process. The more you understand, the easier it becomes to make the decisions that are the best for you and your loved one. This raises your confidence level which in turn increases your satisfaction with the decision.

Should it really be any different when it comes to making decisions on a burial vault for a loved one? Wouldn't you think families are best served when they are presented with all their options so that they can make educated, and arguably more satisfied, decisions? For such a major decision, they are entitled to an Educated Selection Process. And you might be surprised by the selections that they would make.

Consider the statistics of Outer Burial Containers (OBCs) chosen by the most educated group of consumers when it comes to such products: Funeral Professionals. When Funeral Professionals themselves choose an OBC for their own loved ones, they

overwhelmingly choose a burial vault over a grave box. Peacock Marketing Group, an independent organization based in Greenville, SC, has done a survey for Wilbert every twenty-four months for the last six years and the percentage of Funeral Professionals choosing grave boxes has consistently been in the low single digits. In the latest 2014 survey, this most educated group to make arrangements chose a grave box for their family

**Would choose a grave box for a loved one**



members only 1.5% of the time. Contrast that to industry estimates of approximately 50% of all OBC purchases by families are unlined products such as grave boxes. That is a remarkable gap. It may well be that education is the difference.

Thinking of how Funeral Professionals educate families in their time of need, it is interesting to see how the tools used are evolving. The Peacock Marketing Group survey also tracks changes over time in the selection room environment and the 2014 results validated estimates of rising use of computers in making arrangements. While the percentage of Funeral Professionals using computers in the arrangements conference grew slightly between 2010 and 2012, it has doubled in the last two years.

However, it is important to assess whether digital tools are adding value towards educating families. Software programs are excellent in automating accounting processes and driving operational efficiencies but if

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Isn't it time to cross over to a better Educated Selection Process?

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the product selection component is nothing more than pictures and bullet points, is there truly an improvement in how the family is educated?

What we have found in our research is that video may be one of the best ways to connect with families and improve their education. In an online study of burial-inclined families who merely watched a two-minute video that explained differences between a grave box and a burial vault, only seventeen percent said they would choose a grave box. Comparing that to the fifty percent estimate cited earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the education provided through a simple video made a difference.

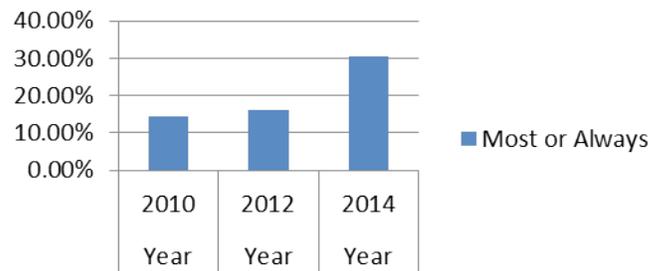
In this era where YouTube is the second largest search engine after Google, video obviously connects. Consider incorporating video into your digital arrangements or look for tools or programs that include video, and be sure that you and your staff consistently play the videos for your families.

Bottom line: when the most educated families (Funeral Professionals) select a product class (lined burial vaults) nearly 100% of the time and the least educated group only select it 50% of the time, it indicates a significant opportunity to improve communication and education. Through education, families will make better decisions. Informed decisions result in more satisfaction, which is the ultimate goal in the service to families. Every family wants, and deserves, an Educated Selection Process.



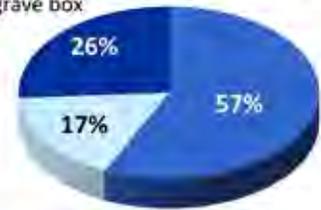
Mark Klingenberger is Vice-President of Sales & Marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services Inc., and has over 27 years of experience in the funeral industry. He has been in sales and marketing management for several leading funeral industry providers and has extensive experience in helping funeral professionals build market share through customer education.

### Most of the time or always use a computer to make arrangements



### After learning the difference between a grave box and a burial vault, only 17% chose a grave box

- 57% chose a burial vault
- 26% needed more information before making a decision
- 17% chose a grave box



■ Vault ■ Grave Box ■ Unsure

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Vantage Products Corporation was founded in 1978. The plant was a research and development facility of Hercules, Inc. before being purchased.

