

Southern

◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

MAGAZINE

December 2016

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May the Spirit of the Holidays
Be With You Throughout the
New Year

Sometimes Good, Sometimes Bad and
Sometimes Ugly - The Items of Avoidable
Criticism (Part I) by Todd Van Beck
Profitable Merchandise: Looking Closer at
Burial Vaults by Mark Klingenberger, Wilbert
Doric Products Annual Meeting & Dealer Awards
Vantage Products Company Profile and Photos
FDA of Kentucky Convention & Expo - Summary,
Officers, Directors and Photos
Past Presidents Club of GA Hold Annual Meeting
Foundation Partners Group Announces
Leadership Change, Bukala New CEO
Matthew-Aurora Announces Roll Out of Its
New Integrated Casket Line
Tommy Johnson Joins Ward's Transport and
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FEATURES

- 6 Most Amusing Letters to Santa!
- 8 Profitable Merchandise: Looking Closer at Burial Vaults by Mark Klingenberger, Wilbert Inc.
- 12 Vantage Products Company Profile and Photos
- 14 Doric Products Annual Meeting & Dealer Awards
- 18 Sometimes Good, Sometimes Bad and Sometimes Ugly - The Items of Avoidable Criticism (Part I) by Todd Van Beck
- 30 Past Presidents Club of GA Hold Annual Meeting
- 34 FDA of Kentucky Convention & Expo - Summary, Officers, Directors and Photos

INDUSTRY NEWS

- 24 ASD's 2016 NFDA Trade Show Review
- 26 Matthew-Aurora Announces Roll Out of Its New Integrated Casket Line
- 28 Georgia Funeral Home Sells to Greg Rollings
- 41 SynDaver Lab Opens at Ogeechee Tech
- 42 Foundation Partners Group Announces Leadership Change, Bukala New CEO
- 43 FuneralCall Answering Service is Proud to Announce the Official Release of Their Integration API
- 45 Tommy Johnson Joins Ward's Transport and Supplies



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notes from the editor

Most Amusing Letters to Santa!

Dear Santa,

Please give me a doll this year. I would like her to eat, walk, do my homework, and help me clean my room.

Thank you, Jenny

Dear Santa,

Thanks for the race car last year. Can I have another one, only this time one that is faster than my best friend's race car?

Ricky

Dear Father Christmas,

I wish you could leave a puzzle under the tree for me. And a toy for my sister. Then she won't want to play with mine and I can have it to myself.

Merry Christmas, Cassie

Dear Santa,

You can send me one of everything from the boys' section of the Sears catalogue. But nothing from the girls' section. I can't wait for Christmas to come.

Kent

Dear Pere Noel,

Could you come early this year? I've been really super good, but I don't know if I can last much longer. Please hurry.

Love, Jordan



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2017 Federal XTS HERITAGE
The 2017 XTS Heritage has made minor changes for the transition into 2017. The Heritage now includes not only standard rear view back-up camera but now has 4G wireless capabilities.



2017 Federal MKT STRATFORD
The 2017 MKT Stratford continues the same sleek design that discerning funeral directors have come to appreciate, as well as standard features that are beyond compare in the funeral industry.



2017 Federal 44" MKT LIMOUSINE
The 2017 44" MKT has the same sleek body image that it contained in 2016 and offers all of the same great features.



2017 Federal 48" Raised Roof XTS LIMOUSINE
The 2017 48" XTS Raised Roof has made minor changes for the transition into 2017. New this year is 4G WiFi capability, plus as in years past, standard rear-view back up camera on all Federal Limousines.



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Profitable Merchandise: Looking Closer at Burial Vaults

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

Sometimes it seems that we are afraid to use the word “profit”, due in part to an association that some people attempt to draw between profit and exploitation, such as “a company has profited at someone else’s expense”. The funeral service industry is particularly sensitive to this perception, aggravated by occasional unfair slams in the media. The reality, though, is that funeral service providers are highly ethical businesses and businesses cannot survive without profits. Consider this from the Foundation for Economic Education:

“Profit is a deeply moral concept, since without profit we will suffer, not from exploitation, but from a misallocation of resources, a failure to provide the goods and services that the economy needs, the loss of tax revenue, a reduction in employment and the inability to provide for social need whether through the private sector or the public sector.” (5 Reasons Profit is Good. 2015, November. Retrieved from <https://fee.org/>)

It’s as if this was written specifically about the funeral service industry.

So let’s unashamedly talk about profits and consider your offerings in services and merchandise. Do you have a solid understanding of the contributions to your bottom line across all services and merchandise? On the merchandise side, you’ve likely been well-informed by the casket companies on profits generated by caskets as these firms have generally been proactive with reporting on inventory turns and profits. Casket

sales may also be front-and-center because they have historically been predominant in volume as a sales item and your funeral home may have considerable inventory for which you are focused on recovering your investment. However, there are trends that may be chipping away at your casket sales and profits, such as consumers purchasing caskets online and the increasing rates of cremation that don’t involve a viewing. Where might you look to shore up revenue?

One merchandise item that is often under-appreciated as a strong profit contributor is the outer burial container (OBC), particularly lined burial vaults. Burial vaults have always contributed steady profits to funeral homes but may not have always received the visibility achieved by caskets. Indeed, burial vaults may well be the second highest profit contributor among merchandise items. However, the potential for burial vaults to generate even greater revenue is apparent when you look at the research on consumer preferences.

According to a study by independent research firm Product Acceptance & Research (PAR), consumers who are educated on the differences between unlined grave boxes and lined burial vaults overwhelmingly said they would choose a burial vault for themselves or a loved one. Only **seventeen percent** of respondents said they would choose an unlined grave box after seeing nothing more than a two-minute video describing the differences. Differences briefly outlined in the educational video were objective comparisons

of construction and protective qualities as well as the ability to personalize many burial vaults with photos and images to commemorate loved ones. It is striking to compare the eighty-three percent inclination towards purchasing lined burial vaults with the typical industry sales mix of fifty-percent. Even more striking is the significant revenue and profit potential that an improved OBC sales mix represents. What is the OBC sales mix at your funeral home and what would your bottom line look like if you were to see more sales of lined units?

“But I know my families and they don’t want higher-quality burial vaults.”

This is an interesting statement that needs to be challenged a bit. Arguably it falls into the same questionable assumption that families who choose cremation are doing it primarily for cost reasons and thus have no interest in services. You might know what you have sold in the past, but do you really know what families want? Looking at the PAR research, the majority of families want protection and personalization of an outer burial container for their loved ones.

But let’s go beyond the research to your own experiences – haven’t you ever heard people say “I had no idea you could do this” after they chose (or attended) a committal service with a personalized vault carapace on display? In my years of work in the funeral industry, I certainly have heard numerous stories like this. Fully educate families on product and service options and let them arrive at their own educated decisions. Like all other major decisions people make, the more information and knowledge they have, the better they feel about their decisions. And the better they feel about those

who educated them.

There are a number of tools available to help you educate families, but video is perhaps the most effective. Video has a way of engaging people of all ages and appeals to both visual and auditory learners. A good video is also able to impart all of the key information, concisely and consistently. Showing a video also provides a welcome break from the intensity that most families feel during the arrangements conference. You may be quite surprised at the effectiveness of video and even choices that families make as a result of watching a video. Ask your vault supplier if they have videos that you can use. You can also email this author for the same two-minute video (non-branded, free of charge) that was used in the PAR research study.

