



# Southern<sup>®</sup>

◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

MAGAZINE

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## Start Your Engines... For ICCFA's Annual Exposition in Charlotte, NC

ICCFA Expo Agenda, Key Note Speakers, Workshop Presenters and Exhibit Hours Tackle Your Tech Goals Today by Barrie Fleetwood, Messenger, LLC

How To Get More Families to Use your Firm ONLINE in 2019 by Ashley Montrose, FrontRunner

Key to Service = Symmetry of Balance by Todd Van Beck

Weigel Strategic marketing Teams with RANNKO Online Reputation Platform

ADDvantage Casket Company Acquired by Bills Forsberg

Alan Creedy Announces "Buy & Sell" Workshop in Charlotte Prior to ICCFA Expo

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### MAGAZINE

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February 2019

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with a Southern Accent Since 1919

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## notes from the editor

by John Yopp

The ICCFA Executive Board, Officers and Staff welcomes you to the Annual ICCFA Exposition in the great city of Charlotte, North Carolina. The Convention events, educational sessions and floor exhibit will be featured from April 3-6, 2019 and urge all of those to attend, even if for part of the convention. There is so much to see, learn and enjoy fellowship and networking with your colleagues from the Death Care profession.

Charlotte's recent 2016 census count came in at approximately 860,000 making it the 17th most populous city in the United States. The metro portion of Charlotte is 2,475,000 which ranks 22nd overall in the U.S. Charlotte is home to the corporate headquarters of Bank of America and the east coast operations of Wells Fargo, which along with other financial institutions has made it the second-largest banking center in the United States since 1995.

Among Charlotte's many notable attractions, some of the most popular include the Carolina Panthers of the NFL, the Charlotte Hornets of the NBA, the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, the Charlotte Independence of the USL, the Charlotte Hounds of Major League Lacrosse, two NASCAR Cup Series races and the NASCAR All-Star Race, the Wells Fargo Championship, the NASCAR Hall of Fame, the Charlotte Ballet, Children's Theatre of Charlotte, Carowinds Amusement Park, and the U.S. National Whitewater Center.

We urge everyone to enjoy the Exposition and their visit to Charlotte and never too early to begin to make plans for the 2020 ICCFA Annual Expo in the San Antonio Convention center in San Antonio, Texas.

If you are not a member of ICCFA, below is some information on our Association and ask that you contact us for more information:

### MISSION STATEMENT

*Providing exceptional education, networking and legislative guidance and support to progressive cemetery, funeral and cremation professionals worldwide.*

The International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association is the only international trade association representing all segments of the cemetery, funeral service, cremation and memorialization profession.

Founded in 1887 as the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents, the organization was created by a group of 18 cemeterians whose goal was to improve the appearance and operations of their properties. Throughout its first century of operation, the association grew in size and mission and underwent several name changes, but it remained a national cemetery-only organization. In 1996, the association became the International Cemetery and Funeral Association, expanding its membership to include funeral homes and other related businesses and extending its reach beyond U.S. borders. In 2007, "Cremation" was added to the name to more accurately reflect the operations and goals of its membership.

Today, the ICCFA is composed of more than 9,100 cemeteries, funeral homes, crematories, memorial designers and related businesses worldwide. It serves and supports these members through a host of benefits designed to increase their management proficiency and improve their businesses—from regular updates on government and legal issues, to educational meetings, to a variety of services and products tailored to meet their needs.

The ICCFA promotes consumer choices, pre-arrangement and open competition and has created more than two dozen model guidelines advocating state legislation on a variety of consumer-related issues. The association also assists consumers more directly through information resources, as well as through a complaint mediation service.

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and Marketing



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## EXPOSITION HALL HOURS

***Wednesday, April 3***

4:00–7:00 PM  
EXHIBITS AND EXPO HALL GRAND  
OPENING

***Thursday, April 4***

12:00 NOON–5:00 PM  
EXHIBITS AND LUNCH IN EXPO HALL

***Friday, April 5***

10:00 AM–1:00 PM  
EXHIBITS AND BRUNCH IN EXPO HALL

### ***Welcome Reception***

**TUESDAY, APRIL 2  
6:30 TO 9:30 PM**

Jumpstart the 2019 Annual Convention at the NASCAR Hall of Fame! This ticketed event will give you access to all of the museum's exhibits, interactive activities, plus food and drink. Tickets: \$20.

