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MAGAZINE

New film "The Burial" about
O'Keefe vs. The Loewen Group trial

**Does Hollywood
get the story
right?**

**2023 PROFESSIONAL
CAR ISSUE!** See Page 12

In This Issue...

- O'Keefe vs. The Loewen Group by Joe Weigel
- PCS 2023 International Meetup Recap by Gregg D. Merksamer
- Building Strong Community Connections by Guy V. Winstead
- Community Outreach for Brand Awareness by Danielle Burmeister
- 11 Impactful Ways Funeral Directors Support Our Troops
by Jessica Farren
- Remaining Relevant in a Competitive Industry by Hannah Burns



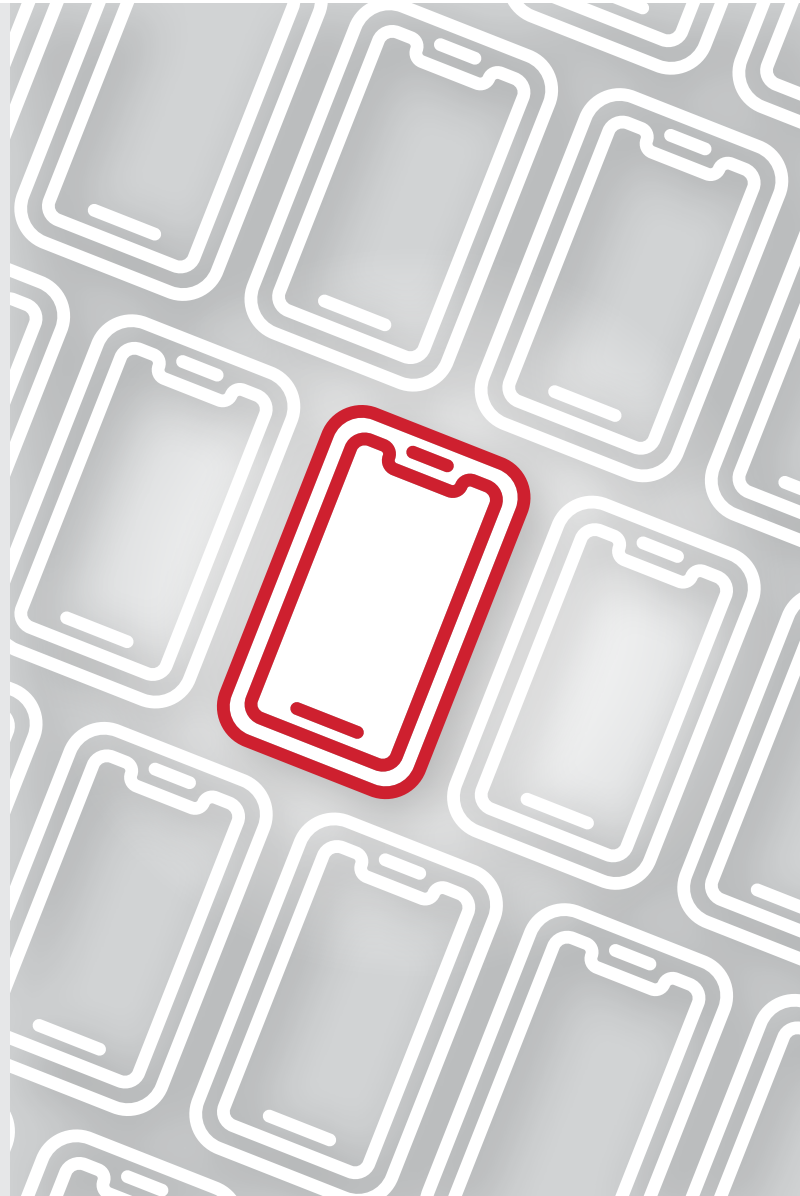
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Page 7

FEATURES

- 7 O'Keefe vs. The Loewen Group**
by Joe Weigel
- 12 PCS 2023 International Meetup Recap**
by Gregg D. Merksamer
- 18 Building Strong Community Connections**
by Guy V. Winstead
- 22 How Funeral Homes Can Leverage Community Outreach for Brand Awareness** by Danielle Burmeister
- 24 11 Impactful Ways Funeral Directors Support Our Troops**
by Jessica Farren
- 30 Remaining Relevant in a Competitive Industry**
by Hannah Burns

INDUSTRY NEWS

- 28 Premier Preeed Hires Galvan for Newly-created Position**
- 29 Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions Launches Cherished Memories E-Commerce Site for Funeral Homes**
- 32 Funeral Service Foundation Raises Record Donations During 2023 NFDA International Convention and Expo**
- 34 Foundation Partners Group Appoints New Chief Financial Officer**
- 34 Ambulance & Coach Sales of Nashville Delivers**

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- Shiv Khera



October 2023

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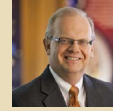
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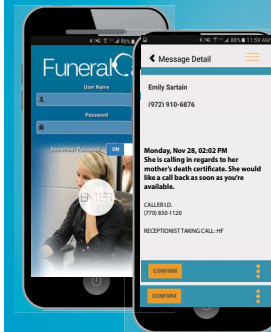


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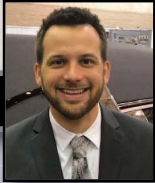
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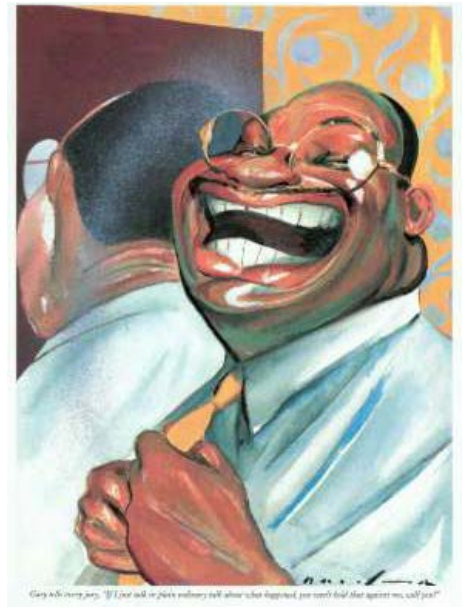
by JOHN YOPP

Special thanks to SFD's Associate Editor, Joe Weigel, and Jeffrey O'Keefe for reliving the 1995 "John Grisham-like" trial in Jackson, Mississippi and its subsequent results of a fascinating trial.

With the recent release of Amazon Prime's "The Burial" starring Jamie Foxx and Tommy Lee Jones, the movie depicts the trial from start to finish. Although SFD's coverage and interview from this landmark case, O'Keefe vs Loewen, is not intended to open any wounds that may or may not have healed from the past, it does attempt to bring to the surface the facts of the case as much as possible.

Below is a timeline of the case and its many stories that were created from well before the case to the final verdict as seen through the eyes of Jonathan Harr.

A REPORTER AT LARGE about flamboyant Florida trial attorney Willie Gary, 52, vs. the Loewen funeral company... Tells about the civil trial, which began Sep. 12, 1995, in Jackson, Mississippi... Gary wears three-thousand-dollar suits and has cases pending in forty-two states... Describes his self-made career, and how he rose from poverty... Describes how, rejected for a football scholarship on the last day of training camp at Bethune-Cookman, a small black college in Daytona... Describes how he then succeeded in obtaining a football scholarship to Shaw University in Raleigh, by showing up as the school year commenced, and convincing the coach to give him an opportunity... Before the start of his second year of college, he married Gloria Royal... Tells about a landscaping business he started in college to support himself... He was accepted at North Carolina Central University law school in Durham... After law school, he returned to Florida and passed the bar exam on his first attempt. He talked his way into a job with the Office of the Public Defender in Stuart, and in his first week, was given responsibility (mainly by the defendant) for a first-degree murder death-penalty case... The defendant was found guilty, but he eventually received a retrial and a life sentence... After the trial was over, no money was available to keep Gary on in the public defender's office, so he opened his own law office... Tells how he settled a case against an insurance company for \$225,000 in his second year, a verdict which made his reputation... By 1996, Willie Gary had accumulated nearly sixty settlements or verdicts of a million dollars or more... His great indulgence is lavish spending, and in this, he can match the excess of any corporate mandarin. The interior of his Gulfstream jet, for example, is outfitted with 18k. gold fixtures... Tells about the rise of Ray Loewen to the head of a large chain of Canadian and American funeral homes... Tells about the case brought against Loewen by a Biloxi businessman named Jeremiah O'Keefe, a contractual dispute, which Gary eventually agreed to lead... Tells how Gary's initial request to settle the case was for \$125 million... Describes Gary's lengthy cross-examination of Ray Loewen... Tells how the jury awarded O'Keefe a total of \$500 million, an amount which would bankrupt Loewen's company... Eventually, a deal was negotiated between the two parties... Lowen's company went bankrupt eventually and O'Keefe eventually purchased Loewen assets in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, using money obtained in his lawsuit against Loewen...



FORM B9F (0/97)

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Notice of Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Cases, Meeting of Creditors & Deadlines

Chapter 11 bankruptcy cases concerning the debtors listed below were filed on June 1, 1999.

You may be a creditor of one or more of the debtors. This notice lists important deadlines. You may want to consult an attorney to protect your rights. All documents filed in these cases may be inspected at the bankruptcy clerk's office at the address listed below. NOTE: The staff of the bankruptcy clerk's office cannot give legal advice.