Additional tools that are available run the gamut from traditional print collateral and wall graphics to digital presentations that can be utilized in your selection room or on a large-screen display in your conference room. Again, you can tailor and complement your OBC presentation with those tools that are most comfortable for you and your staff. The value of locally-provided products and services

While other merchandise is more subject to being purchased outside your business, that’s not generally the case with a burial vault. A burial vault cannot be easily or inexpensively shipped over long distances and the setup and installation of a burial vault requires special equipment and skilled labor. Consequently, funeral service providers receive nearly all sales of outer burial containers.



There is also tremendous value in a graveside service, both in terms of added revenue but also intrinsic value for families. The final committal of a loved one to the final resting place is service is what everyone has been working toward since the death. It's been said that a good funeral gets the dead where they need to go and the living where they need to be and the committal service is the ultimate ritual that makes both happen. A personalized burial vault can greatly add to the tribute and committal at the graveside and to the positive experience for the family. As personalization is available on better quality burial vaults, a more profitable unit can be sold while delivering what people want to buy. Families will spend to get the experience they want. Additionally, positive experiences can also translate into future value for the funeral professional in the way of return and referral business.

OBCs do not tie up capital

Most firms do not buy an inventory of outer burial containers as the OBC is generally delivered only when sold. Subsequently, there is no capital that is tied up. While some firms may buy a minimum OBC inventory, that inventory is usually turned quickly. Other merchandise may be on a showroom floor for so long that aging becomes an issue. Have you engineered your floor the best you can? Considering capital investment and inventory costs, outer burial containers are among the most efficient merchandise items.

Don't bury revenue opportunity

Burial vaults provide extremely solid revenue and opportunity for additional revenue growth. Make sure that each family is educated on differences in OBCs and the service possibilities that can enhance

the commemoration of their loved one. Utilize some of the many tools that can help you and your staff consistently equip families with better knowledge and food for thought on what they can do to create a memorable experience. As more families choose higher quality burial vaults, your profits will also rise and allow you to reinvest in your firm and help secure financial stability.

Mark Klingenberg is Vice-President of Sales & Marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services Inc., and has over 28 years of experience in the funeral industry. He has been in sales and marketing management for several leading funeral industry providers and has extensive



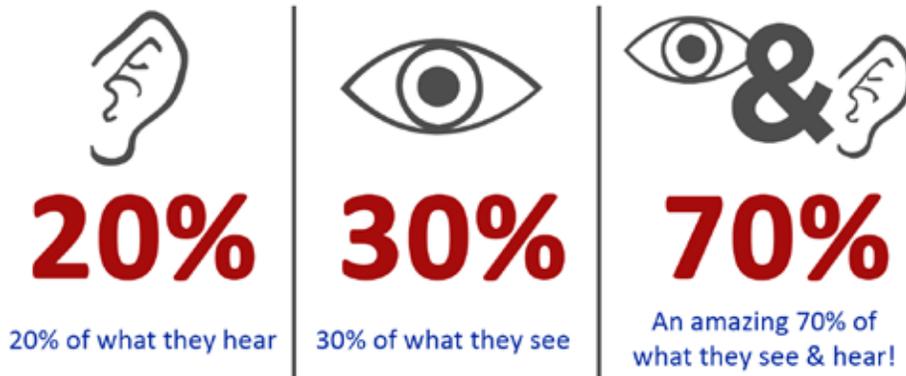
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Vantage Products Corporation

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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.

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Vantage Products on the 2016 Convention Trail



South Carolina Funeral Director's Mid Winter Expo, Columbia, SC



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National Funeral Directors Association Annual Convention & Expo, Philadelphia, PA

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Doric Products Announces Dealer Awards

Doric Dealers from across the U.S. and Canada recently attended the Fall Dealer meeting and awards program in Fort Worth, TX. The festivities were hosted by **TexSet, LLC** of Justin, TX.

Doric congratulates Doug Evans and Jim Woods of **Carolina-Doric, Inc.**, based in Florence, SC on a tremendous year. **Carolina-Doric Inc.** was once again recognized as **#1 Dealer** and for the overall **Greatest Number Sold** as well as a number of other awards noted below.

Additional winners of the overall awards included: **“Top Cremation Product Sales Award”**: Cordeiro Vault Co. (Vallejo, CA); **“Daisy Chrisom Award”**: Rocky Mountain Monument & Vault (Sandy, UT); **“Overall Greatest Percentage of Increase”**: Division I – Cordeiro Vault Co. (Vallejo, CA), Division II – American Concrete Industries (Auburn, ME), Division III – Wicomico Vault (Salisbury, MD), and Division IV – Deihl Vault & Precast (Orangeville, PA).

Bronze Category winners: **“Greatest Number Sold – Bronze”**: Division I – Carolina-Doric (Florence, SC), Division II – Brewster, Inc. (Millville, NJ), Division III – Perfection Concrete (Vandalia, IL) and Division IV – Century Vault Company (West Barnstable, MA). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Bronze”**: Division I (3 way tie) – Chesapeake Burial Vault (Barclay, MD) & Rex Vault & Mausoleum Service (Newton, IL) & Rocky Mountain Monument & Vault (Sandy, UT), Division II – (3 way tie) Brewster, Inc. (Millville, NJ) & Doric Burial Vault Co./Griffin (Griffin, GA) & Southern Ohio Vault Co. (Portsmouth, OH), Division III – Perfection Concrete (Vandalia, IL), and Division IV – Century Vault Company (West Barnstable, MA).

Winners in the **Lydian Category**: **“Greatest Number Sold – Lydian”**: Division I – Carolina-Doric (Florence, SC), Division II – The Fort Miller Service Corp. (Greenwich, NY), Division III (2 way tie) – Grable Burial Vault Service (Logansport, IN) & Grant Burial & Vault Service (Downsville, LA), and Division IV (2 way tie) – Century Vault Company (West Barnstable, MA) & Deihl Vault & Precast (Orangeville, PA). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Lydian”**: Division I – Wieser Step & Vault Co. (LaCrescent, WI), Division II – T & C Precast LLC/Jacson Inc. (Henderson, TX), Division III – Grant Burial & Vault Service (Downsville, LA), and Division IV – none.

In the **Athenian Category**, winners were: **“Greatest Number Sold – Athenian”**: Division I – Carolina-Doric, Inc. (Florence, SC), Division II – Watts Vault & Monument Co. (Des Moines, IA), Division III – Harris Precast Inc. (LaPorte, IN), and Division IV – Deihl Vault & Precast (Orangeville, PA). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Athenian”**: Division I – Central Burial Vaults, Inc. (Oklahoma City, OK), Division II – American Vault Company (Cleveland, OH), Division III – Simerly Concrete Products Inc. (Bristol, TN), and Division IV – Century Vault Company (West Barnstable, MA).



Doric Vice President of Finance and Treasurer Jim Wiens presents the #1 Sales Dealer and Greatest Number Sold awards for 2016 to Carolina Doric of Florence SC. Pictured are (l-r) Jim Woods, Jim Wiens, Frankie Hilton, and Alex Warr.