Initially, manufacturing was small and included custom furniture parts, door skins and burial vaults, but the company grew very rapidly, and over time dropped other products to focus on the funeral products industry as their expertise and market share expanded. Vantage owns huge injection molding machines that can adapt to unique applications, ideal for the funeral products industry.

Vantage is now located and headquartered in a new, state-of-the-art 100,000 square foot facility in Covington, Georgia. The facility is home to two new injection molding machines, robotic painting systems, R & D, as well as ample storage and shipping facilities.

## Vantage Products on the 2015 Convention Trail



Southern Funeral Service Expo, Macon, GA



South Carolina Mid Winter Convention and Expo, Columbia, SC



NFDA International Expo, Indianapolis, IN



Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky Convention, Louisville, KY

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# Doric Products Celebrates 60 Years of Service in Milwaukee, WI

Milwaukee, WI was the place to be for the 2015 Doric Products, Inc. annual fall meeting. Lake Shore Burial Vault Co. hosted Doric Dealers from around the U.S. and Canada at their plant in addition to providing insight to their diverse operation. Well-known industry speaker Poul LeMasters presented dealers with his thoughts on a wide range of topics that included disinterment issues, workman's compensation and human resources. The weekend concluded with the presentation of annual sales awards and recognition to longstanding dealers of Doric Products. Top honors this year went to Doug Evans and Jim Woods of Carolina-Doric, Inc., based in Florence, SC. **Carolina-Doric Inc.** had a fantastic year which culminated by being recognized as **#1 Dealer** and for the overall **Greatest Number Sold**.

Additional winners of the overall awards included: **“Top Cremation Product Sales Award”**: DG Robertson Inc. (South Burlington, VT); **“Daisy Chrisom Award”**: Rocky Mountain Monument & Vault (Sandy, UT); **“Overall Greatest Percentage of Increase”**: Division I – Doric of Western New York Inc. (Buffalo, NY), Division II – DG Robertson Inc. (South Burlington, UT), Division III – Willmar Precast (Willmar, MN), and Division IV – Cheboygan Cement Products (Cheboygan, MI).

Bronze Category winners: **“Greatest Number Sold – Bronze”**: Division I – Superior Vault Co. LTD. (Mississauga, Ontario Canada), Division II – Hardy Doric Inc. (Chelmsford, MA) and Division III – Beck Vault (Rome, NY). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Bronze”**: Division I – Crummitt & Son Vault Corp. (Martins Ferry, OH), Division II – Hardy Doric Inc. (Chelmsford, MA) and Division III – Beck Vault (Rome, NY).

Winners in the Lydian Category: **“Greatest Number Sold – Lydian”**: Division I – Doric of Tennessee (Nashville, TN), Division II – American Vault Company (Cleveland, OH) and Division III – Golden Eagle Vault Services (Rocky Mount, VA), Neher Burial Vault Co Inc. (Springfield, OH), and Simerly Vaults (Knoxville, TN). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Lydian”**: Division I – Crummitt & Son Vault Corp. (Martins Ferry, OH), Division II – American Vault Company (Cleveland, OH).

In the Athenian Category, winners were: **“Greatest Number Sold – Athenian”**: Division I – Carolina-Doric, Inc. (Florence, SC), Division II – Doric Vault of Eastern New York (Hudson, NY), Division III – Beck Vault (Rome, NY), and Golden Eagle Vault Company (Rocky Mount, VA),



*Jim Woods (left) and Doug Evans (right) of Carolina-Doric, Inc. receive sales awards for #1 Sales Dealer and Greatest Number Sold from Doric Vice President of Finance and Treasurer, Jim Wiens (center).*

and Division IV – J.P. Vincent & Sons, Inc. (Galena, IL). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Athenian”**: Division I – Bruns-Norwalk Vault Co. (St. Louis, MO), Division II – Warga Concrete Products (Fort Wayne, IN), and Division III – Wayne Burial Vault Co., Inc. (Indianapolis, IN).