See Reverse Side For Important Explanations	
Debtor (name(s) and address): Loewen Group International, Inc. 50 East River Center Boulevard Suite 800 Covington, Kentucky 41011	Case Number(s): 99-01244 (PJW) See Attached Schedule A for Case Numbers of Other Debtors
See Attached Schedule A for Names and Addresses of Other Debtors	Taxpayer ID Number(s): 52-1522627 See Attached Schedule A for Taxpayer ID Numbers of Other Debtors
Cited to Debtors: Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue Richard M. Cieri, Esq. North Point 901 Lakeside Avenue Cleveland, Ohio 44114 (216) 586-3939	Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue Paul E. Harner, Esq. 1900 Huntington Center 41 South High Street Columbus, Ohio 43215 (614) 469-3939
Delaware Counsel to Debtors: Morris, Nichols, Arshlt & Tunnell Robert J. Dehney, Esq. 1201 North Market Street Post Office Box 1347 Wilmington, Delaware 19899 (302) 658-9200	
Meeting of Creditors: Date: July 20, 1999 Time: 2:00 p.m. Location: Room 2313 U.S. Court House 844 King Street Wilmington, Delaware	
Deadline to File a Proof of Claim: Proof of Claim must be received by the bankruptcy clerk's office by the following deadline: Notice of deadline will be sent at a later time.	
Creditors May Not Take Certain Actions: The filing of these bankruptcy cases automatically stays certain collection and other actions against the debtors and the debtors' property. If you attempt to collect a debt or take other action in violation of the Bankruptcy Code, you may be penalized.	
Address of the Bankruptcy Clerk's Office: 824 Market Street 5th Floor Wilmington, Delaware 19801	Clerk of the Bankruptcy Court: Stephen D. Taylor
Hours Open: 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Date: June 30, 1999



by
JOE WEIGEL

We all love a good David and Goliath story

one where in the end, the little guy prevails. This month, funeral service had the opportunity to relive its own inspiring example of how the underdog could defeat someone much bigger with the release of the movie, **"The Burial"**. Inspired by true events, the movie from Amazon Studios tells the story of the lawsuit filed by Jeremiah O'Keefe and the ensuing trial against The Loewen Group more than thirty years ago.

A Quick Refresher on the Facts of the Case

In 1990, Jeremiah O'Keefe owned eight funeral homes in the Mississippi Gulf Coast region as well as the Gulf National Life Insurance Company (GNL). For more than a decade, O'Keefe had an exclusive contract with Wright & Ferguson Funeral Home in Jackson, Mississippi, committing Wright & Ferguson to offer and sell only GNL policies. That year, Loewen entered the Mississippi market and acquired an insurance company and funeral home owned by the Riemann family of Gulfport, Miss., and two funeral homes of Wright & Ferguson.

In April 1991, O'Keefe filed a lawsuit in Jackson, Mississippi against the Loewen Group contending that it was violating the terms of the GNL insurance sales contract with Wright & Ferguson by selling its own policies instead of those of GNL. Subsequent negotiations led to an August 1991 settlement agreement between the two parties that was never honored by Loewen. As a result, O'Keefe expanded his earlier lawsuit regarding breach of contract and breach of settlement to include an anti-trust element.

After Loewen gained a trial postponement, a young Black Jackson, MS trial attorney, Hal Dockins, Jr., urged O'Keefe to add to the legal team. He recommended bringing on a very wealthy and infamous hotshot personal injury attorney, Willie E. Gary, whose success and lavish surroundings include a Gulfstream jet named *Wings of Justice* and had even made an appearance on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* TV program.

Once O'Keefe agreed, Michael Cavanaugh, Jerry's long-time 30-year attorney, and Dockins, Jr., then set out to Stuart, Florida to convince Gary, an African-American lawyer, to join the case and work with Michael Allred. Gary had built a reputation as a talented courtroom battler but had a full docket of cases. However, after spending several days with the two Mississippi lawyers, Gary was convinced to take the case.

With Gary joining the team and days to go before the opening of the trial, O'Keefe made a final settlement offer to the Loewen Group, but it was rejected. (In fact, O'Keefe had made multiple settlement offers before the trial.) Gary had never handled a contract law case prior to this lawsuit, he had built his reputation on personal injury cases.

In the end, the Mississippi jury didn't look fondly on a Canadian mega-businessman trying to take advantage of small, local family businesses. In fact, the jury went far beyond the settlement that Gary initially requested, awarding O'Keefe \$500 million in damages -- the largest in Mississippi history.

The figure represented \$100 million in compensatory damages and \$400 million in punitive damages which was possibly the second largest verdict in the nation. The next year, Loewen settled with O'Keefe for \$175 million, structured as cash, equity, and a note.

Hollywood's Take on the Story – The Film's Official Synopsis

Jeremiah O'Keefe (Academy Award winner Tommy Lee Jones) is a pillar of his community and the owner of eight funeral homes. To avoid bankruptcy, he agrees to sell part of his business to a conglomerate run by Ray Loewen (Bill Camp). When their contract isn't properly executed, Jeremiah decides to sue and hires Willie E. Gary, (Academy Award winner Jamie Foxx).

Willie is a charismatic, smooth-talking personal injury attorney with a record for winning multi-million-dollar judgments. He has no interest in taking on a contract law case until Jeremiah's junior counsel Hal Dockins, Jr. (Mamoudou Athie) convinces him that their case could be lucrative and groundbreaking. But first, Willie must take on power defense attorney Mame Downes (Jurnee Smollett).

Inspired by true events, *The Burial* is based on *The New Yorker* article of the same name by Jonathan Harr, with a screenplay co-written by Doug Wright and Maggie Betts, who also directs, and stars Tommy Lee Jones, Jamie Foxx, Jurnee Smollett, Mamoudou Athie, Pamela Reed, with Bill Camp and Alan Ruck.

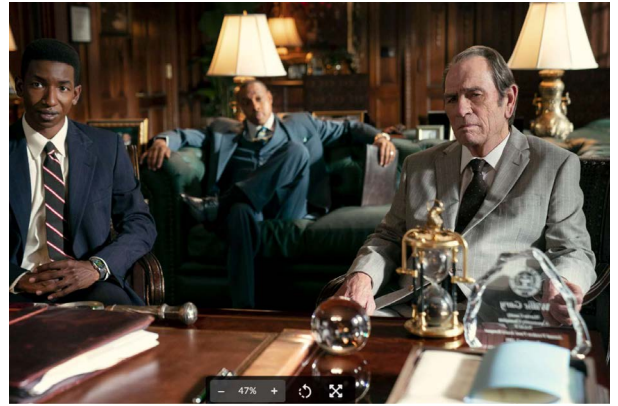
Did Hollywood Get It Right?

Imagine your family's story was being told on the silver screen. Would you be excited? Thrilled? Worried? Well, Jeffrey O'Keefe, Sr., CEO of Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Homes and the son of Jeremiah (Jerry) O'Keefe is concerned about how the film will be received by the funeral profession as he believes the film may open up wounds that have been long healed.

"My father signed away the rights to his image and likeness for the story and lost control of the end product," stated O'Keefe. "As you might expect, Hollywood creatively embellished the narrative to fit their needs. Unfortunately, it's not a real-life documentary of what actually happened."

O'Keefe and his family were never consulted until well after the filming progressed. Their long-time family lawyer, Michael Cavanaugh, was contacted to fact-check some items for the movie. The family did have the opportunity to review the first "rough cut" of the file – at which point they let the producer know that there were several items that were unacceptable and had to be changed to the storyline.

In the end, there are still many exaggerations and fiction added to the factual story which include:



With Reggie Douglas (Dorian Missick) listening, Hal Dockins, Jr. (Mamoudou Athie), and Jeremiah O'Keefe (Tommy Lee Jones) meet with Wille E. Gary to convince him to take the O'Keefe case,



Willie E. Gary (Jamie Foxx) stands behind the pulpit addressing the congregation in his church in Stuart, FL.



Jeremiah O'Keefe (Tommy Lee Jones) meets with his long-time O'Keefe family lawyer, Mike Allread (Alan Ruck) to discuss the merits of bringing Willie E. Gary into their lawsuit against Loewen.



Defense attorney Mame Downes (Jurnee Smollett) and the attorney for the plaintiff, Willie E. Gary (Jamie Foxx) approach the bench during the trial.

- The movie makes the O'Keefe family more downtrodden than they were in real life.
- The O'Keefe family's personal finances were never under duress. (Ending cable service as a cost-cutting measure and taking a third mortgage to pay the lawyer were all exaggerations for dramatic effect in the movie plot.)
- The motive for filing the lawsuit was breach of contract, breach of settlement, and anti-trust activities. There were never discussions about pursuing the legal fight to leave a financial legacy for the O'Keefe children.
- O'Keefe made multiple settlement offers before the trial. He never rejected an offer of \$75 million, nor did he seek at any point to put the Loewen Group out of business.
- The scene involving Gary and O'Keefe on the courthouse steps after the verdict never happened. O'Keefe was jubilant after the trial, not glum.
- The movie has a scene where O'Keefe is cross-examined and accused of improperly investing pre-need funds. O'Keefe never improperly invested pre-need funds.
- The movie contains a scene where Loewen and O'Keefe are at a table negotiating – this never happened.
- The lead lawyer for Loewen at the trial was a male and not a female as shown in the movie.



Ray Loewen (Bill Camp) makes a point to Jeremiah O'Keefe during a dinner negotiation with O'Keefe family attorney Mike Allred (Alan Ruck) looking on.