### ***PLPA Reception***

**THURSDAY, APRIL 4  
5:00 TO 6:00 PM**

Join pet loss professionals from around the world as they meet to kick off a week full of festivities. Hors d'oeuvres and drinks will be served.

### ***First Timers' Reception***

**THURSDAY, APRIL 4  
5:00 TO 6:00 PM**

Will this be your first time attending the ICCFA Annual Convention & Exposition? Come meet others who are also new to the Convention, as well as ICCFA volunteers and leadership, at this special reception dedicated to welcoming you.



### ***ICCFA Educational Foundation Reception***

**THURSDAY, APRIL 4  
6:00 TO 7:00 PM**



Join us for a reception to honor donors, scholarship recipients and bestow the ICCFA Educational Foundation Lasting Impact Award to **Ernie Heffner**. Light snacks will be served along with an open bar.

### ***ICCFA Prayer Breakfast***

**FRIDAY, APRIL 5  
7:30 TO 8:30 AM**

Come join us for breakfast and fellowship at the annual ICCFA Prayer Breakfast. The Prayer Breakfast is courtesy of generous sponsorships and is free for the first 60 individuals who arrive—first-come, first-served.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Pet Memorial Service

FRIDAY, APRIL 5  
8:30 TO 8:40 AM

Join us as we honor service animals and family pets who have died in the past year. If there is an animal that you would like to honor during the service, please complete the submission form found at [www.iccfaconvention.com](http://www.iccfaconvention.com). The deadline for submission is February 25, 2019.

## Keeping It Personal Award Presentation

FRIDAY, APRIL 5  
8:40 TO 9:00 AM

Winners of the 2018 Keeping It Personal (KIP) Awards will be honored during a ceremony on the general session stage. The KIP Awards recognize the best in personalization and were created by ICCFA's Personalization Committee to recognize outstanding examples of personalization of services and products in the deathcare profession.

## Voices from the Past Historical Cemetery Tour

SATURDAY, APRIL 6  
1:30 TO 4:00 PM

Visit Charlotte's oldest historical cemeteries and learn about their 50 "residents" who have come back to life to share their life stories at the site of their graves. Tour at your own pace while enjoying live music and local food trucks. This event is free but does require a ticket.

## Scenes from 2018 ICCFA Expo in Las Vegas



## Closing Banquet

SATURDAY, APRIL 6  
6:00 TO 11:00 PM



Come enjoy food and entertainment as we close the 2019 ICCFA Annual Convention. The ICCFA presidential transfer from **Christine Toson Hentges, CCE**, to **Jay Dodds, CFSP**, will take place during this event, as will the exchange of gifts with our fellow international associations.



Tickets are included with full attendee and spouse registrations.

All others may purchase a ticket on the registration form.

The Closing Banquet also includes the ICCFA Memorial Service. Tribute and memorialization are at the heart of what we do. Join us as we remember colleagues and loved ones who have died this past year.

If you would like to remember a loved one who has died, please send us a profile and photos for inclusion in the service. Instructions and a PDF form can be found at [www.iccfaconvention.com](http://www.iccfaconvention.com). The deadline for submission is February 25, 2019.



# KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



## Mindy Corporon

### ACTIVIST

Former CEO and now activist, Mindy Corporon took action after her son and father were murdered in a religious hate crime. Mindy started the Faith Always Wins Foundation and a community-wide event, SevenDays® Make a Ripple, Change the World. She formed high school programming for productive interfaith dialogue and now helps companies create healthy workplace environments so healing can occur after life's tragedies. In her talk, **Managing Your Business Through a Tragedy**, Mindy will tell her story and share how to manage through a tragedy, how you can address fear in a comfortable setting, who you can count on in the midst of chaos, and how to engage your team to promote healing and build resiliency.



## Drew Dudley

### LEADERSHIP EXPERT

What if we believed that leadership wasn't just for those in charge? What if we embraced our ability to lead, no matter our school grades or pay-grade? The most impactful leaders focus on "everyday leadership" and ensure that it's fostered, acknowledged, and rewarded. Drew Dudley's keynote, **Creating Cultures of Leadership and the Power of Lollipop Moments**, will make you laugh, think, and reconsider the ways you evaluate leadership in your life and workplace.