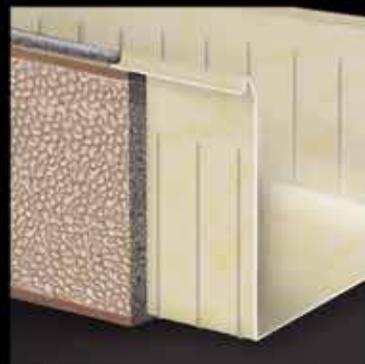
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Patrician Category winners were: **“Greatest Number Sold – Patrician”**: Division I – Carolina-Doric (Florence, SC), Division II – Brewster, Inc. (Millville, NJ), Division III – Doric of Western Massachusetts (Pittsfield, MA), and Division IV – Everlasting Vault Company (Randallstown, MD). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Patrician”**: Division I – Doric Vault of Western New York (Buffalo, NY), Division II – Brewster, Inc. (Millville, NJ), Division III – Huntingburg Vault (Huntingburg, IN), and Division IV – J.P. Vincent & Sons Inc. (Galena, IL).

Winners in the **Phoenix Category** were: **“Greatest Number Sold – Phoenix”**: Division I – Doric Concrete Vaults (Newton, KS), Division II – American Concrete Industries (Auburn, ME), Division III – Wayne Burial Vault Co. Inc. (Indianapolis, IN), and Division IV – Everlasting Vault Company (Randallstown, MD). **“Greatest Percentage of Increase – Phoenix”**: Division I – Rocky Mountain Monument & Vault (Sandy, UT), Division II – Esterly Burial Vault Service (West Reading, PA), Division III – Wicomico Vault Company Inc. (Salisbury, MD), and Division IV – J.P. Vincent & Sons Inc. (Galena, IL).

The Doric Board of Directors is extremely proud of each of these companies for their hard work and dedication to the funeral service industry. For more information on Doric Products, please visit our website, www.doric-vaults.com or call 1-800-457-0671.

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National Funeral Directors Convention



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Media Publicity

Sometimes Good, Sometimes Bad, Sometimes Ugly – the Issue of Avoidable Criticism

By: Todd Van Beck, Director of Continuing
Education, John A. Gupton College, Nashville, TN

Does that sound cynical or what? However to many people, the Archie Bunker's of the world the terms "media publicity" and "funeral service" just do not go together, unless of course we are talking about the term "negative publicity." Throughout this series the point has been made time and again that the media's treatment of funeral and cemetery work in the past and present has a consistent track record of being less than complimentary. We all know this fact.

Over the years of my career I have moved from viewing "funeral home publicity" in other words public relations efforts from being noble, insightful, and helpful, which I knew everybody understood to the somber realization that much of the P.R. efforts stimulated from our side of the fence are in actuality much less effective than other similar efforts in other lines of work.

For example few lay people can mention any kind of public relations efforts put on by a funeral home or cemetery by name and/or recite the verses and music which make up the funeral home ads, whereas practically everyone is familiar with Coca-Cola ads and Chevrolet ads, and McDonalds ads.

I remember a funeral home in a major city ran a series of ads using a snappy slogan where the actual name of the funeral home rhymed with the word "far." The ad read: "YOUR MONEY GOES FAR WITH (the name of the funeral home). The ad did however capture public attention. When the city profile magazine did it annual "Best and Worst" edition this funeral home won the award as being the worst advertisement in the entire city – and this was a city of 4 million people!

I worked for a man who was the trinket king of funeral service. You named it he gave it away. Pens, pencils, small calendars, large calendars, smelling salts, emergency sewing kits, emergency rain bonnets, erasers, rubber jar grip openers, thermometers, illuminated phone stickers,

the list went on and on, and here is the kicker, my boss had mentally convinced himself, based on nothing more than what the trinket salesman had told him that one fourth of our business came from these free trinkets. Many of our families, suffering from the throngs of grief, did leave the funeral home with a free sewing kit in hand. The only problem was that we did 110 funerals a year while another funeral home down the block who gave away absolutely no trinkets at all did 600 plus calls. Still my boss believed the trinket salesman. Probably the most remembered type of funeral home publicity in the area of advertising is price ads. To many in funeral service price advertising is still an omen, but it appears clear from the results that the public responds to this type of blunt information.

In the 1920's the famous funeral director Walter B. Cooke from New York City put this ad in the New York papers: "COMPLETE ADULT FUNERAL - \$250.00 – WALTER B. COOKE" that was it – maybe half a dozen words, and did the ad work! The other funeral directors in New York hated the ad however the public liked the ad and the Walter B. Cooke Co. went on to become one of the largest funeral home companies in New York City. The point being of course is that the public not the funeral profession liked the advertisement.

I knew a funeral director in the same city as mentioned above that put an ad on television with the funeral director standing next to a 20 Ga. Metal casket and telling the public the message that for X amount of dollars you could get a complete funeral with that casket. This firm grew by hundreds of calls over a two year period.

The message might well be that publicity that funeral directors like might not be the publicity that the public likes.

Good Publicity in Funeral Service

Does good publicity in the funeral service profession

exist? Of course it does, but it is rare. I have many more favorable media publicity in my files awarded to individual funeral directors in individual communities, than I have favorable publicity concerning the funeral service profession in general, on a nationwide basis. I would describe the good publicity for the profession at large as being rare.

There have been precious few days in funeral service history when the funeral profession as a whole has basked in the glow of favorable publicity. The proof of my long held opinion that ALL funeral service is ultimately local can be seen in the individual members of the funeral service profession who constantly receive the accolades due them when they function in a civic, community, social or even political role. But it is precious rare that you read an article about that person in relationship to his or her role as a funeral director.

I remember a horrible plane crash in Chicago years ago where hundreds of people were killed. The funeral profession of greater Chicago volunteered free of charge to embalm, restore, dress and casket the victims. What kindness, what generosity, what nobility, what heroism. The article concerning this magnanimous episode in our long history was published in one, just one of the insider professional funeral service journals. Yes the story was told, and publicity was created but for whom; for funeral directors exclusively that's who. When was the last time you went to the dentist and wanted to read a magazine while you were waiting and thumbed through half dozen or so publications until you hit upon "The United States Mortician Monthly?"

The professional journals consistently tell our story about how good we are and they constantly profile up and coming funeral students who talk about their hopes and dreams in funeral service, and that is great stuff. But who else subscribes to "The United States Mortician Monthly" other than morticians. You will never see a funeral publication in your dentist's office, and so the question can easily be asked, "What good is it to tell ourselves over and over again how great we are?"

In working on this article I pulled out my file on good publicity concerning the entire funeral profession, excluding praise of individual local funeral directors, and here is what I found:

- Dear Abby and Ann Landers occasionally gave funeral service a pat on the back.
- The funeral profession overall in Oklahoma City

received a pat on the back for their work after the horrible bombing.

- "Women's Home Journal" published a wonder essay by Lois Duncan about the value of funerals.
- There is a delightful article from the Lifestyle section of a newspaper in Denver which lauded and praised the entry of women in funeral service.
- I have noticed that if a state association convenes in a city there is usually favorable or maybe more accurate curious publicity in the media concerning that event.

For my files that was about it. If fact, good publicity is so rare for our ranks to receive that you can probably recall such events that have occurred in your own career without keeping formal files and without any trouble at remembering these rare events.