Reggie Douglas (Dorian Missick) listens as Willie E. Gary (Jamie Foxx) and Hal Dockins, Jr. (Mamoudou Athie) argue legal strategy



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In fact, there are more than a half dozen inaccuracies in the 2 ½ minute trailer for the film alone.

While the O'Keefe family was not able to contribute to their story as it was being filmed, they were able to go to New Orleans for the filming. While there, they had the opportunity to visit with the actors.

"Tommy Lee Jones warned us that we would not be seeing our dad in his portrayal during the filming, but he did a fine job in the role," commented O'Keefe. "I understand that they had contacted Harrison Ford to play the role of our father, but he had broken his leg during the filming of the latest Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny movie."

The movie only focused on the two-month trial. In reality, the O'Keefe-Loewen saga had the makings of a TV mini-series as the story actually began four years before the trial and lasted until well after the trial. According to O'Keefe, what happened before and after the trial was just as riveting as the events during the trial.

"We remain in contact with Willie Gary," added O'Keefe. "In fact, while in New Orleans for the filming, we had the opportunity to go to dinner with Willie. He mentioned to us then that he had a small, cameo role near the end of the picture."

The film received its initial screening in early September at the Toronto International Film Festival where Variety magazine placed the film in its Top Ten Audience Award winners. The film then had a limited theatrical release on October 6, followed a week later with the film streaming on Amazon Prime. In addition, there were several higher education showings at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well as the law community.

The O'Keefe family plans a private screening of the movie in Biloxi or Gulfport in the near future. Scott Foundas, the Amazon producer on the film, has agreed to attend. They will host a question-and-answer session about the movie after the viewing.

In the end, the O'Keefe family wished the movie had remained true to the story told in the pages of the New Yorker magazine.

"Don't get me wrong – Amazon Studios did a fantastic job with the story. It is a great movie from a storyline standpoint," added O'Keefe. "But it's just not the story our family would have told."



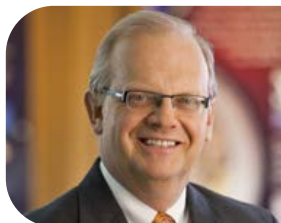
Attorney Willie E. Gary (Jamie Foxx) argues a point during the O'Keefe vs. Loewen trial.



Jeremiah O'Keefe (Tommy Lee Jones) confers with his wife, Annette O'Keefe (Pamela Reed) during a meeting with Willie E. Gary.



Willie E. Gary (Jamie Foxx) consoles Jeremiah O'Keefe (Tommy Lee Jones) on the courthouse steps following the trial verdict. In reality, O'Keefe was overjoyed with the verdict.



About the Author

Joe Weigel is the associate editor of Southern Funeral Director magazine. He has associated with funeral service for three decades. He has BS-Journalism from Ball State University. Joe can be reached at 317-608-8914 or sfdmagazine@gmail.com.

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PROFESSIONAL CAR SOCIETY'S 2023 INTERNATIONAL MEET RECAP

by
GREGG D. MERKSAMER

The synergies that come from two or more car clubs co-staging events together in a time of declining and aging membership hobby-wide was made crystal-clear when the Professional Car Society held its 46th International Meet in concert with the Vintage Chevrolet Club of America's 2023 Eastern National Meet from August 8th through 12th. The memories and new friendships forged in Morgantown, PA during Meet Week indisputably bode well for the 2024 International the PCS Mid-Atlantic Chapter will be staging with the American Truck Historical Society (ATHS), the Divco Club of America and the Society for the Preservation and Appreciation of Antique Motor Fire Apparatus (SPAAMFAA) at the York, PA Fairgrounds from June 3rd-8th as will soon be promoted in more detail on the official PCS website at www.TheProfessionalCarSociety.org.

The success of the 2023 PCS International was also assured by how the Holiday Inn in Morgantown, PA was so well-suited to serve as the Meet's headquarters hotel. On top of being conveniently situated off Interchange 298 of the Pennsylvania Turnpike only 40 miles west of Philadelphia and 15 miles south of Reading, it already had experience hosting car gatherings like the Buick Club of America Tri-Regional Meet and the Camaro Club convention it respectively welcomed over the two weeks preceding the joint PCS/Chevy shindig. It is also, perhaps most-crucially, connected physically to Morgantown, PA's Classic Auto Mall, which offered meet attendees another 900-plus consignment and 300 permanent collection vehicles to admire under climate-controlled conditions once they moved their own cars out of the harsh August sun for an indoor display on Friday and Saturday.

Morgantown's location on the western border of Berks County also meant Lancaster County's many scenic and pastoral delights were just a short drive down westbound Pennsylvania State Highway 23 and the rural routes it connects to. These were the by-ways by which PCS people visited a vast farm in Manheim where ten million chickens lay a third of Pennsylvania's eggs (1,700 cows are also milked there daily) and 17-acre plant in New Holland where over 600 people are employed building agricultural hay balers. Formally-scheduled Berks County tour stops north-and-east of Morgantown, meanwhile, included a truck bodyworks-turned-museum in Boyertown that touts the country's biggest collection of Pennsylvania-made motor vehicles and a 1905 carousel in Pottstown that took twenty years to restore. Come evening mealtime diets were simply unmaintainable, thanks to three days' worth of group dinners (two of which were at all-you-could-eat smorgasbords) diving deeply into the calorie-rich Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine that keeps Amish men going at communal barn-raising.

That a PCS International Meet is about camaraderie as much as the cars was underscored by how many people traveled tremendous distances to attend the 2023 edition. Ed Renstrom, joined by his affectionate Rat Terrier Jack (Dog is his co-pilot!), trailered his 1953 Armbruster Pontiac ambulance nearly 1,700 miles from Hot Springs, South

Dakota, while Lance Giberson's 1965 Superior Cadillac Sovereign hearse/ambulance combination coach was hauled an also-epic 950 miles from Florenceville, New Brunswick, Canada. William Donnell and his young protégé Gabriel "Badger" Taylor earned official distance honors for driving a 1989 Eureka Cadillac limousine-style commercial glass hearse 799 miles from Greenville, Illinois, slightly edging out Jeremy Ledford's 744-mile drive from Lebanon, Tennessee in a 1996 Superior Cadillac Statesman standard glass landau hearse; the 1988 Henry Brothers Buick LeSabre 6-door Edwin Logan drove up from Limestone, TN; and the 1969 Miller-Meteor Cadillac Classic "48" ambulance Brice & Barbara Harris brought from Blythewood, S.C. in the process of earning the 2023 John R. Keel Memorial Award for Youthful Enthusiasm.

The Philadelphia International Airport's proximity to Morgantown also facilitated participation by Texas denizen Nick Studer and Tom Shafer of Los Gatos, CA, who flew cross-country from San Francisco and truly made the most of his time in the East by also visiting bus photo archives in Virginia, Pennsylvania and New Jersey in his capacity as VP and Head Archivist of the Pacific Bus Museum (pacbus.org). Recently-joined Aiken, SC PCS member John Dietzel (being a rail fan like many others in our ranks) and his father-in-law Bill Roberts spent Meet Week mailing out pro-car illustrated postcards after taking Amtrak from Columbia, SC to Philadelphia, where they grabbed a cab to the airport and collected the rental car they also used to visit the Strasburg Railroad on-their own. "This is my first meet but I'll definitely be back," John promised.



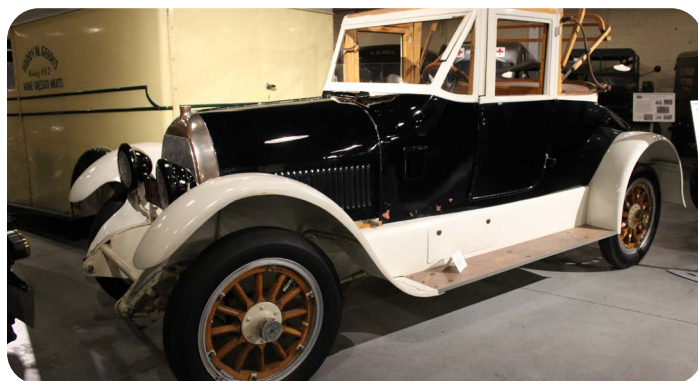
As Lancaster County, PA boasts some of America's most-fertile farmland, it was fitting the first scheduled tour of the 2023 PCS International Meet on Tuesday, August 8th was Kreider Farms of Manheim, which touts a high-tech carousel that milks 1,700 cows three times daily and ten million hens supplying a third of Pennsylvania's eggs. Overviews of its vast acreage are afforded by a 100-foot Silo Observation Tower originally used for storing feed before it was, incredibly, moved 900 feet to its current location by an outfit that also handled a lighthouse once.



The PCS 2023 Pennsylvania meet's big tour stop on Wednesday, August 9th was the Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles, which occupies the original factory of the Boyertown Auto Body Works that built motor truck, ambulance and military vehicle bodies starting in 1914 and stayed in continuous operation until 1990. Holdings made right on-site included this 1958 Ford Mister Softee ice cream truck that bore period-appropriate Civil Defense logos as its on-board generator could be used for the emergency refrigeration of food and medicine.