Drew Dudley, founder & Chief Catalyst of Day One Leadership, works with organizations around the world to empower people to increase their leadership capacity. He has spoken to over 250,000 people on five continents, been featured on *The Huffington Post*, Radio America, Forbes.com, and TED.com, where his TED talk was voted "one of the 15 most inspirational TED talks of all time" and has been viewed millions of times around the web.



## Jon Acuff

### BESTSELLING AUTHOR

According to a study conducted by the University of Scranton, 92% of resolutions fail. That's a staggering number considering how important goals are to companies. At every element of your work, goals matter. What if we could do some simple things to improve how often we finished what we started? What if we could complete the incomplete projects and tasks? What if we could get more done in a world of bottomless opportunities and endless distractions?

*New York Times* bestselling author and speaker Jon Acuff will share easy changes you can make to your corporate culture to make sure everyone hits their goals in his keynote, **FINISH: The Surprising Truth About Accomplishing Goals**. Some of the ideas are obvious. Some are counterintuitive. Some will surprise you, but the best part is they actually work.



To help you get on the right track, ICCFA offers over 30 educational breakout sessions targeting all segments of the deathcare profession. If you are looking for inventive ways to maximize returns at your cemetery, need tips on how to start your succession plan, want to embrace current technologies, or are looking for updates on state and federal regulations, Charlotte is the place to be! For the full list of educational sessions visit [www.iccfaconvention.com](http://www.iccfaconvention.com).

# Breakout Sessions at a Glance

## Wednesday, April 3

2:00–2:50 PM	<b>DIY Facebook &amp; Social Media Marketing</b> T FH Cm <i>Robin Heppell, CFSP</i>	<b>Goal Setting for Success</b> Ge <i>Jodie Dupree</i>
3:00–3:50 PM	<b>Serving the Community Through the Doors of the Funeral Home</b> FH S <i>Jill Lazar</i>	<b>From Click to Cases</b> S T <i>Andy Lopez</i>

## Friday, April 5

1:00–1:50 PM	<b>Cremation Authorization Form Pitstop</b> Cr L <i>Poul Lemasters, Esq.</i>	<b>Recruit, Train &amp; Retain Veterans</b> Ge HR
2:00–2:50 PM		<b>Raising \$3,000 Every Day: How Congressional Cemetery Brings in \$1.1 Million a Year</b> Cm <i>Paul Williams</i>
3:00–3:50 PM	<b>Youth &amp; Funerals</b> FH Gr	<b>Engaging Your People to Serve More Families</b> Cm <i>Gino Merendino</i>
4:00–4:50 PM	<b>Women in Leadership: Defining Your Impact</b> Ge	<b>Management of Cemetery Trees</b> Cm <i>Anne Fenkner</i>

## Saturday, April 6

9:00–9:50 AM	<b>It's More Than Money: Non-Financial Incentives to Attract &amp; Retain the Best Talent</b> HR <i>Mark Jorgensen</i>	<b>"Should I Bring the Ashes with Me?": Better Support for Those Who Have Lost Pets</b> P <i>Jehanne Gheith, MSW, LCSW, PhD</i>
10:00–10:50 AM	<b>Fighting for Relevance</b> Cm Gr <i>Jason Troyer, PhD &amp; C. Lynn Gibson, PhD</i>	<b>Riding the Millennial Cycle: Better Strap In</b> P <i>Chris Burke, FLMI</i>
11:00–11:50 AM	<b>How to Build a 21st Century Workplace</b> B <i>Tyler Anderson</i>	<b>Communication is a Two-Way Street</b> P <i>Carolyn C. Shadle, PhD &amp; John L. Meyer, PhD</i>
12:00–12:50 PM	<b>Donor Family Celebration of Life</b> FH <i>Dorman H. Caudle</i>	<b>Pet Disaster Recovery</b> P <i>Jodi Clock, CPLP</i>
1:00–3:00 PM	<b>Legal &amp; Legislative Luncheon: A Regulatory Update Everyone Needs to Hear</b> L <i>Poul Lemasters, Esq.</i>	