No question about it. Good publicity is rare, not for the individual funeral director, but certainly for the profession on a wide, national scale.

Bad Publicity

Even as a child growing up in Iowa I knew that bad news traveled faster than good news. Let something bad happen or go wrong and people in my town were in frenzy. Let something happen good happen or worse yet let somebody in our town get a compliment or accolade



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and the people either shrugged their shoulders and put their noses in the air, or thought out loud “Who the hell does she think she is?” This happens in the big city too.

Bad news possesses power, bad news captures people’s attentions, people remember bad news, bad news sells, bad news is attractive, bad news instructs us, and bad news frightens us which is a great motivator to action. Bad news just does better than good news.

Let’s examine and explore this further. Consider the following news events:

- Flight #609 lands uneventfully at the airport.
- Charles and Naomi Anybody attended the theater last night.
- Ida Whatsherface jogged safely through Central Park.
- The Blust Bros. Funeral Directors handled, to absolute perfection as usual, another funeral service. No mistakes, no errors, everything was perfect, as usual.

Sad but true, huh? It is only going to be news and warrant publicity if Flight #609 experienced difficulty in the landing, or crashed, or the Anybody’s got mugged as they left the theater, or Ida discovered a corpse under a shrub in Central Park (which is a real possibility) or The Blust Bros. Funeral Directors dropped the casket and in turn broke two of the pallbearers legs. Now that’s news, and it is bad news.

I can assure you my friends that if any funeral director dropped the casket and in so doing two pallbearers broke their legs, every funeral director from Halifax to Los Angeles will know the story but also today Jay Leno will probably make a joke about the event, it might well make CNN which might then be picked up by the AP and basically broadcast across the globe. This happens every second of every minute of every day.

Of course bad news is not a new phenomenon for us – is it? Forty years ago the Omaha World Herald published an article titled “Profiteering in Sorrow.” It was bad publicity for the funeral profession to be sure.

However what I remember most of all was the reaction of the funeral directors while they were having cocktails at a local hotel close in proximity to most of the funeral directors in the city. Here is what a few of them said, “I don’t think many people in town read the World-Herald” (yeah sure). Or, “I know my families and they

won’t believe that kind of stuff about me.”

That may well have been true in Omaha in 1966 (I highly doubt it), but today we can no longer assume that families don’t read a particular magazine or watch television and when they see bad publicity about funeral service their reaction is to attach themselves to the bad publicity and believe it. It has always been a fact that any stain upon any member of our profession overflows onto each of us.

One of the greatest compliments in our profession is that while bad publicity from the media seems to never balance out, there is also at the same time a terribly important and complimentary situation in that no business or profession receives any more unsolicited letters of praise for their services, their kindness, their sympathy and understanding than the average individual American funeral director. As individuals funeral directors certainly have many staunch supporters, but as a profession it appears clear that we are still looked upon from beneath a raised eye brow.

I was hopeful but terribly naïve that with the coming of the Federal Trade Commission Funeral Rule in 1984 that the bad publicity issues would slow down. Well, we all know that this did not happen, the beat of bad news regarding funeral and cemetery work went on even in light of mandatory disclosures and Federal Regulations. No the anti-funeral people were still not satisfied.

Then in 1993 on February 2, NBC’s Dateline broadcast painted a horrible and unattractive smear upon funeral service without giving anyone who understood and knew funeral service a chance to offer a rebuttal – offering some information like 99.99% of funeral directors are ranked by the American public as being, kind, honest, decent people.

That same evening on another section of the Dateline program in a segment profiling unsafe automobiles a car was seen to explode - boom. Later however it was determined, and Dateline admitted with a considerable loss of credibility that they had faked the exploding gas tank results with a planted incendiary device. However the fact that Dateline just faked the information concerning the car explosion does not change the fact that for you and me millions of people were still undoubtedly left with a negative impression of funeral service as a result of that broadcast. I personally do not see any reason that our beloved profession will not

continue to draw bad publicity in the future, and one reason is the long standing, inherent intertwining of dealing with the awkward situation of combing money and grief, sentiment and dollars.

Ugly Publicity

I have suggested that bad publicity exists for the funeral profession overall, and most often good publicity exists for individual funeral directors which is certainly well deserved in view of their truly wonderful and stellar reputations.

I would define ugly publicity as media attention that deals with and slams a particular funeral and/or cemetery operation, and that can get ugly, quick! Way too often bad publicity and ugly publicity go hand in hand, as happens often with television coverage of our profession. Most times the newspapers have their resident investigative reporters who create ugly publicity for funeral service and cemetery work by using lots of names, including those of individual's funeral homes, cremation companies and cemeteries. What funeral director would want to find his or her name included in an article titled "Funeral survivors tell tales of horror"? That is ugly publicity.

One newspaper article I have listed 34 funeral homes on a bar graph, comparing prices of basic services, exclusive of caskets and cemetery plots. Usually ugly publicity is peppered with exaggerations, embellishments, and sometimes downright lies, but they are difficult for lay people to separate. The writers of ugly publicity are experts at literary peppering. You have to look hard, and know what to look for to find such examples. Of course if the funeral director finds the peppering and reports it, then the media cries foul play and that the funeral director who exposed the inaccurate information is just crying the blues. Kind of a no win situation.

Ugly publicity is usually the most damaging. Ugly publicity is always the most damaging when the story is absolutely true – when no peppering is involved.

Sensational instances of ugly publicity which were true included over the years:

- The body that was dumped at the family's doorstep by an upset funeral director.
- The Tri-State Crematory debacle in North Georgia.
- Corpse abuse instance in Toledo, Ohio.
- Failure to bury the deceased.
- Unlicensed work.

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In the end it really does not matter much to the general population that you probably could not find another funeral director or cemeterian or cremationist in all of North America who would actually do such things; what matters is that in all these regrettable incidences (and there are certainly more) which received a ton of media attention, in the end ugly publicity tarnishes the reputation of everybody involved in this profession across all of North America.

So Here We Are - What To Do?

For my entire career our profession suffers, and always has suffered from the ravages of derogatory publicity, however our beloved profession has survived many threats over the years which would easily have toppled other careers. Here are some examples of what caused me personal and professional suffering: Jessica Mitford (my, my that woman could provoke me), anti-funeral people (Mitford disciples), memorial societies, negative publicity, government regulation (which only drove the funeral costs higher), funeral director wannabe's who talk about funerals but can't do them, and much more but here is some good news – we are still plugging along. We stumble occasionally, certainly wander afield at times, but as a profession we are alive, and still serving families and our communities. And that my friends, after all we have been through together over the last 40 years is indeed good news.

I am not Pollyanna and I believe that the intimate relationship between the inevitable emotional component of funeral service and cemetery service and the monetary costs of providing those services will no doubt continue to provide grist for the media mill. The media just seems to resent the undertaker and/or cemeterian making a living let alone a good living. While at the same time in the flawless, errorless media world some “talking head” on the TV is lauded as television journalism “at its best” and the talking head walks away with a ten digit salary for simply reading the words that somebody else wrote. To be sure the media can dish it out but they cannot take it when there is a counterattack.