World War II military ambulances bodied by Boyertown in the very same building where PCS People got to see them on display eight decades later included (background) a 1942 Dodge WC-54 that Boyertown later converted to the Korean War era S8-MA-50-1 spec retrofitting a wider, taller, six-stretcher body with walk-through capability and (foreground) an open-sided 1942 International Harvester MI-4 intended for service in the hot-and-humid Pacific Theatre. Boyertown also earned its World War II Army/Navy "E" Flag (for excellence) for building hundreds of mobile machine, shoe repair and tire repair shops in addition to 30 hospital operating rooms and three dental prosthetic labs-on-wheels.



Ninety-five percent of the Boyertown Museum's 90-plus vehicles were built or bodied somewhere in Pennsylvania. One of many standouts was this Reading-made, V8-powered 1919 Daniels Model C Convertible Coupe reputedly built for pickle and ketchup tycoon H.J. Heinz, which is displayed in a partly-completed state to showcase the wood framing of its landau bar-operated top mechanism and aluminum-paneled body.



2023 PCS International Meet attendees also took a Thursday, August 10th tour of the New Holland, PA plant where CNH employs about 650 people building New Holland and Case-branded hay balers an average rate of seventeen units daily. An outdoor shot of this 17-acre complex emphasizes how paintwork is the main differentiator between yellow-and-red New Holland and red-and-black Case balers that sell for \$60-\$90,000 each depending on model



The 336,000-square-foot Classic Auto Mall in Morgantown, PA had an astounding 921 consignment, 84 inventory and 300 permanent collection vehicles on view the week it welcomed the 2023 PCS International and Vintage Chevrolet Club of America Eastern National Meets. One of its tiniest offerings was this adorable, Italian-made 1960 Autobianchi 110B hardtop convertible sporting mint green paintwork, rear-hinged doors and Fiat twin-cylinder engine making 21 ponies from 499 cc. As is the case with many restored mini-cars nowadays this might just find a buyer at its \$80,500 asking price!

2023 PCS INTERNATIONAL FUNERAL CARS & AMBULANCES

Many PCS and Chevy people decided to place their Saturday show cars inside the Classic Auto Mall on Friday afternoon, August 11th. Here we see a supremely-original, 44,800-mile 1977 Chevrolet Monte Carlo owned by Mike and Sue Kissinger of Marysville, PA passing Pt. Marion, PA funeral director Phil Rishel's 1969 Superior Cadillac Royale Landaulet hearse and 1996 S&S Fleetwood 6-door Limousine as it headed toward the Vintage Chevrolet Club's display room beyond the corridor that also offered back door access to the Holiday Inn HQ hotel.



The oldest hearse at the Professional Car Society's 2023 International Meet was this Superior-bodied 1940 Pontiac "straight eight" Peter Lockwood of New Holland, PA "paid not much for" after finding it through his local PENNSAVER as 21-year-old in 1978. Business-branded FUNERAL procession windshield cards he discovered in its glove box 45 years ago established this conveyance originally belonged to the Brumbach Funeral Service of Kutztown, PA, while its blue mohair casket compartment touts arched quarter window flower trays and a Superior-exclusive, relatively-inexpensive "Sidroll" side-service setup teaming angled casket rollers with extra-wide #2 side doors. This rarity is now available for purchase by phoning 717-354-7825 or e-mailing lockwoodpc@gmail.com.



The sight of George Hamlin's 1953 Henney Packard ambulance and Jeff Beyer's 1955 Studebaker Ambulet parked side-by-side outside the PCS 2023 International Meet's HQ hotel in Morgantown, PA brought to mind a famous photo of both cars together 51 years earlier at the Antique Automobile Club of America's 1972 Fall Hershey Meet. This indirectly led to the 1976 founding of the PCS after George and Jeff began wondering if there were other hobbyists interested in preserving, restoring and showing professional cars unsullied by coffins, cobwebs, skeletons and other ghoulish trappings that diverted attention from their aesthetics and fine craftsmanship.



Charles Lambert of Raleigh, NC recalled this Superior-bodied 1957 Pontiac he's owned since 1993 was originally a part-time hearse/ambulance combination owned by Apex Funeral Directors of Apex, NC: "When the town chartered its first volunteer rescue squad in 1971 or 1972 (Apex) said 'here!' and this is the way they operated it until they got their first van-type ambulance a couple of years later." This two-tone blue "Poncho" turned lots of heads at the 2023 PCS Pennsylvania Meet despite the absence of bodyside trim still being straightened back home.

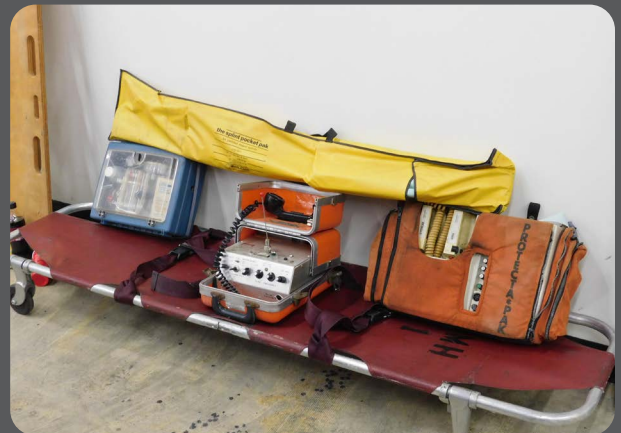
This 1959 S&S Cadillac Professional High-Body ambulance was the most-honored entrant at the 2023 PCS International Meet in Morgantown, PA, earning Joseph Puleo of Wall, NJ Best-of-Show as well as Medics' Choice and the Cadillac & LaSalle Club Award. This awe-inspiring rig originally cost Deal, NJ's First Aid Squad a then-astounding \$20,000 and stayed in their service until another S&S succeeded it in 1970. After Puleo purchased it in thankfully rust-free condition from a Connecticut Cadillac collector in 2018 the hardest part of its restoration proved to be the 10-foot rocker panel moldings: "luckily I found a guy in Pennsylvania to re-create them by running flat stock through a jig."



1965 Cadillac funeral cars were the first to fit stacked headlights and extra-tall commercial glass rooflines as recalled by this limousine-style Superior Sovereign hearse/ambulance combination coach Lance Giberson trailered 950 miles from Florenceville, New Brunswick, Canada to take part in the Professional Car Society's 2023 International Meet in Morgantown, PA. A 2016 tip on the Funerarium Facebook page led Lance to this Black-over-Ensign Blue beauty he bought from its original owners at L.H. Brooks Brothers in Danville, Virginia: "It was the funeral home's first coach," Lance said, adding they sourced it from Southwest Specialty Vehicles of Dallas.



Another 1965 Cadillac that entered PCS circles through Facebook was this extremely rare flower car (one of only 35 completed at Superior's Lima, OH plant that model year) that Allentown funeral director Nicos Elias acquired in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country four years ago. In addition to gracing the 2023 PCS International Meet T-shirt it earned PCS Senior certification during rigorous judging at Saturday's Concours inside Morgantown, PA's Classic Auto Mall. Nick extended special thanks to the restorers at the renowned NB (Nicola Bulgari) Center of Allentown who repaired the power assists that adjust the height and angle of this car's stainless steel flower deck.



Brice & Barbara Harris of Blythewood, SC - who just acquired this 1969 Miller-Meteor Cadillac ambulance originally delivered the Jamestown, North Dakota FD and kept in their service until 1980 - were the 2023 recipients of the John R. Keel Memorial Award honoring PCS members who demonstrate the Youthful Enthusiasm of the 18-year-old club prodigy who passed away Christmas Day, 2002. "Brice bought a car he obviously likes very much and asked others a lot of questions about it" during Meet Week, Keel award administrator Steve Lichtman said; "He was just bouncing around the show this year - it's just enthusiasm and that's Brice."

Brice Harris of Blythewood, SC also brought an impressive collection of period rescue equipment to Morgantown that he leaned against the wall behind his 1969 Miller-Meteor Cadillac ambulance during Saturday's indoor Concours. This display included an Epic Systems Communications Mease F8 Biophone, a Protecta-Pak defibrillator and a fire blanket recalling his rig's second-tier service as a raceway ambulance in Brainerd, MN.



The only Oldsmobile at the Professional Car Society's 2023 International Meet was this 1974 Cotner/Bevington "AMBULANCIA" that might have served in Mexico before Michael Hysek of Bristol, PA bought it on-line out of San Diego in September, 2019.



Edwin Logan's 1988 Buick LeSabre 6-door limousine from Limestone, TN (seen here departing CNH's New Holland, PA plant following the PCS' August 10th, 2023 tour) was one of four originally built for a Memphis mortuary by Henry Brothers of Manila, Arkansas. Its Texas license plate recalls how Ed bought this car from Frank Miller's Dallas funeral car dealership in December, 1999 because "both of grandfathers and my dad had Buicks and I already had six decades of Buicks from the 1940s-on-up. After I sold off the 1987 LeSabre I bought for my daughter so she could get a pickup truck I thought it would be fun to fill in that gap with a 1980s limo. Frank Miller said (this) was fixin' to go to Mexico before I got it."

Attila Bethlenfalvy has imported several "JDM" (Japanese Domestic Market) vehicles under the USDOT's 25-year exemption protocol including this 1995 Nissan Atlas he uses to acquire memorabilia for his North Carolina Funerarium. "I prefer driving on the right side of the vehicle as I'm further from the crash zone," he said, adding "I also grew up with old Harleys and Indians you shifted with your left hand." Attila also added this truck was bodied by Autech (which has also made stretch limousines for Nissan and its Infiniti luxury brand) and is powered by a 4.2 litre in-line six-cylinder diesel affording a 2000-kilogram payload capacity according to the Japanese language tag on the back door he instantly translated using a smart phone scan.