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<p><b>Employee Empowerment: Profitability, Culture &amp; Satisfaction</b> <b>B</b>  <i>Tim Bridges</i></p>	<p><b>The Pains &amp; Gains of Entering the Hispanic Market</b>  <b>Cm FH</b>  <i>Salvador Perches</i></p>
<p><b>Follow the Money: How Deathcare Businesses are Investing In the New Future</b> <b>B</b>  <i>Doug Gober Jr.</i></p>	<p><b>When Your Day Ends</b> <b>E FH</b>  <i>Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP</i></p>
<p><b>Your Comprehensive Pre-Need Program: Insurance, Trust or a Little of Both?</b> <b>B</b>  <i>Beth Kmiec &amp; Ashlee Theising</i></p>	<p><b>Addressing Sexual &amp; Other Harassment in Your Funeral Business</b> <b>HR</b>  <i>Stephanie Ramsey</i></p>
<p><b>Marketing Workshop 101: The Definitive Guide to Best Practices in the Modern World</b> <b>Cm FH S</b>  <i>Neil Sherrin</i></p>	<p><b>A Place to Go: Why Ceremonies Matter</b> <b>FH Gr</b>  <i>Linda Stuart</i></p>

<p><b>Purpose-Filled Selling: Winning in Sales by Celebrating Life</b> <b>S</b>  <i>Justin Baxley</i></p>	<p><b>The Digital World: Using Mobile Technologies to Create Better Family Experiences</b> <b>FH T</b>  <i>Rob Shane</i></p>
<p><b>Embracing the Customer Experience Revolution</b> <b>S</b>  <i>Jake Johnson &amp; Lori Salberg</i></p>	<p><b>Be the Extra Support Your Families Needs &amp; Get More Media Attention, Too!</b> <b>FH Gr</b>  <i>Allison Gilbert</i></p>
<p><b>Art of Selling the "Big Deal": How to Maximize Family Mausoleum Sales Opportunities</b> <b>Cm S</b>  <i>Michael Harens</i></p>	<p><b>People with Disabilities: Involvement, Inclusion, Healing</b> <b>Gr</b>  <i>Marc Markell, PhD</i></p>
<p><b>Repeat Families: You Can't Stay in Business Without Them</b> <b>S</b>  <i>Ellery Bowker</i></p>	<p><b>The Three Online Marketing Fundamentals You Must Master</b> <b>S T</b>  <i>Welton Hong</i></p>

**B** Business Management & Operations  
**Cm** Cemetery  
**Cr** Cremation

**E** Embalming  
**FH** Funeral Home  
**Ge** General Interest  
**Gr** Grief

**HR** Human Resources  
**L** Legal  
**P** PLPA  
**S** Sales & Marketing

**T** Technology



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Charlotte Douglas airport is situated within a 15-minute drive from The Westin Charlotte Hotel.

ICCFA has secured a discounted room rate of \$215 per night plus taxes. Guests must identify themselves as being an ICCFA Annual Convention attendee to obtain the discounted rate. A first night, non-refundable deposit will be charged at the time of booking. The cut-off date for making reservations in this block is February 28, 2019.

## ADDITIONAL HOTELS

The 2019 ICCFA Annual Convention has an additional room block at the following hotel:

### **Hilton Charlotte City Center**

222 E. 3rd Street  
Charlotte, NC 28202  
704.377.1500

\$215 plus taxes per night. The cut-off date for making reservations in this block is February 28, 2019.

## AIRPORT INFORMATION

The closest airport is the Charlotte Douglas Airport, located at 5501 Josh Birmingham Pkwy, Charlotte, NC 28208. The Charlotte Convention Center is 8 miles from the Charlotte Douglas Airport (CLT) and estimated one-way cab fare is \$25. Less expensive shuttles are available as well.