I suspect, with not some little experience to back my suspicions up, that we have no way to predict whether a truly concerted effort on our parts to forestall or better yet counteract inevitable derogatory publicity will be or could be effective. And the reason we are unable as a profession to predict whether we could actually succeed at warding off bad publicity (there's really little we can do about ugly publicity which is gospel true – except

tighten up who get into the profession in the first place) is simply that there has not YET been such an effort made, other than on the before mentioned local level.

I have been impressed that when community organizations or statewide organizations of funeral directors put aside their differences and territories and put their collective heads together to counter derogatory publicity, the efforts can be and are extremely worthwhile.

I am reminded many years ago I was in the dentist office and picked up an issue of Time Magazine. As I the thumbing through the magazine the symbol of a pyramid caught my attention and here was an ad explaining the value and purpose of the funeral which was placed by the National Selected Morticians. The ad was absolutely wonderful. Ted Roeder who was a member of NSM and a buddy of mind from Omaha was the featured funeral director and the ad was so professionally done and read so well. Great stuff! I remember another funeral group that pooled their funds together and cooperatively bought bill board ads the message of which admonished people to not drink and drive. It was an extremely powerful message coming from the funeral directors of the community.

Here is a crazy idea. What would be the cooperative benefits for our entire profession if every national funeral service and cemetery service organizations in North American put their money and brains together and sponsored a national ad campaign with one simple message – funerals are good for people. Get a national spokesperson such as Barbara Bush, who has had firsthand knowledge and experience with bereavement with the death of a child and broadcast the ad on every television set in the nation - forever. The American Dairy Association does this, the American Beef Association does this, and the results for those associations have been very impressive.

If cooperative publicity projects have worked on the state and local levels why couldn't it work on the national level? Some years back a certain clergy in a certain state woke up one morning and proclaimed himself at the self appointed funeral reformer for the Midwest and off he went on a holy crusade. In the midst of this crusade I was asked by one of the state funeral directors associations to present a series of seminars all across this state to inform and educate the clergy about the truth of providing funeral service and yes the costs involved with handling the expressed wishes and

desires of the public when a death occurred. To this day I am amazed they asked me – as most readers will agree they could have done much better by asking someone else to explain funeral service, but off I went on now my crusade

This experience taught me some valuable lessons. First, the average clergy person in that state was absolutely clueless concerning funeral costs, second, the average clergy person in that state had not taken one course on grief psychology in seminary and in turn during these seminars they were absolute sponges for knowledge, and third because the anti-funeral person was himself a clergy he had an instant connection with other clergy whether he knew what he was talking about or not – and trust me folks he did not have an idea in heaven or hell what he was talking about – it was a touchy situation. In the end truth won out, and the clergy formed their own balanced opinions based on solid funeral information which ended up concluding that the flock was NOT getting ripped off by a bunch of money grubbing undertakers – who by the way had been serving these communities many times for over a hundred years with few if any complaints.

I found, for really the first time in my career, and this was 35 years ago that a possession of facts and figures as well as sensible logic will stop in its tracks the fallacious reasoning and unwarranted and unjustifiable statements made by self-proclaimed funeral reformists. I firmly believe that we should not leave this information and truth telling to somebody else to do – as funeral professionals we should do it ourselves, and do it first. Beat the devils to the punch in other words.

Let every one of the thousands of funeral home, regardless of who owns them, start and always continue to mold public opinion and sentiment in our favor by giving out accurate information and by standing up and telling the blunt truth.

Specifics That We Can Implement

Create the online course for the entire community called “funeral economics 101”

Put this course, for free, on your funeral home web site. Offer it to the community. Have a pre test so they can get an idea of what they do and do not know, and then offer a post test which is evidence of just how much they have learned about the economics of the funeral, burial, cremation, body donation, memorial service,

accessories, shipping remains, scattering cremains and even burial at sea. The sky is the limit.

Here is a suggested topic outline:

I. History of Funeral Costs

- A. The Days of the Undertaker – Itemized Statements.
- B. Movement from Undertaker to Funeral Director – Unit Pricing
- C. Modern Times – Functional Pricing
- D. The Federal Trade Commission – HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF – Itemized Statement

II. What ingredients make up funeral economics?

- A. Overhead
- B. Profits
- C. Expenses

III. How much does a funeral cost?

- A. Regions
- B. Personal preferences
- C. Options, Alternative, Suggestions

IV. Payment for a funeral

To be Continued....Part II



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- Program completion in 12 or 16 months

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ASD's 2016 NFDA Trade Show Review



Every year, we sit down to write our annual wrap-up of the NFDA Convention and summarize our time at the world's largest gathering of funeral professionals. Every year, we find the phrase "best convention ever" creeping into our review. This is because the NFDA Convention grows bigger every year. While the size of the expo hall and different exhibits gets larger, the breadth of information shared also expands as fresh ideas and sparks of inspiration circulate among colleagues.

For the ASD team, it is always exciting to watch old friends coming together while new trends are debated and analyzed. However, this was a truly extraordinary year for our team. Our office's proximity to Philadelphia gave us the opportunity to include even more of our staff in convention activities, which, for us, made NFDA 2016 the best convention ever. While 2016 was a special year for ASD, we also heard many directors tell us how much enjoyment and enrichment they gained from this year's convention.

We understand how helpful it is to have visual aids when learning. That is why ASD's booth includes a large television monitor that can be connected to an iPhone. Funeral Directors in attendance were shown how to use our ASD Mobile app's most advanced features and could see these tools in action on ASD's interactive screen. Throughout the convention, we heard many directors tell us, "I didn't know your app could do that." We understand that mobile technology is very unfamiliar to a lot of people and it can be a challenge for many to understand the different benefits of it. Our large display allow directors to visualize exactly how ASD Mobile can make life easier for them.

Thank you so much to everyone who stopped by to visit with the ASD team at the 2016 NFDA Convention. It was wonderful to have so many of our employees at the booth, giving them a chance to put a face with a name. In addition to spending quality time with our friends and clients at our booth, we also enjoyed the opportunity to stroll through the expo hall to see all of the interesting products and services available to directors. We appreciate everyone who took the time to talk to us.



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Matthews-Aurora Funeral Solutions Announces Beginning of New Integrated Casket Product Line Roll out



Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions, a division of Matthews International Corporation (NASDAQ GSM: MATW), today announced it is beginning the rollout of its integrated casket product line to its funeral home customers nationwide. Following the acquisition of Aurora Casket one year ago, Matthews Aurora promised it would bring together the best caskets and features from both legacy companies to offer an upgraded, expanded selection to all customers. The products announced today make good on that promise.

Nearly all caskets across the integrated product line have new or upgraded product features, including a 60/40 cut on half-couch models to provide better body positioning and appearance; enhanced interiors with thicker wadding for a better fit and finish; the best locking mechanisms in the industry for both metal and wood caskets, including a lock on hardwood caskets that secures the casket in a quarter-turn; new standard insert panel dimensions for ease of ordering, and several detailed interior design upgrades which help to improve the fit and overall presentation of all Matthews Aurora caskets.