"CIVILIAN" CHEVYS SHOT AT THE VINTAGE CHEVROLET CLUB OF AMERICA'S 2023 EASTERN NATIONAL MEET JOINTLY STAGED WITH THE 2023 PCS INTERNATIONAL

The oldest Chevrolet shown at the PCS co-hosted Morgantown meet was this 1928 AF four-cylinder touring car brought from southern New Jersey's Hammonton "Blueberry Capitol" by Steve & Theresa Jones. "We just recently purchased it a year ago on a phone call," Steve said, adding it came out of "a Virginia basement as you see it. I have five grandkids and the oldest, a 10-year-old girl named Kendall like the oil, took such an interest in it that we've already taught her how to drive it and maintain it. (Double-clutch) Shifting came natural to her."



Joe Wurm of Aberdeen, MD - a 1969 Woodstock "designated driver" who subsequently spent 30 years in the U.S. Army before serving it as a civilian employee for another 23 years - has raised \$100,000 for an Ordinance Soldiers Memorial at Ft. Lee, VA by displaying his patriotically airbrushed 1957 Sedan Delivery at various Chevrolet shows around the country. Tooled leather Vietnam scenes adorn its cargo area interior walls to compliment the exterior.

Nick & Barbara Matlaga of Mt. Bethel, PA bought this 1980 Chevrolet Monza 2+2 hatchback from its original owner in 2006 with just 22,000 miles on its odometer. It excited many Morgantown meet attendees as so few examples have survived out of the 53,415 made during the Monza's final model year along with 95,469 coupe versions and 20,534 soft-nosed, quad-headlamp Sport hatchbacks.



BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

by
**GUY V.
WINSTEAD**

Funeral homes have a unique opportunity to build trust and provide comfort by being deeply ingrained in their community. When families face the difficult prospect of arranging a funeral, they often find solace in turning to a funeral home with local deep roots. This trust is not built overnight; it emerges through shared experiences and a history of mutual support. Families feel more at ease knowing that their local funeral home is not just a service provider but a trusted neighbor ready to offer support when it is needed most.

Your funeral home's reputation is intricately linked to its level of community involvement. When a funeral home actively engages with its community, it builds a reputation as an institution that cares deeply about the well-being of its neighbors. Positive perceptions about your funeral home's professionalism and compassionate approach can lead to increased business and referrals. Families facing the challenging task of choosing a funeral home are naturally drawn to those with a stellar reputation for not only providing dignified services but also for being pillars of support within the community.

Participation in local events and community initiatives can serve as a powerful tool for building brand recognition. Attending these events is also a great opportunity to showcase your services and build awareness for your preneed program. While these events may not result in an immediate business, the more individuals encounter the funeral home in the context of their community, the more familiar and comfortable they become with its presence. This familiarity fosters trust and confidence, crucial elements in the decision-making process during times of preneed planning or loss.



Another event that can allow a funeral home to become active in its community are Senior Expo as evidenced by the Boyd Family Funeral Home.

At Security National Life, we are a preneed company focused on helping funeral homes build their preneed programs. Our approach is built on an outreach-based approach to serving families. Instead of sitting back and waiting for customers to come to you, a community-first mindset can help you reach families you might otherwise miss.

A robust preneed program, coupled with a dedicated preneed advisor, can be potent tools for your funeral home's success. In addition to attending local events, many preneed advisors organize workshops and seminars, to educate the community about preneed and pre-planning. These seminars provide valuable information and showcase the funeral home's commitment to helping families prepare for the future. Events like these can help your funeral home build relationships, increase preneed business, and establish yourself as a resource for families in your community.

If your funeral home can support a dedicated preneed advisor, this is an excellent opportunity to supercharge your funeral home's

outreach efforts. As someone focused on reaching families outside the funeral home, they can seek out additional events and spaces to represent your funeral home. This frees up your funeral directors and other staff to focus on serving families in their greatest time of need. A preneed advisor is also equipped to discuss preneed options with event attendees and can focus on a consultative approach to representing your funeral home.

Security National Life encourages our preneed advisors to find non-traditional opportunities for community outreach. Don't limit your funeral home's potential to just existing events. Seek out places your potential customers frequent. Security National's preneed advisors have found success representing their funeral homes at grocery stores, shopping malls, flea markets, and more.

As we in the funeral industry know all too well, many people avoid thinking about and preparing for their passing. Community outreach, especially in places your customers visit frequently, can help them feel more comfortable with your funeral home over time and help normalize funeral planning. Your presence in these spaces makes accessing the resources your funeral home has to offer easy and accessible.

Of course, community outreach shouldn't just be limited to promoting your business. Beyond their primary role in providing funeral services, funeral homes have a profound opportunity to give back to their communities through volunteerism. Volunteering serves as a vital means of reinforcing the connection between funeral homes and their neighbors, fostering a sense of unity and support within the community. Funeral homes can engage in various forms of volunteer work, such as organizing food drives, participating in disaster relief efforts, or actively supporting local charities. By participating in these initiatives, funeral homes extend their commitment to the overall well-being of the community, demonstrating that they are not just service providers but dedicated contributors.

Volunteerism allows funeral homes to build deeper and more meaningful relationships with community members. It transcends the traditional client-service provider dynamic, emphasizing the funeral home's role as an integral part of the social fabric. These acts of service not only strengthen trust and goodwill but also create a more empathetic and supportive environment when families face the inevitable challenges of grief and loss. Funeral homes become more than just places to turn to in times of need; they become beacons of compassion and solidarity, enriching the lives of their neighbors through their active involvement.

Finding the right charity or cause to sponsor can help you establish your funeral home's priorities in the community. At Security National, we're proud to support Canopy Children's Solutions—a Mississippi-based charity that provides behavioral health, educational, and social services solutions for children and families. Our parent company also contributes to the Taylor Hagen Memorial Foundation, a non-profit committed to raising mental health awareness and supporting suicide prevention programs. By aligning with these initiatives, Security National Life demonstrates our commitment to strengthening the well-being of communities beyond just offering preneed services.

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Health Fairs present an excellent opportunity for community outreach as demonstrated by the staff of the Mothe Funeral Home.

Security National also encourages our employees and agents to volunteer and make meaningful contributions to their communities through various avenues, including support for local charities, food drives, and disaster relief efforts. If members of your staff have a particular cause that is close to their hearts, consider making a donation or arranging for your staff to volunteer towards these programs. Creating a culture of giving back underscores your commitment to the well-being of others and solidifies your reputation as a compassionate and socially responsible institution.

As funeral homes foster deeper connections and actively engage with their communities, they morph from being simple businesses into community connectors. Through these connections, they gain an intimate understanding of the unique dynamics and culture of the area they serve. This understanding, coupled with their unwavering dedication to the welfare of their neighbors, results in more empathetic and personalized interactions when families are navigating grief. In knowing a familiar face, families find an added layer of comfort and support during life's most challenging moments.

What you do matters and the role you fill in your community is important. By engaging with your community, you can become more than just an institution of ceremony. Your funeral home becomes a living embodiment of support, compassion, and unwavering dedication to your community, forever elevating the quality of support offered during life's most profound and challenging moments. We hope you will join Security National Life in our commitment to community outreach, meeting people where they are, and making sure families are prepared for one of life's most difficult moments.



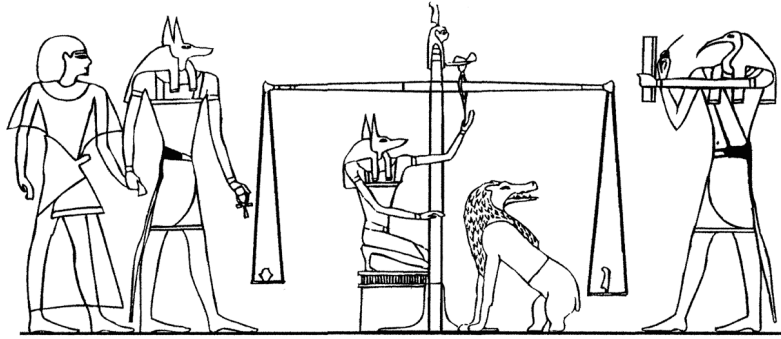
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About the Author

Guy V. Winstead is the Vice President of Sales for Security National Life Insurance Company, a leader in the preneed and final expense industries. Prior to his current position, Winstead served as a third-generation funeral director. Raised in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Guy now lives with his wife, Shelley, and their son Jack in New Orleans, LA. He is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and a member of various professional and philanthropic organizations.



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How Funeral Homes Can Leverage Community Outreach for Brand Awareness

by **DANIELLE BURMEISTER**
VP-Marketing & Communications
Homesteaders Life Company

How many funeral homes do your client families consider before calling you to care for their loved ones? Three? Four?

The answer may surprise you.

Homesteaders has asked this question in our consumer research for more than a decade, and the results are consistent: three out of four consumers consider only one funeral home when making their arrangements.

It's a metric that helps illustrate the importance of active preneed – the more families you can reach in advance, the more likely you're going to be the first (and only) firm they consider. It also shows the power of brand awareness, the natural result of strategic and well-timed marketing. But what does it take to build that awareness in your community?

The U.S. Small Business Administration recommends spending 7-8% of a business's gross income on marketing. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, the median cost of a funeral with a visitation and burial was \$7,848 in 2021 and the median cost of a funeral with cremation was \$6,971. So a firm that does 100 calls a year with the average breakdown of burial vs. cremation (36.6% burial, 57.5% cremation) at the median service amount should be spending at least \$48,000 on funeral home marketing each year.