Patrician Category winners were: **“Greatest Number Sold – Patrician”**: Division I – Hairfield Vault Companies, Inc. (Newton, NC), Division II – Rooks Vault & Monument Co. (Byron, GA) and Division III – Memphis Vault Company (Memphis, TN). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Patrician”**: Division I – Doric of Tennessee (Nashville, TN), Division II – Watts Vault & Monument Co. (Des Moines, IA), Division III – Beck Vault (Rome, NY).

Winners in the Phoenix Category follow: **“Greatest Number Sold – Phoenix”**: Division I – Doric Concrete Vaults (Newton, KS), Division II – Doric Vault of Eastern New York (Hudson, NY), Division III – Harn Vault Service Inc. (Massillion, OH), and Division IV – J.P. Vincent & Sons, Inc. (Galena, IL). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Phoenix”**: Division I – Creter Vault Corp (Flemington, NJ), Division II – Hardy Doric Inc. (Chelmsford, MA), and Division III – Palm Vault Co. (Ada, OK).

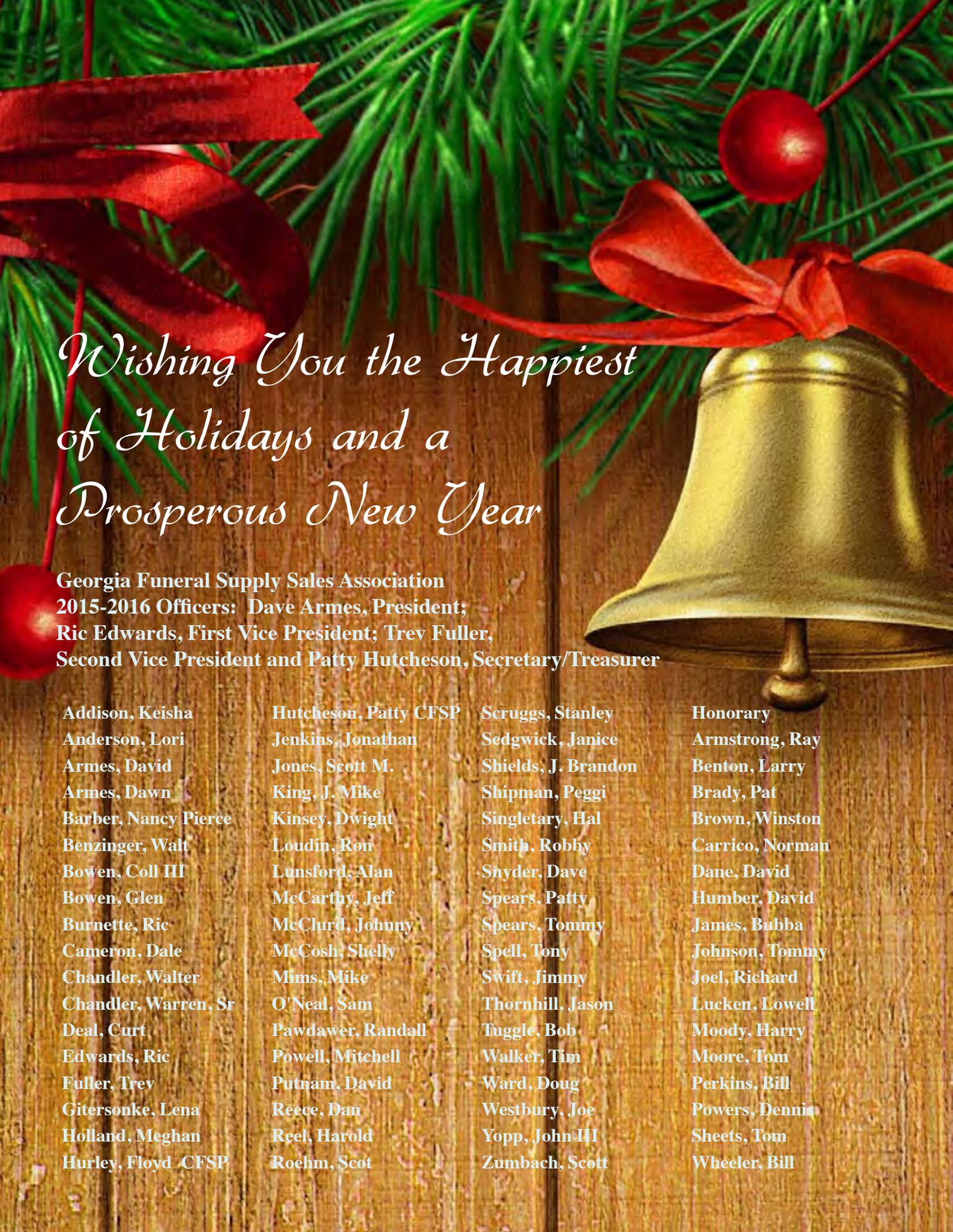
Doric is pleased to honor each of these companies for their hard work. For more information on Doric Products, please visit the website, [www.doric-vaults.com](http://www.doric-vaults.com) or call 1-800-457-0671.