Matthews Aurora also announced today that some of its best-selling caskets will now be available, on a regional basis, through its expanded service center network. “We’re adding top-selling caskets based on regional preferences throughout our network, including Freedom Midnight Blue, Patriot Ebony (pictured), Sovereign Pecan (pictured), Gatewood Cherry and

Magnolia Poplar. We’re also really excited that we are improving nearly every casket in our product line through the integration process, and are able to make some of our most popular caskets available to our customers sooner than expected,” stated Marty Strohofer, vice president of marketing and product development for Matthews Aurora. “The new caskets will begin flowing through the service center network and will be available to customers beginning in the fall,” said Strohofer.

Matthews Aurora previously announced to its customers that it will continue its tradition of product investment and innovation in its manufacturing facilities in Aurora, Indiana; Richmond, Indiana; York, Pennsylvania; Monterrey, Mexico; and St. Laurent, Canada.

About Matthews International Corporation

Matthews International Corporation is a global provider of brand solutions, memorialization products and industrial automation solutions. The SGK Brand Solutions segment is a leader in the delivery of brand development, activation and deployment services that help build our clients’ brands and consumers’ desire for them. The Memorialization segment is a leading provider of memorialization products, including memorials, caskets and cremation equipment, primarily to cemetery and funeral home customers that help families move from grieving to remembrance. The Industrial segment designs, manufactures and distributes marking, coding and industrial automation technologies and solutions. We have more than 10,000 employees in more than 25 countries on six continents that are committed to delivering the highest quality products and services.



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Georgia Funeral Home Sells to Greg Rollings

Mableton, GA – The White Columns Funeral Chapel was purchased in May by Greg Rollings. White Columns Funeral Chapel, located in Mableton, was built in 1965 and run by Walter Eugene “Gene” Davis (1930-1985). The firm was advertised as “the first fully planned funeral home facility in Cobb County” in the Marietta Daily Journal. Rita Davis and Betty Davis (Gene Davis’ Wife) retained the family ownership till they sold to Mr. Rollings this year.

NewBridge Group represented Greg Rollings in the transaction. Rollings stated “White Columns greatly enhances our strong family footprint in the West Cobb community. We have been talking to Rita Davis about her company for quite some time and are excited to be able to continue the Davis family tradition of providing great service to the community.”



For more information please contact Dwight Glover with the NewBridge Group at 404-781-2092.

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Cadillac XTS Park Hill

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XTS Victoria

Tradition and elegance are the operative words to describe the S&S Victoria. The Victoria's contoured lines present a style with distinctive character. The traditional, hinged casket door, available with right or left opening, provides unsurpassed stylish functionality that sets this vehicle apart in its class.



Cadillac XTS Masterpiece

The styling details evoke the classic lines of the stately "Commercial Glass" coaches from the golden age of funeral vehicles combined with the sleek flow and state of the art technology of the latest Cadillac. Completing the modernization is a new, innovative load door that allows pallbearers maximum access to the casket compartment. Honoring the past...advancing to the future...



Cadillac XTS Medalist

Innovative and distinctive are the words that best describe the S&S Medalist. Styled with an aerodynamic shape that blends well with the modern Cadillac chassis, the overall design exudes quality and prestige with a contemporary look that ensures distinction for your funeral home.



Past Presidents Club of Georgia Hold Annual Meeting

The Past Presidents Club of Georgia held their annual meeting this year at the Little Ocmulgee State Park and Lodge in McRae, Georgia. A morning golf tournament at the Wallace Adams Golf Course started the event for the early attendees which led to the afternoon Social Gathering and Reception at the Pavilion Lodge.

The event featured a “Memorial Service” and was followed by a “Steak Fry Dinner” and the annual business meeting. President Ted Bearden reported that the Georgia funeral service associations and vendors were now working as “one” and looked forward to uniting meetings, conferences, conventions and expo’s to include both GFDA and IFDG, as well as no other independent trade show functions. “Working together will strengthen all of funeral service in Georgia and look forward to the coming years,” said Bearden. The business concluded with the “passing of the gavel” from Ted Bearden to new 2016-2017 President, Walt Benzinger.

The Past Presidents Club of Georgia is an organization and collection of all those individuals that have served as President over the year’s past which includes Georgia Funeral Directors Association, Academy of Graduate Embalmers of Georgia, Independent Funeral Directors of Georgia and the Georgia Funeral Supply Sales Association.



Generations of family members are common in the funeral industry. No different with associations, as father (Left) Richard and son Nathan Stanley, are the latest father - son team to become members of the Past Presidents Club of Georgia. Other past father-son teams include:

Carlos, M Hemperley, Sr., Carlos M. Hemperley, II and Carlos “Butch” Hemperley, III (the only 3 generation family), James “Jimmy” Fletcher - Jim P. Fletcher, Richard - Bryant Hightower, Norman and Bob Lovein A. G. McFall - W. George McFall, Richard - Nathan Stanley, Charles “Buck” Stern - David Stern, Elmo - James Weeks, and John Yopp, Sr. - John Yopp, Jr.



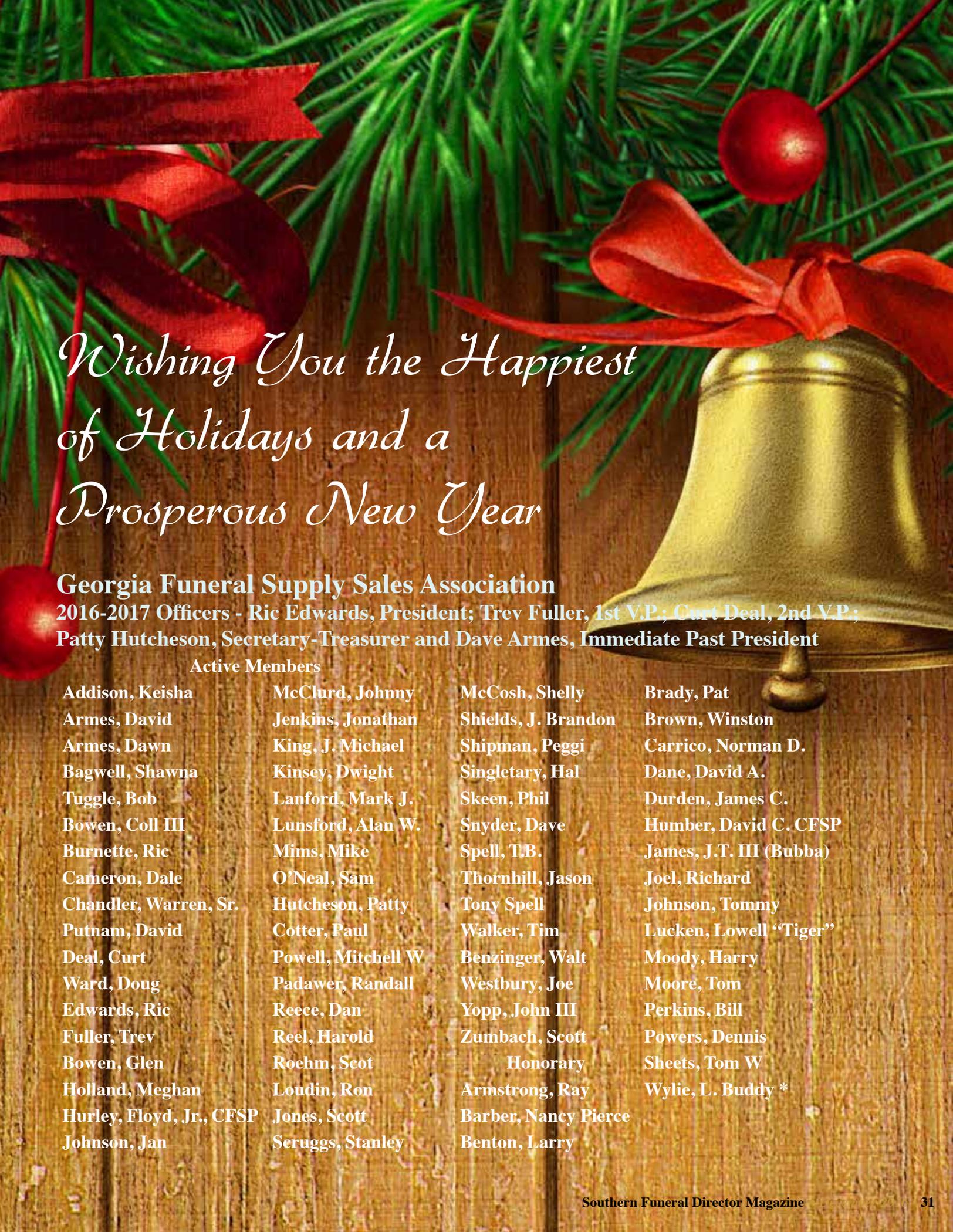
(L-R) In-coming President, Walt Benzinger accepting the “Gavel” from out-going President, Ted Bearden