But if your firm is like most funeral providers, spending 7-8% of your income on marketing can feel steep when you're already struggling to attract and retain staff, keep up with rising inflation, and meet the increasing demand for cremation.

Building brand awareness through community outreach can be an effective way to stretch those marketing dollars. When done well, community service can help you generate positive word of mouth in your community which is often even more effective than traditional advertising methods. But you have to be careful about what type of community outreach you're investing in – slapping your logo on the back of a Little League shirt is a nice gesture, but it's not going to do much to increase your brand awareness.

At the funeral home I grew up in, my dad sponsored the local high school basketball team. Rather than a monetary donation, he offered up the funeral home facilities and technology once a month so the players and coaches could review game footage and enjoy a team meal. The financial investment was small: the parents provided the food and the team always cleaned up before they left. The return was significant: by opening the funeral home to those athletes, parents, and coaches, my dad established comfortable relationships with some high-profile community members. He contributed in a tangible and memorable way rather than being one of many on a long list of small business sponsors. And, as a bonus, he recruited some of the players to wash cars and help with lawn care.

Creative sponsorships like this have a more significant and lasting impact than standard money-for-logo exchanges

because they're focused on building relationships. I doubt any of those players could list the logos on the back of their game-day programs. But, over a decade later, they still come up to my dad and talk about their memories at the funeral home. That is the type of community outreach that truly pays off.

I talked with a funeral home owner a few years ago who hosts a Thanksgiving Day meal for anyone in her community who can't spend the day with their family. It's a lot of work to bake enough turkey and pie to feed the hundreds of people who attend. But it's a meaningful experience for them, and they're going to remember that day when the time comes for them to choose a funeral provider.

Another funeral home we work with invites community members to exchange their weathered American flags at their funeral home for fresh ones. The staff drapes the old flags on Veterans prior to cremation. But beforehand, they gently cut out a single star from the flag and frame it for the family as a keepsake. What started as a run-of-the-mill donation program has become a huge competitive differentiator for their firm. They're now the first funeral home families think of when a Veteran dies.

Education can also be a powerful way to leverage community outreach for brand awareness. Lunch and learns, hosted events and even senior movie nights can help you reach more people in your community while also educating them on who you are and what you offer.

You can also extend those efforts to young people in your community. Consider reaching out to your local school board to see if there are opportunities for you to serve their students. Put together talking points parents can use to speak to their kids about death and dying. Encourage teachers to have students write about their own experiences with grief. Offer to visit the class after the tour to hear feedback and address questions. And, at the very least, ensure the schools in your area know you can be a compassionate subject matter expert and source for grief resources when a staff member or student dies.

There are so many ways you can leverage community service to build brand awareness. As a funeral professional, you are uniquely equipped to demonstrate your firm's value to your community. The greatest investment with these services is time, not money, and they offer an effective way to tell your story while also getting to know members of your community.

About the Author

Danielle Burmeister is VP-Marketing and Communications for Homesteaders Life Company. She leads the team responsible for all aspects of Homesteaders' marketing and branding. Before joining Homesteaders in 2015, Burmeister served as marketing coordinator for the Iowa State Fair and associate faculty for Ashford University. She earned her bachelor's degree from Central College and her master's degree from Iowa State University. In addition, Burmeister is a fellow in the Life Management Institute (FLMI), has received Homesteaders' Rising Star Award, and was nominated for Homesteaders' Outstanding Teamwork Award.



“ We've continued to [work] with Homesteaders because they continue to offer additional benefits. Not just the commissions or the easy check writing, but the other programs like their third-party marketers, eFuneral, lunch and learn options and trainings.



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Owner
Serenity Funeral Home
Kansas City, MO

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EVAN THAYER

Owner, Funeral Director
Boultinghouse Funeral Home
Rockport, IN

11 IMPACTFUL WAYS FUNERAL DIRECTORS SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

by
JESSICA FARREN

Amidst a multitude of heartwarming tales about funeral directors going the extra mile to support our armed forces and pay homage to deceased veterans, one constant theme emerges: a timeless commitment that knows no bounds. From rallying the public to attend the funerals of veterans without families to crafting moving displays that honor our American troops, these stories shine a light on the unwavering dedication of funeral professionals to our military members.

In addition to these individual acts of kindness, funeral home associations have played a crucial role in creating employment opportunities for veterans and advocating for their interests in Congress. In this article, we'll delve into some of these powerful narratives that illustrate the profound ways in which deathcare professionals stand by our nation's servicemen and women.

1. HONORING VETERANS WHO PASS WITHOUT FAMILY

One of the ways our nation pays tribute to the sacrifices of our brave military is through the funeral rites given exclusively to deceased veterans. The firing of the three-volley salute, flag folding ceremony, and playing of taps are time-honored rituals used to emphasize the fact that a person who honorably served their country is being laid to rest. So, when a veteran passes away without any living family member there to ensure the proper funeral rites take place, funeral directors step in to guarantee these traditions are still carried out. However, many have gone far beyond this, taking it upon themselves to make certain no military man or woman is ever buried alone.

One great example occurred at **Brown Funeral Home** in Niles, MI when an intern was tasked with planning a funeral for a gentleman named Wayne Wilson who had no immediate family. When the intern learned from Wilson's friends that he had fought in Vietnam, he put out a plea to the public asking them to help give the veteran the fitting farewell he deserved. The intern's efforts brought 3,000 people who never met Wilson to the funeral service. As incredible as this story is, it is not the first time and will not be the last time a funeral professional mobilizes the public to ensure a veteran receives a proper tribute.

2. COLLECTING DONATIONS FOR SERVICE MEMBERS OVERSEAS

For many years, funeral homes across the country have held donation drives for troops serving overseas. Their efforts have helped countless military members feel closer to home. What's more, these funeral homes will often gather donations multiple times a year, collecting Christmas stockings and Valentine's Day cards to make holidays extra special for those who are serving. These donation drives bring happiness to deployed service personnel while inspiring generosity and goodwill within the community.

3. HOLDING MILITARY RECOGNITION EVENTS

One of the most crucial lessons learned from America's conflict in Vietnam was how essential it is to celebrate and honor those who put their lives on the line in service to their country. It is a terrible tragedy that so many Vietnam veterans were treated with contempt and derision upon returning home. Thankfully, our society has worked to right this wrong by holding military recognition events that properly honor the courage and sacrifice of all who serve. One of the many ways deathcare professionals support vets in their local area is by holding recognition ceremonies, parades, holiday programs, and other veteran appreciation events. Funeral directors are often highly involved with their local V.F.W. and other military associations as it allows them to express their gratitude for those who protect our freedoms.



Funeral Director, Dan Madden of Stark Memorial Funeral Home in Salem, OH proudly displays the Valentine's Day cards his community created for service members overseas and veterans in local veteran hospitals.

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4. GIVING LOST OR UNCLAIMED VETS A PROPER SEND-OFF

It is a sad situation that occurs more often than one might think. A veteran passes but never receives a proper burial, either because their remains were not recovered or because they were never claimed by a family member. Years pass and then someone discovers a hero who had to be left behind. It is then when a funeral director will often volunteer to help, donating his or her time and resources to ensure the vet receives a proper burial with full military honors. In some cases, this involves handling the logistics of bringing a service member home who died overseas, sometimes many decades ago, and was unable to return with their unit. Other cases involve the discovery of unclaimed cremated remains, which has led some deathcare professionals to put on their detective hats to track down the veteran's descendants. If none can be found, they will often work with organizations like the **Missing in America Recovery Project** to guarantee the serviceman or woman is properly honored.

5. ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF VETERANS TO LAWMAKERS

Funeral professionals have an active voice within the walls of the federal government through the advocacy efforts of the **National Funeral Directors Association**. Lesley Witter, Senior Vice President of Advocacy, has led the charge in representing the interests of the funeral service community in Washington D.C., and helping to ensure the issues they care about are given priority attention by lawmakers. One of these issues is improving funeral and burial benefits for veterans and their families.

For years, funeral directors have met with lawmakers to advocate on behalf of military families. Their efforts have had a meaningful impact. At the beginning of 2021, the BRAVE Act was signed into law after many months of lobbying from funeral directors. This important piece of legislation updates the statute so that all non-service connected deaths are treated equally and veterans receive the same benefits regardless of where they pass away.

6. SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY TO SERVE INITIATIVE

In 2021, the Funeral Service Foundation and ICCFA Education Foundation announced they would be collaborating on a new joint project aimed at recruiting military veterans into careers throughout the funeral service profession. Funded equally by both foundations and endorsed by ICCFA and NFDA, the **Journey to Serve** initiative provides tools and resources to aid in veteran recruitment on a local, regional, and national scale. Funeral directors can visit www.journeytoserve.com to download a toolkit that will help them recruit and hire more military veterans to work at their funeral business.

7. OFFERING FREE CASKETS TO VETERANS

The appreciation and gratitude morticians have for veterans shape how many funeral home owners choose to run their businesses. In fact, some mortuaries such as **J. Allen Hooper Funeral Home** in Morrisville, PA, and **Dickey Funeral and Cremation Services** in Laredo, TX are so invested in their relationship with vets in their community that they will provide services or funeral merchandise such as caskets and urns to veteran families free. The generosity of these funeral homes and their willingness to give back to our nation's heroes is truly incredible.