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Ric Edwards, First Vice President; Trev Fuller,  
Second Vice President and Patty Hutcheson, Secretary/Treasurer

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# Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky Hold Annual Expo and Convention

Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville on June 17-19, 2015. The convention was well attended by funeral directors, suppliers, and their families. As the attendees viewed all the new and improved merchandise, they were able to visit with old friends and vendors.

Robbie Brantley of Brownsville was elected President of the Association. The Exhibit Hall was filled with 88 exhibiting companies. During this three-day meeting, Kentucky funeral homes were honored for 75, 100, 150, and 190 years of service; fourteen 50 year Kentucky licensed funeral directors were also honored; and continuing education awards were presented to 19 Kentucky funeral directors.

Six hours of continuing education credits were offered each day. The speakers from across the country were outstanding and included the following: Dr. Jacquie Taylor, the Executive Director and Senior Scholar of the New England Institute at Mount Ida College in Newton, MA., presented "It's Time to Get REAL about Funeral Service Education & Licensing;" Dr. Alan Wolfelt, internationally noted author, educator and

grief counselor, presented "The WHY of Meaningful Funerals: Helping Families Make Transformations;" Vernie Fountain, owner and operator of Fountain Embalming Services, Fountain National Academy of Professional Embalming Skills and Forensic Investigative Resources of the Midwest, presented "Embalming & Reconstructive Techniques and Tips;" Poul Lemaster, with a unique background in both death care and law provides resources and counsel to all death care professionals, presented "It's Not Just a Form – The Art, Science & Legalities of Your Forms and Contracts;" Dr. Bill Bass, created the world's first laboratory devoted to human decomposition: the University of Tennessee's "Body Farm, presented "Death's Acre: Inside the Body Farm;" and the President of the National Funeral Directors Association, Rob Moore IV, gave an update on the National Funeral Directors Association.

A large crowd enjoyed "The President's Reception and Dinner Cruise" Thursday evening aboard the Belle of Louisville. The entertainment was provided by Jamie Higdon during the cruise and was enjoyed by everyone.

## The following officers and directors were elected for the 2015-2016 year:

Officers		
<b>President</b>	<b>Robbie Brantley</b>	<b>Brownsville</b>
<b>President-Elect</b>	<b>David West</b>	<b>Nicholasville</b>
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>John Jones</b>	<b>Harlan</b>
<b>Secretary-Treasurer</b>	<b>James W. Davis</b>	<b>Berea</b>
<b>Sergeant-at-Arms</b>	<b>Rob Riley</b>	<b>Carrollton</b>
<b>Immediate Past-President</b>	<b>Doug Stanley</b>	<b>Williamstown</b>
<b>Chairman of the Board</b>	<b>Marcia Caniff Davis</b>	<b>Ashland</b>
District Directors		
<b>Central</b>	<b>Grant Bolt</b>	<b>Georgetown</b>
<b>Eastern</b>	<b>Rusty Preston</b>	<b>Paintsville</b>
<b>Northern</b>	<b>Bill Mullins</b>	<b>Covington</b>
<b>Southern</b>	<b>Gerald M. "Marty" Jones II</b>	<b>Morgantown</b>
<b>Southcentral</b>	<b>Brandy Harwood</b>	<b>Tompkinsville</b>
<b>Southeastern</b>	<b>Wesley Rominger</b>	<b>Manchester</b>
<b>Western</b>	<b>Chad Townsend</b>	<b>Dixon</b>