Enjoying fellowship time (L-R) Ted Bearden, Tim Stewart, Judson Caldwell, Danny Hutcheson, Claude McKibben and Dale Frazier



Brother Harry Moody preaching words of wisdom: “When you become a “Past President” of the Past Presidents Club of Georgia, you best have your affairs in order and your heart right with God!”



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of Holidays and a
Prosperous New Year*

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Thornhill, Jason

Tony Spell

Walker, Tim

Benzinger, Walt

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Benton, Larry

Brady, Pat

Brown, Winston

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Dane, David A.

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Humber, David C. CFSP

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FDA of Kentucky Holds 134th Annual Convention & Expo Elects David West, President

The Funeral Directors Association of Kentucky celebrated their 134th Annual Convention at the Hyatt Regency Hotel and the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville on June 28-30, 2016. The convention was well attended by funeral directors, suppliers, and their families. Attendance at the Annual FDAK Convention provides funeral directors with a forum to receive and exchange information. Members return home with new ideas that allow them to better serve the families in their communities. David West of Nicholasville was elected President of the Association.

The Exhibit Hall was filled with 82 exhibiting companies. During this three-day meeting, Kentucky funeral homes were honored for 50, 70, 75, and 130 years of service; twenty-one 50 year Kentucky licensed funeral directors were also honored; and continuing education awards were presented to 33 Kentucky funeral directors.

Six hours of continuing education credits were offered each day. The speakers from across the country and programs were outstanding and included the following: Funeral Service Forum with several presenters and Doug Gober of Gober Strategic Capital presented “Upping Your Game – What to Do When the Competition Levels the Playing Field.” Dr. Tom Lynch, author of five collections of poems and four books, and Dr. Thomas Long, researcher in homiletics and author, presented “The Good Death, Good Grief and Good Funerals: Finding Our Place in the Continuum of Care;” Awards and Installation of Officers and Dr. Michael Baden, former Chief Medical Examiner of New York City and medical examiner for forty-five years, presented “Determining the Cause of Death.”

A large crowd enjoyed “The Presidential Gala & Charity Auction” Wednesday evening to benefit Kosair Children’s Hospital and Kosair Charities. The entertainment was provided by The Monarchs with FDAK Past President David Owen and also included a harpist, magician, caricature artist, and photographer for souvenir photos.

The following officers and directors were elected for the 2016-2017 year:

Officers		
President	David West	Nicholasville
President-Elect	John Jones	Harlan
Vice President	Rob Riley	Carrollton
Secretary-Treasurer	Rusty Preston	Paintsville
Sergeant-at-Arms	Gerald M. “Marty” Jones II	Morgantown
Immediate Past-President	Robbie Brantley	Brownsville
Chairman of the Board	Doug Stanley	Williamstown
District Directors		
Central	Grant Bolt	Georgetown
Eastern	George Sparks	Grayson
Northern	Bill Mullins	Covington
Southern	John Hill	Owensboro
Southcentral	Brandy Harwood	Tompkinsville
Southeastern	Wesley Rominger	Manchester
Western	Chad Townsend	Dixon



(l to r) Front row – Southeastern District Director: Wesley Rominger from Manchester; Western District Director: Chad Townsend from Dixon; Southcentral District Director: Brandy Harwood from Tompkinsville; Immediate Past-President: Robbie Brantley from Brownsville; President: David West from Nicholasville; President-Elect: John Jones from Harlan; Vice President: Rob Riley from Carrollton; Secretary-Treasurer: Rusty Preston from Paintsville; and Chairman of the Board: Doug Stanley from Williamstown

Back row – Eastern District Director: George Sparks from Grayson; Southern District Director: John Hill from Owensboro; Northern District Director: Bill Mullins from Covington; Central District Director: Grant Bolt from Georgetown; NFDA Policy Board Member: Shannon Combs from Richmond; and Sergeant-at-Arms: Gerald M. “Marty” Jones II from Morgantown



David West (left) was presented his gavel as the new President of The Funeral Directors Association of KY by Immediate Past President Robbie Brantley

David West (left) was sworn in as the new President of The Funeral Directors Association of KY by his brother, John West, of the Betts & West Funeral Home in Nicholasville, KY



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Pat Caniff presenting the “Pat R. Caniff FDA of Kentucky Scholarship Foundation Award” in the amount of \$5,000 to recipient Andrew Imel, Mid America College



(L-R) R. Bryant Hightower, CFSP, 2016-2017 NFDA Secretary; Shannon Combs, Policy Board Member for Kentucky and Randall Padawer, Applied Lighting



Doug Gober, Gober Strategic Capital, featured speaker presenting “Upping Your Game-Learning to Level the Playing Field With Your Competitor”



(L-R) Del Doleman, American Cemetery Supplies, getting lots of booth help from grand daughters: Kirstin, Ashlyn and Erin Gould, as well as daughter, April Gould



First timer, Ben Czachor helping dad, Kevin Czachor at the Answering Service for Directors (ASD) display booth.....(Like father like son)



Enjoy the afternoon exhibits with Sondra Maggert, (standing) Linda Strong and Sharon Beyer





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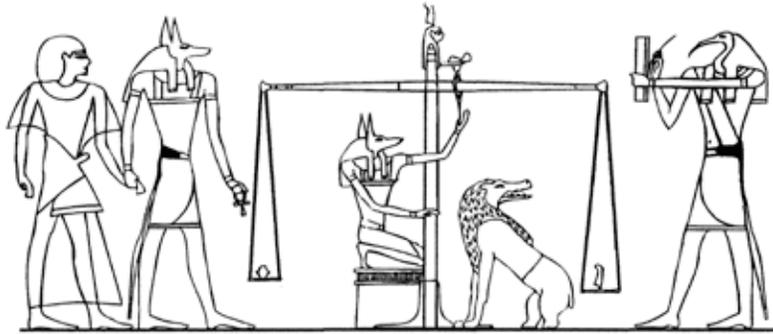
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SynDaver Lab Opens at Ogeechee Tech

The Funeral Service Education (FSE) program at Ogeechee Technical College (OTC) recently acquired a new SynDaver synthetic cadaver for instructional and lab demonstration use. The SynDaver Mortuary Model can be used with a variety of medical labs, as well as for clinical embalming and anatomy labs. The model features an injectable vascular system, as well as the capacity for cosmetic feature setting, and a body cavity compatible with clinical embalming techniques. The SynDaver Synthetic Human is world famous for accurately reproducing detailed human anatomy with highly realistic materials. Individual tissues have been developed over the course of the last two decades to accurately mimic the look and feel of real human tissue for use in teaching medical and mortuary related classes and labs.