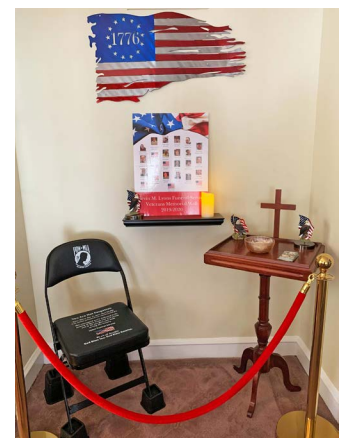
8. CREATING POWERFUL DISPLAYS TO HONOR SERVICE MEMBERS

There is a reason why in America we fly the flag at half-staff during a period of mourning. Visual symbols of remembrance and love can have a powerful impact on those who view them. Many funeral professionals have endeavored to create spaces inside or outside their mortuary chapel that pay tribute to the sacrifices made by military veterans. These symbolic displays serve as evocative reminders for all who enter the funeral home to take time to appreciate those who protect our freedoms.

9. HELPING VETERANS IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

"Remake the world, a little at a time. Each in your own corner of the world."

This quote from author Rick Riordan really captures the mission of so many deathcare professionals. Understanding the influence they have to effect change on a local level, many funeral directors seek out ways they can help those in their own backyard. This includes building relationships with the local veteran community and determining what some of the unmet needs are of those individuals. Maybe it's hosting a dinner for the VFW, offering a donation drive for veteran families, or helping vets connect with one another. Funeral directors are passionate about giving our servicemen and women the recognition they deserve when they return to their hometowns.



The Veterans Memorial Wall on display at Kevin M. Lyons Funeral Service in Glenolden, PA

10. OFFERING A FLAG RETIREMENT PROGRAM

The American flag is a revered symbol of freedom and liberty. However, most people are unsure what they should do when a flag becomes weathered or torn. The Veterans Flag Retirement Program provides a solution to this dilemma while honoring veterans. Funeral homes that participate in the program ensure each veteran who is entrusted to their care for cremation is done so with a donated worn or tattered flag, ensuring unusable flags are properly disposed of while honoring a hero. Funeral homes will welcome anyone in their community to drop off worn and tattered flags to be used for this purpose. It is just another example of funeral homes going that extra mile to salute our nation's veterans.



A van donated by Roselawn Funeral Home in Princeton, WV to help veterans in their local area attend funeral

11. COORDINATING WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA EVENTS

Wreaths Across America is a national campaign to remember and honor veterans by laying wreaths on their gravesites during the holiday season. Every year, Wreaths Across America volunteers lay hundreds of thousands of memorial wreaths. The organization works to find local support in different areas and coordinate wreath-laying ceremonies at veteran cemeteries nationwide. Many funeral homes have gotten involved with these efforts, coordinating donation and volunteer efforts in their local area. This is a wonderful way to encourage the entire community to remember and honor veterans who have served our country.



About the Author

Jessica (Fowler) Farren is the Public Relations Specialist and Staff Writer at ASD – Answering Service for Directors. She has answered the calls of funeral homes nationwide for more than 19 years. Jessica manages ASD's company blog, social media accounts and digital marketing. She has been published in numerous funeral trade magazines and has written articles on a variety of subjects including communication, marketing, business planning, technology and funeral trends. To contact Jessica, call 800-868-9950 or email jess@myASD.com.



Premier Preneed Hires Galvan for Newly-created Position *New Director of Learning and Development Will Take On Key Role For Company*

July 17, 2023 – Premier Preneed Marketing, a prominent preneed marketing company, has announced the hiring of a new director of learning and development, Stacy Galvan. In her new role, Galvan will be responsible for working with current team members to educate and train current accounts as well as helping to build new relationships and prospects with funeral homes and preneed counselors to help them better serve the families in their community.

During her career in funeral service, Galvan has held key preneed sales and training positions at several companies, including funeral homes, cemeteries, and a preneed insurance company. She possesses the skills and technical knowledge to design and deliver efficient training for agents to be successful in selling pre-arranged funeral plans.

"Stacy is a proven leader in the area of learning and professional development," stated Jeff Wright, Vice President – Preneed at Premier Preneed Marketing. "With Premier Preneed Marketing's continued growth, Stacy will play a critical role in leading our efforts to design, develop, and execute corporate learning programs using innovative approaches for training. This includes training programs with our all-in-one sales and marketing suite, the Premier Preneed 360 Platform."

"I've seen firsthand what sales training can do for people. As I've grown my career, learning and professional development has become a passion of mine", commented Galvan. "When the opportunity arose to follow this passion for helping to train others and to do so by joining a great company like Premier Preneed, I jumped at it. I could not be more excited to join the company."

With the addition of Galvan as the Director of Learning and Development, Premier Preneed is well-positioned to continue to take its training, sales, and sales support programs to new heights. Earlier this year, Premier added Michelle Fong as Business Development Manager to help provide and implement high-quality solutions for Premier funeral home partners.



Stacy Galvan



Premier Preneed Marketing has provided pre-need support, training, and leading life insurance solutions to funeral homes nationwide for over fifty years. The company connects funeral homes with multiple carriers from which to choose and offers single pay, multi-pay, and preneed annuity options as well as standard and guarantee issue plans. For more information about Premier Preneed Marketing, visit www.premierpreneed.com.



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Treasured Tribute Tools



Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions Launches Cherished Memories E-Commerce Site for Funeral Homes

PITTSBURGH, PA – Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions today announced it has launched an exciting new web site that will enable its funeral home customers to capture more sales of urns, keepsakes, and memorial jewelry. The new site, cherishedmemorieskeepsakes.com, offers Funeral Homes a way to retain urn, keepsake, and memorial jewelry sales they might otherwise lose to online retailers, and it also creates a convenient, at-home purchasing experience for families.

The Cherished Memories site will be offered exclusively through Matthews Aurora Funeral Home customers and will offer families an online retail purchasing experience that allows them to browse the entire Matthews Aurora I'll Remember You® cremation catalog, making their purchases from the comfort of their own home and using a credit card for payment. Funeral Homes will be able to offer a customized URL and link that they may place on their own web sites, and that will also be published in a customized brochure they can offer to their families. The new site provides a simple interface and experience for families while also helping Funeral Homes retain those cremation product sales within their business. It will be offered free of charge to Matthews Aurora customers.

"We are really pleased to offer our new Cherished Memories site to our Funeral Home customers," said Marty Strohofer, Vice President of Marketing & Product Development for Matthews Aurora. "The site offers a seamless and comfortable purchasing experience for families and enables the Funeral Home to compete directly with other online retailers offering cremation products."

The new Cherished Memories site is available now to all Matthews Aurora Funeral Home customers. Customers may request a demonstration or sign up by contacting their Matthews Aurora Funeral Service Consultant.



Experience the Matthews Aurora Difference for your firm by calling 1-800-457-1111 or visit us online at matthewsaurora.com. Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions is a part of Matthews Memorialization.



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REMAINING



IN A COMPETITIVE INDUSTRY

by: Hannah Burns

As time advances, so does the desire for change and modernization within many industries. Remaining vigilant and adapting to the world around you is becoming increasingly important. More specifically in the funeral service industry, adapting to these industry changes can not only benefit your business but make it more efficient in regards to operation. Responding to the continuous change of family's needs, remaining competitive with other funeral homes, capitalizing on new opportunities, and expanding and growing. Complacency can hurt your business prospects. Always consider branching out into new directions, as anything from green funerals to providing virtual services can help you remain ahead of the game. Remaining proactive and moving forward with the changing needs of your staff and customers allows you to move together with industry trends, creating new opportunity for revenue while more effectively serving your customers.

In being a funeral service professional, we choose every day to comfort the brokenhearted, to see others at their weakest and most vulnerable. We see the absolute worst life has to offer. A front row seat to the most horrible of all horrible, and for me, I feel indebted to those who sit before me. We see children, innocents, disease, accidents, heartache, fathers, mothers, and those so alone no one comes to cry for them. Our hearts continue to grow in ways we could never fathom. It is an honor to serve these families. They come to us, most with no experience on where to go or what to do, we guide and direct them while offering consolation and compassion. No two family's needs are the same and we have the meet each one right where they are. Optimizing advances made within the industry is optimal in providing excellent service to the family while serving their loved one. Technology has changed the way we interact with almost every facet of our lives, and funerals are certainly no exception. Adopting new technologies can help you streamline operations, saving you time and money while better catering to the needs of your customers. Although many first calls are taken via phone, people are looking at your website. Who works for you? What are the reviews? What do you offer? What is pricing like for your services? Your clients are going to look at your website appearance, or lack of an online presence, to see how you are serving others within your community. Many in the profession find technology scary but demystifying and embracing it can deliver exceptional benefits to the business and your service levels. As younger people enter the field of mortuary science, they are bringing change and innovation to the precedents.

As the world changes, new opportunities arise for those who are willing to take them. Just because a family may not accept an offer, it is nice to have the option to do so and the ability to be able to choose. These could start as services that add extra value, like memorial items, offering catering services, or live streaming and recording. The key to this is ensuring all options are being shared and presented at arrangement meetings so families have a clear understanding of their choices. For this, it is important that funeral directors feel comfortable and confident to transparently share

these options so that the family can make the best decisions for their situation. The idea of change for many within the industry is unwarranted and many don't entertain the forthcoming innovations that could potentially benefit their business and their pockets. Guiding and supporting your employees will minimize error, allow them to adapt more quickly, and feel more comfortable in doing so.