(l to r) Front Row – Central District Director: Grant Bolt from Georgetown; Southern District Director: Gerald M. “Marty” Jones II from Morgantown; Southcentral District Director: Brandy Harwood from Tompkinsville; President: Robbie Brantley from Brownsville; Immediate Past-President: Doug Stanley from Williamstown; Eastern District Director: Rusty Preston from Paintsville; Sergeant-at-Arms: Rob Riley from Carrollton

Back Row – NFDA President: Rob Moore IV from New Jersey; Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Davis from Berea; President-Elect: David West from Nicholasville; NFDA Policy Board Member: Shannon Combs from Richmond; Vice President: John Jones from Harlan; Southeastern District Director: Wesley Rominger from Manchester; Western District Director: Chad Townsend from Dixon; and Northern District Director: Bill Mullins from Covington. Not pictured: Chairman of the Board: Marcia Caniff Davis from Ashland



(left) Robbie Brantley was sworn in as the new President of The Funeral Directors of KY by his father-in-law, Jerry Patton, of the Patton Funeral Home in Brownsville, KY. (right) Brantley was presented his gavel by Immediate Past President Doug Stanley.



# HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?



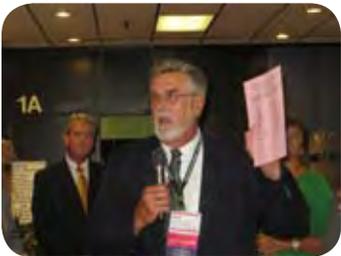
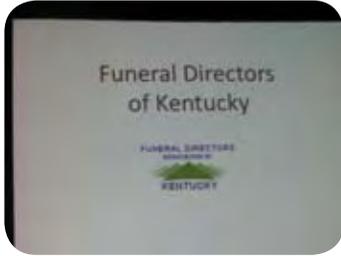
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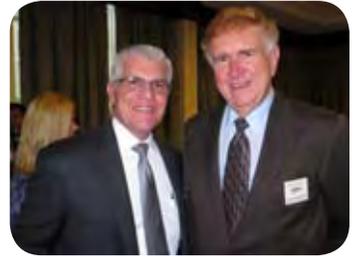
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# 50 Top Resolutions

## 5 things you can't recover in life:

A stone after it's thrown

A word after it's said

An occasion after it's missed

Time after it's gone

Trust after it's lost

## 7 Things To Remember If You Don't Want To Have Any Regret When You Die

There are many statements and pieces of advice that can be said about what it is to live so fully that you won't have any regret when you die. There is one element that encompasses a full life, and that's following your truths. It's being true to yourself about what you want and not deviating from those desires. This is solely what negates the sting of regret. Think hard about these tips so that one day, when it's time for you to leave this earth, you won't have any regret when you die.

### Don't Ever Leave Without Saying I Love You

Honestly, this is really important. My mom died last year and I can still feel the amount of love she had for me in her last "I love you." I, of course, told her I loved her but it was almost a distracted comment at the time. She knew it would be our last goodbye and last "I love you," so with the power she had left, she said it with so much passion that it still makes me feel warm today.

### Don't Take Those You Love For Granted

You will probably notice this throughout your life. A relationship ends and you remember all the reasons you loved them. Your children fly the coop and you fondly remember the house filled with laughter. When you reach the end of your life, you will probably contemplate a lot about people that meant something to you. Every time you have a beautiful memory, it might be tainted with the fact you weren't really giving that person your full attention. Look into the eyes of the people you love, listen to them, feel their presence in your life. Don't take one minute of it for granted, as love really is the primary purpose of our existence.

### Beat To Your Own Drum

That's right. Be weird, be silly. Be whatever makes you happy. Date a hippy, date a stock broker. Whatever it is that makes you feel happy, do that. Life should be yours, it should be fulfilling. This is a biggie to prevent regret when you die. Doing what was always a part of your true nature. It may not make you rich or famous, but those things won't really matter when you live out your personal dreams.