“This model will allow us to safely instruct students in a variety of lab settings,” said Michele Rugar, OTC’s FSE program director. “While actual human models are not always available, this synthetic model can be accessed as needed with minimal effort. We are excited to be able to add this advanced instructional tool to our program.”

Ogeechee Tech is one of only three colleges to introduce this state-of-the-art cadaver for use in instruction.

To find out more about the SynDaver, visit www.syndaver.com

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Foundation Partners Group Announces Leadership Change, Bukala New CEO



Foundation Partners Group (FPG), a leading provider of innovative funeral, cemetery and cremation experiences and products, has announced that Bob Bukala will succeed Brad Rex as President and CEO.

“When Brad arrived at FPG four years ago, he established a compelling vision for an innovative company to reinvent the funeral experience. He has successfully executed against that vision while significantly growing the company and, today, Foundation Partners is a leader in the industry,” stated Henry Hagan, Chairman of the Board. “The Board, Access Holdings and Brad are pleased that Bob Bukala will be leading the company in the next phase of growth.”

“I am sad to leave our outstanding team, but know that Foundation Partners is well positioned for the future. Customers have embraced our ShareLife® difference and we provide a compelling proposition for firms that want to join our network, as evidenced by the nine acquisitions we completed this year,” said Brad Rex. “Bob and I joined the company at the same time and have worked closely together to achieve the company’s current success. FPG is in good hands with Bob.”

“I’m privileged to succeed Brad in the role of President and CEO and will continue to build the company’s future by leveraging the foundation of innovation and impeccable customer satisfaction that our families have come to expect from us,” commented Bob Bukala. “Foundation Partners is a market leader in bringing innovation to the funeral service industry and our appetite for organic growth and acquisitions has never been greater. I look forward to working with the team and continuing to exceed expectations for the Families and Team Members we serve.”

Bukala is an accomplished business executive with a proven track record growing companies through organic initiatives and acquisitions. Prior to accepting the role of President and CEO, Mr. Bukala was EVP and Chief Financial Officer of the company and He was instrumental in accelerating the pace of the nine acquisitions FPG completed



over the past year. Prior to joining Foundation Partners, Bukala was Chief Financial and Administrative Officer of Geomentum Inc. (IPG, NYSE). Prior to joining Geomentum, Bukala was Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of Knightsbridge Solutions, which grew from \$9 million to \$136 million in revenue over 6 years and was subsequently sold to Hewlett-Packard Company (HPQ, NYSE). After completing the integration of Knightsbridge into Hewlett-Packard, Bukala became the CFO for the HP Worldwide Consulting Group and VP and CFO of EDS- Americas acquisition by Hewlett-Packard.

About Foundation Partners Group: Foundation Partners Group (FPG) is a leading provider of innovative funeral, cemetery and cremation experiences. As one of the largest private funeral profession operators, FPG owns and operates funeral homes, cremation centers and cemeteries in 15 states, and is actively seeking to expand its locations throughout the U.S. With headquarters in Orlando, FL, Foundation Partners is committed to revolutionizing the funeral profession with a customer experience-centered approach that harnesses innovation and values the power of relationship and partnership. For more information, visit the Foundation Partners Group website at www.foundationpartners.com



FuneralCall Answering Service is Proud to Announce the Official Release of Their Integration API



FuneralCall Answering Service is proud to announce the official release of their Integration API and successful integration with various software vendors including Consolidated Funeral Services, Ionic, and Directors Advantage. This integration allows FuneralCall clients to automatically sync obituary information once it is uploaded onto their website. FuneralCall clients now experience freedom from having to input the information twice - once onto their website and once onto the FuneralCall Web Portal.

“FuneralCall’s API Integration with our system has freed up our staff tremendously. They are no longer having to duplicate the process when entering in our service arrangements which is a big relief,” says Bryant Hightower of Hightower Family Funeral Homes and the new Secretary of the NFDA. “We’ve been with FuneralCall for over 18 years and we enjoy sharing in all of their accomplishments and new innovations.” To begin using this feature, contact the FuneralCall Programming Department at 888-239-0351 or contact your software vendor and ask them to integrate with the FuneralCall API.

“We’re very excited about this new technology because it coincides with our motto of providing the ultimate customer service experience for our clients,” says Adam Wilkins, VP of Operations. “We consider the API a great addition for both FuneralCall and our clients and we look forward to the future upgrades.” The FuneralCall Programming team is hard at work developing further updates to allow other tasks to be automated and will announce such updates as soon as they are perfected.



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Tommy Johnson Joins Ward's Transport and Supplies

Doug Ward of Ward's Transport and Supplies LLC (WTS) has announced the addition of Tommy Johnson to the sales team effective January 1, 2017.

Tommy will travel throughout the state of Georgia offering not only the wide range of products and services available through WTS, but also the Cremation Capsule line. "With over 50 years in the funeral industry and over 35 years in funeral supply sales, Tommy will make a great addition to our sales team," said Doug.

In 2013, after 23 years in the monument business, Doug opened Ward's Transport Services, specializing in reliable and professional removals and transportation throughout Georgia and in parts of Florida. In 2016 Doug expanded his services to include a line of quilted cot covers. After the success of the cot covers, Doug added a few more products. Ward's Transport Service has grown to become Ward's Transport and Supplies, LLC, continuing the reputable removal services regionally, while offering products at competitive prices to funeral homes nationwide. You can learn more at www.wardstransportservice.com.



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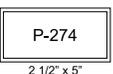
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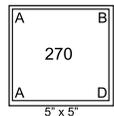
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Classic Metal Vaults	17	www.doric-vaults.com
Columbian Financial	35	www.cfglife.com
Custom Air Trays	21	www.customairtrays.com
Doric Products	15	www.doric-vaults.com
Federal Coach Company	7	www.federalcoach.com
Frigid Fluid Company	33	www.frigidfluid.com
Funeral Call	4,43	www.funeralcall.com
John A. Gupton College	19, 23	www.guptoncollege.edu
Johnson Consulting Group	3	www.johnsonconsulting.com
Matthews-Aurora Funeral Solutions	27	www.matw.com
Midwest Business Capital	5	www.midwestbusinesscapital.com
NewBridge Group	28	www.newbridgegroup.com
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Outlook Group	2	www.outlookgroup.com
Physicians Mutual	2	www.physiciansmutual.com
Pierce Chemical	47	www.piercechemical.com
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S & S Coach Company	29	www.sscoachcompany.com
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