Overall, flexibility is the key to maintaining profitable business operations in 2023 and beyond. While you cannot control the changing environment, you can adjust your ability to react to unforeseen changes by making sure you are always in the best position possible. Work to understand how trends are affecting the deathcare industry and how families' preferences for deathcare are changing, so you can make proactive adjustments to better serve those that come before us.

About the Author

Hannah Burns is a college student at Mid-America College of Funeral Service. She is halfway through her educational journey and just at the beginning of her career in funeral service. In October, Hannah obtained an apprentice license in her home state of Maryland, where she works full time at Bounds Funeral Home (Dignity Memorial) alongside her sponsor. She enjoys spending time with her family and her rescue dog, Tannah. Hannah shares "Over the past year, I have lost two very special people in my life. Without hospice and optimizing palliative care options, I don't know where we would be. I have worked collectively the past few months with a research journey on understanding that hospice is more about quality of life, rather than quality of death."



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Funeral Service Foundation Raises Record Donations During 2023 NFDA International Convention and Expo

Brookfield, WI – The Funeral Service Foundation announced that it raised record funds at two of its key events held during the NFDA's International Convention and Expo in Las Vegas, Nevada. Held annually, the Foundation's Golf Classic and Donor Reception help raise funds for scholarships, programs and resources that strengthen funeral service.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

This year's Foundation Golf Classic was held September 10 at Top Golf Las Vegas and hosted more than 150 attendees. Thanks to Major Co-Benefactors, Dodge and CFS/Tribute Technology; Presenting Sponsor Service Corporation International; and more than 60 other key sponsors, the event raised more than \$170,000 for the Foundation's programs and resources.

"We are so grateful for the continued support of all of our sponsors, participants and volunteers who continue to make this event such a success," said John Heald, Chair of the Fund Development Committee of the Funeral Service Foundation. "Not only are the funds raised truly impactful and essential to supporting funeral service, but it's a terrific chance to connect and have some fun with friends all across the profession."



Major Co-Benefactor's CFS/Tribute Technology's Charlie Cole welcomes 2023 Golf Classic attendees alongside Major Co-Benefactor Dodge Company's Tim Collison.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL DONOR RECEPTION

On the evening of September 11, more than 250 of the Foundation's donors, along with current and past trustees and volunteers, attended the invitation-only Donor Reception, which was underwritten by Global Atlantic Financial Group for the tenth straight year. Hosted by Lisa Baue, the Foundation's Immediate Past Chair, more than 20 major donors were recognized including Funeral Directors Life, Pinnacle Funeral Service, Tribute Technology, the Memorial Classic Golf Tournament, Park Lawn Corporation, Service Corporation International, and Foundation Board Chair Mark Krause, who all supported the Foundation this past year with gifts and pledges of \$100,000 or more. Victoriaville & Co. also pledged support of \$50,000 this year.



New Foundation Trustee Carmalita March-Harris of March Funeral Homes pledges her support for the Todd Van Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund while new Foundation Chair Mark Krause helps quiet the crowd during the bidding process.



The evening culminated with the Foundation's presentation of its Distinguished Service Award, given posthumously this year to Todd Van Beck, who served as a funeral director, a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees and Program Director at Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. Former Foundation Chair Allan Cole led the audience in a reading of Todd's favorite poem, "The Undertaker," followed by heartfelt memories shared by Todd's son, Thomas Van Beck. The Foundation extends its thanks to Tukios and The Messenger Co. in helping to memorialize Todd during the evening.

Former Foundation Chair Bob Arrington then hosted the Foundation's paddle raise for the Todd Van Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund with pledges and payment reaching over \$95,000 to date. The hope is to permanently endow the scholarship upon reaching a minimum goal of \$100,000. This academic scholarship will be presented to students in accredited mortuary science degree programs.

Fundraising for this special scholarship continues; to make a donation to the Todd Van Beck Memorial Scholarship please visit: <https://www.funeralservicefoundation.org/donate-now-tvb>.

"The generous support from all of our donors recognized at the reception is a reflection of their belief and commitment to our beloved funeral profession and the Foundation," said Mark Krause, Chair. "Additionally, the funds raised that night and since then, to establish and endow the Todd Van Beck Memorial Scholarship, is a testament to Todd's impact in our profession and the impact that funeral service has and will have for the communities we serve."



Since 1945, the Funeral Service Foundation has served as the philanthropic voice of the funeral profession and has identified as the charitable arm of the National Funeral Directors Association since 1997. Donors and volunteer leaders profession-wide support the Foundation in its mission to lift up grieving communities by investing in people and programs that strengthen funeral service. Visit [FuneralServiceFoundation.org](https://www.funeralservicefoundation.org) to learn more.

Foundation Partners Group Appoints New Chief Financial Officer *Linden Arakawa to Succeed Thomas Kominsky*

WINTER PARK, Fla. – October 25, 2023 – Foundation Partners Group, a leading provider of innovative deathcare services, today announced the appointment of Linden Arakawa as Chief Financial Officer effective November 3, 2023. Arakawa will succeed Thomas Kominsky.

"We are grateful for Tom's significant contributions to Foundation Partners over the past four years and wish him all the best as he returns to the transportation and logistics industry," said President and CEO Kent Robertson. "Tom is, and will continue to be, a fan and supporter of Foundation Partners as we endeavor to build the funeral home of the future."

Arakawa has served as the company's Chief Accounting Officer since June 2021.

"A proven financial leader with a forward-thinking mindset, Linden has led our accounting and finance departments through a significant transformation over last two years," Robertson said. "He will continue to create innovative business and financial strategies in his expanded role."

Before joining Foundation Partners Group, Arakawa served 11 years as managing partner and director at CBIZ MHM where he advised Access Holdings, Foundation Partner's lead investor, on their various portfolio companies including Foundation Partners. He is a licensed CPA in the states of Florida and North Carolina, and a graduate of Saint Leo University in Florida where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in accounting.



Linden Arakawa



Winter Park, Florida-based Foundation Partners Group is one of the industry's most innovative providers of funeral services and the largest funeral home group in the country based on number of families served. Foundation Partners owns and operates a network of over 260 funeral homes, cremation centers and cemeteries across 21 states. Our deep understanding of technology and our ShareLife® customer experience centered approach allows us to deliver truly innovative and compassionate care to the families we serve. Visit www.foundationpartners.com to learn more.

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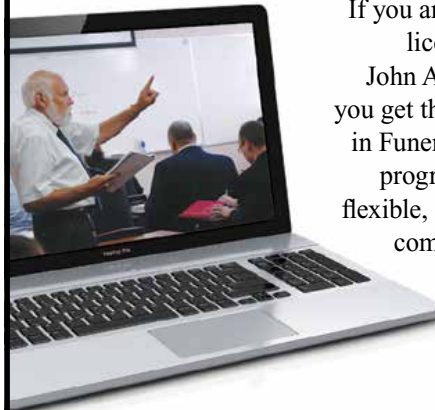
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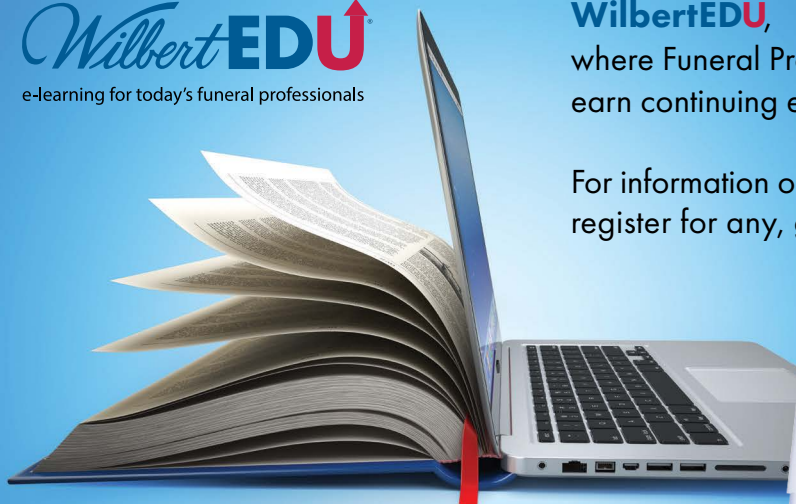
OCTOBER 2023 AD INDEX

Ambulance & Coach Sales	5, 36	www.ambulanceandcoach.com
"ASD" - Answering Service for Directors	25	www.myasd.com
C&J Financial, LLC	11	www.cjf.com
Cherokee Child Caskets	9	www.cherokeechildcaskets.com
Collegiate Memorials	40	www.collegiatememorials.net
FuneralCall	4	www.funeralcall.com
IMSA	29	www.imsa-online.org
John A. Gupton College	36	www.guptoncollege.edu
Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions	2	www.matthewsaurora.com
Physicians Mutual	37	www.physiciansmutual.com
Security National	19	www.securitynationallife.com
Service Casket / SICH	21	www.sichcasket.com
Sheilds Professional Vehicles	31, 39	www.myhearse.com
Talk of a Lifetime	4	www.talkofalifetime.com
The Messenger Company	5	www.themessengerco.com
United Midwest Savings Bank	3	www.umwsb.com
Ward's Funeral Supplies	35	www.wardstransportservice.com
Yarbrough Mortuary	21	877.664.2802
Wilbert EDU	28, 38	www.wilbert.com/wilbertedu

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