### Do Good Things

Have you ever had the opportunity to be compassionate towards someone and walked away instead? I remember seeing a girl I sort-of knew from high school and she was crying. I really felt compelled to put my arms around her and give her a hug but I was too shy. This happened well over ten years ago and I still remember that moment. I should have tried to make her feel better, let her know that someone cared at that exact moment. Don't let moments like these pass you by. We were put here to care for one another when necessary.

### Do Charitable Deeds

When you are coming to the end of your life, you'll likely wish you could have done more in this world. There is no truer legacy than leaving others less fortunate with something. Those people will never forget you, and it's likely you changed their life in bigger ways than you realize. While it's not about being remembered, it's in us as humans to reach out to others and be helpful.

### Live YOUR Dreams

This is a big one. In past generations, there was little option to live out your own dreams. Society had a black and white idea on what a man should be and what a woman should be. It's simply not the case anymore, so cut out the voices from generations before you and really live out your true dreams. No matter how silly or irrational it seems to others, this is your life alone. This brings you immeasurable joy in your life and you likely did it even though you were afraid.

### Be Bold

Magic happens out of your comfort zone, and what you desire in life could be challenged by your own fears. My advice is to do the things that you're afraid to do. Even if there's no reward at the end of the rainbow, realizing that your fear was unfounded brings boldness. I guess that's why we feel the adrenaline when we see videos of adrenaline junkies. While I'm not suggesting that you jump out of a plane, face your fears with the same gusto. When you are at the end of your life, that's one less thing to regret when you die. You confronted what you were most afraid of and you won.

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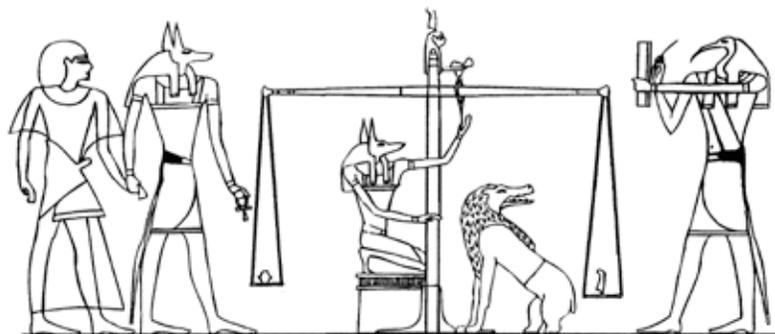
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## Stygar Family of Funeral Service Support Local First Responders In An Effort to Save Lives Vital ICE App Introduced by VitalBoards



Stygar Family Funeral Service in St. Charles, Missouri and Florissant, Missouri has graciously invested back into their communities in order to promote saving lives.

Owners Jeffery Stygar and his brother John “Steven” Stygar, recognized a very unique opportunity.

It is to assist the local St. Charles and Florissant First Responders through a marketing initiative which could potentially save lives.



The Stygars have made available, for free, to everyone in their local community to download the Vital ICE App – the in case of emergency app. The Vital ICE App allows for every individual that takes the opportunity to download it on their phone to have the peace of mind that, even in a life-threatening situations, their pertinent information is readily available to assist the paramedics and EMT’s in providing the proper treatment.

The Vital ICE App allows the user to store their contact information, emergency contacts, allergies, current medications, allergies to medications, medical history, and a copy of their insurance card.

The app also provides first aid scenarios, a one-touch dial of 911 with GPS location, and an emergency group that can be notified of the user’s distress and location. The Vital ICE app also provides a reminders section where the user can enter in their doctors and pertinent appointments, as well as daily medications.



Stygar Funeral Home is making this potentially life-saving App available to the communities for FREE as a way of showing their gratitude for allowing them to serve the community. All that is required by the user is entering in Stygar’s unique four digit code at start-up.

In conjunction with the Vital ICE app, there is a coinciding Vitalboards Initiative that is distributed by the funeral home locations and partnering fire departments/EMS. It is comprised of a write-on/wipe-off magnetic memo board that can be affixed to all refrigerator surfaces. The useful boards have a Monday through Sunday planner, shopping list, note area, and an important phone numbers section. A wet erase marker with mounting clip accompanies the board, which should be placed on the front of the refrigerator door. What makes the Vitalboards Initiative unique is that, on the reverse side of each board, there is room for each resident to record critical health information.



This Vital information includes questions taken from surveyed EMS, fire, police and ER staff which represents a portion of the required documentation needed in the event of a medical emergency. This “Need to Know” information could help save a life if the resident is unable to speak or is otherwise incapacitated. Home owners are instructed to fill out this information as accurately and legibly as possible. A small weatherproof EMS Sticker is also included, which should be affixed on or near the front door of each residence.

In the event of an emergency at a residence, first responders can identify the location of the Vitalboard on display, to retrieve the homeowner's vital information. These boards could easily be taken in the ambulance to the hospital, where ER Staff can further access this critical information. Remember, time is of the essence to assist saving lives.

Mr. Jeff Stygar first learned about the Vital ICE app and Vitalboards through an EMS National publication called EMS World Magazine. The International Association hosts an annual EMS World Expo. A thousand suppliers annually converge on the trade show, to be considered for the highly sought after EMS World EXPO Innovation Award. Vitalboards grabbed Jeff's attention since they won the 2014/15 esteemed honor. Mr. Stygar made the appropriate calls to Vitalboards and his areas first responders, to get the program implemented.

\* ( To Learn more how your (MFDA)(OGR)(NFDA) Funeral Home can exclusively partner with your local first responders in saving lives, contact Vitalboards/Memorial Service Mktg at 1-573-483-3109 or by emailing them through [www.vitalboards.com](http://www.vitalboards.com) )



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## National Funeral Directors of America Committed to Technology Upgrades, Releases Advanced Member Portal

SPRINGFIELD, IL- Federated Funeral Directors of America, a Fiducial company, is pleased to announce the release of an updated portal dedicated to all Federated members. This portal offers increased accessibility in real time to a business's key financial information in a snapshot summarizing key performance data and utilizing graphs and charts. Information is displayed visually to simplify the data and offers comparisons with past business performance as well as Federated averages.

With the support of Federated's parent company, Fiducial, the new portal release is part of an innovative and ambitious plan to provide the latest technological enhancements. "We're very excited about the opportunities that technology provides for better serving our members," stated Fabrice Moriaux, Executive Director. "Not only to be the leader in bookkeeping, tax and other services to the funeral business, we aim to be the leader in technology in the next 3 years."

Federated's new member portal is accessible from any device, including a smartphone, tablet or computer. The initial release of the new portal represents the first phase of the project. Subsequent phases will feature additional capabilities and will be released as they are completed.

Federated currently has nearly 1400 members and offers expert service in the funeral business with bookkeeping, tax and consulting services including valuation and transition services, business consulting, retirement plan administration, collection services and payroll services. More information about Federated Funeral Directors of America can be found at [www.federated-funeral.com](http://www.federated-funeral.com).



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## *Planning Your Preneed Strategy for the New Year: Understanding the Why's Before Setting the How's* *by Lindsay Eagan Bourgois*

With the new year upon us, many have taken the time to look back at 2015, evaluate performance, and set goals for the coming year. Before jumping on the fast track to setting and achieving goals, though, it is important to understand why these goals are in place and how they will help your firm succeed.

Preneed is a perfect example. Looking at why preneed benefits your firm from several different angles is just as important as determining your preneed strategy.

Most would agree that the two major benefits of preneed are:

It protects loved ones from the emotional and financial burdens of planning a funeral.

It secures future market share now.

These reasons are evident, but within them are further truths that should also be considered before planning a preneed strategy. It is important to note that preneed programs can range from passive to active and the below points have proven to yield higher results when more active programs are implemented.

1. Preneed doesn't just secure market share. It secures the right market share. This refers to the growing cremation rate. According to the 2015 National Funeral Directors Association's Cremation and Burial Report, the cremation rate in 2015 surpassed the burial rate for

the first time by nearly 3% with the gap only continuing to widen with each coming year.

Engaging in an active preneed program now helps capture the traditional buying habits that exist today but won't tomorrow. In a growing environment for simplicity and low cost preferences, preneed, when done right, will help keep your funeral home profitable well into the future, despite the increasing cremation rate.

Additionally, when looking at the demographics of buying habits, baby boomers are more likely to choose a full service funeral than a millennial. Therefore, your firm can lock in those buying habits before the arrangements are deferred to the next generation. This is not meant to suggest that the buying habits of millennials should be disregarded. There are several ways to provide meaningful services to both the traditional and cremation-oriented families, but that's another article for another time.

Preneed ensures that the families who want a traditional, full-service funeral are able to secure that service today and decide on their own terms how they will be memorialized.

2. Your brand is bolstered by consistent and effective marketing efforts. At the end of the day, some people are just not ready to preplan, and that's ok. Developing an informative mail piece, putting on an engaging seminar, displaying helpful brochures inside your

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By paying attention to consistency in your firm's logo and message, when families are ready to choose a funeral home, whether for preneed or atneed, there is a better chance they will think of your funeral home.

3. Preneed increases your call volume, thus enhancing the future sales price of your business.

In other words, increased call volume = greater profitability = greater valuation of your business should you consider selling in the future.

4. It's an all-around good thing for families.

Like mentioned above, preneed really benefits families because at the time of death, loved ones don't have to worry about the emotionally and financially grueling aspects of planning a funeral at a difficult time. Instead, they can spend that time remembering their loved one and helping each other cope.

Many news articles in the media today encourage families to be wary of planning their funeral ahead. They cite the struggles of families left with daunting bills at the time of the service and the lapse in policies due to the closing of funeral homes. However, what they fail to note are the availability of guarantees and the transferability of policies should funeral homes close.

Families should do their research and choose a funeral home that provides the options that best suit their needs. It is up to the funeral home to make that information easy to find. In most cases, preneed is a gift for families at a time when they really need it.

Additionally, preneed gives families the gift of time. It takes the time-sensitive nature of planning a funeral within a few days out of the equation, so families can spend more time deciding together on the best way they want to be remembered and memorialized. This also minimizes disagreements at the time of death regarding how Mom or Dad would have wanted to be remembered. It is important to encourage families to have these conversations ahead of time.

FAMIC's "Have the Talk of a Lifetime" campaign can be a great resource for your funeral home in talking to families about the importance of planning ahead.

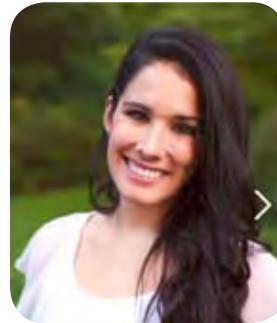
However, in the past 30 years or so, active preneed programs have become a very reliable, if not essential, marketing strategy to ensure future market share and profitability. While in the past you knew which calls would be yours, today that no longer applies. Calls have to be earned, and preneed is a reliable tactic to earn additional calls.

Preneed is literally the future. Funeral home owners are in a business where they can actually secure future business ahead of time. Not many businesses or industries have that same ability. Active preneed programs hold the strongest key to long-term success, however, your firm's primary preneed strategy should consist of taking bigger steps each year in furthering your preneed marketing efforts.

Whether that is more active or passive at this time, your preneed program should evolve and strengthen as your firm grows. A more active program will yield higher results bringing in more families to your funeral home, thus securing the future of your funeral home and the future of the families you serve.

Understanding why preneed is important is the first step. Once that is accomplished, planning your preneed strategy and objectives for the year can begin. It's an equally exciting and challenging time to be in the funeral industry with each year bringing further changes, which call for examination and evolution. Understanding why these changes are happening and how we can evolve right alongside them is how we will all grow and

hopefully succeed. It all depends on perspective, planning, and performance. With that being said, here's to your success in the coming year. Change isn't always a bad thing, so embrace it and decide how each change can be a positive force for your firm. Happy New Year!



*Lindsay Eagan Bourgeois is a Marketing Associate for Preneed Funeral Program, a preneed marketing organization that has secured over \$2.5 billion in funded prearrangements as a result of their marketing systems, which include direct marketing, veterans programs, aftercare, contact management, and preneed counselor training. She is responsible for developing and delivering marketing solutions to funeral homes that will help increase their preneed volume and bring added value to their services. She can be reached at 504-837-8868 or at Lindsay@preneed.net.*



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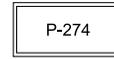
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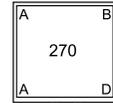
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