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# SPECIAL EVENTS



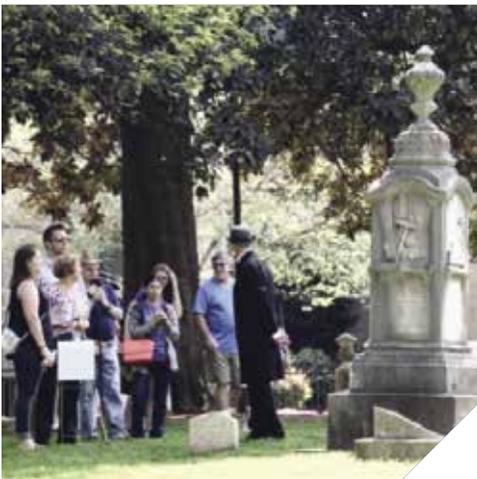
## *Welcome Reception*

**TUESDAY, APRIL 2  
6:30 TO 9:30 PM**

Get a headstart on the Annual Convention action by attending this special Welcome Reception at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. This ticketed event will give you access to:

- ▼ museum exhibits
- ▼ interactive activities, such as the pit crew challenge and the race simulator
- ▼ food and drink, including a moonshine tasting

You will also receive a free keepsake picture as a souvenir. Tickets for the Welcome Reception are only \$20 and can be purchased along with your registration.



## *Voices from the Past Historical Cemetery Tour*

**SATURDAY, APRIL 6  
1:30 TO 4:00 PM**

Join the Mecklenburg Historical Association's Docents for a walking tour of Charlotte's oldest historical cemeteries - Old Settlers' Cemetery, Elmwood Cemetery, and Pinewood Cemetery. Tour at your own pace while learning about their 50 "residents" who have come back to life to share their life stories at the site of their graves. Beautifully costumed portrayers will transport you to the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries as they tell personal stories of Charlotte's founding fathers, civic leaders, pioneering women, and

many others who helped make Charlotte what it is today. Don't forget to stop and enjoy the live music and local food trucks as well!\*

Old Settlers' Cemetery is the resting place of some of Charlotte's earliest families, including its founding father, Thomas Polk (1732-1794) and several Revolutionary Patriots that were signers of the 1775 Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, all of whom are eager to share their incredible stories with you.

Transportation will shuttle you between Settlers' and Elmwood/Pinewood Cemeteries, or you may choose to enjoy a short walk on 5th Street, where you will pass by the building that once was Charlotte's oldest Cotton Mill, circa 1880.

**\*This event is free but requires a ticket.** Free transportation to and from the Westin provided.

**REGISTER NOW AT [WWW.ICCFACONVENTION.COM](http://WWW.ICCFACONVENTION.COM)**



## Tackle Your Tech Goals Today

by Barrie Fleadwood,  
Messenger, LLC

We hear from the experts that the cremation rate in the U.S. is projected to be over 50 percent nationwide this year. Likewise, it is projected that over the next 10 years or so, that rate will climb to near 80 percent. While many southern states have not reached this level yet, the rate is climbing significantly and will likely affect your business in one way or another in the not too distant future. All of us agree on that, I believe.

At the same time as this is happening, technology has become ever more present in both the world around us and in our profession. It can be overwhelming, to say the least. From online death certificates to cloud-based accounting software, technology has changed our business in the last few years. Also, we are reminded that more and more of those planning funerals today are using the internet to gather their intelligence. We must learn about or at least become familiar with such things as SEO, Social Media Marketing and content management.

But not everyone is ready for all of that yet. As a supplier to the funeral industry for over 100 years, the folks at Messenger have witnessed its evolution with interest and at times trepidation. We've seen the things I mention above come about and while it is probably all good, there are still many individuals (and funeral homes) that have not begun their own evolution. It can be intimidating and overwhelming, to say the least.

Let's start with the basics and with that, I'll start with what I know best – funeral stationery and memorial products and how technology can help with that aspect of the funeral service. Our own extensive research has supported what we have long proposed – personalized

memorial products are important to the families who have suffered loss. After conducting several focus groups across the country, we have repeatedly concluded that the family's satisfaction is increased when the funeral home offers personalized products and service. We also have learned that there are still many funeral homes that do not offer much in this way and when families become aware of what could have been available, but wasn't, they are very disappointed.

How to get started, if you aren't already? It's the beginning of a new year, why not set yourself (and your funeral home) a new goal and implement a strategy that helps you provide what your families really want? Following are some Do's and Don'ts. Pick a couple and follow them. Most important is that you begin your journey to utilizing technology to help you provide what your families want and in so doing, possibly improve some efficiency.

- Don't hand your families an empty register book. We still hear stories where the family is handed a register book with no information filled in, other than the relatives' and friends' signatures in the back of the book. Here is an item that the family takes home with them, may look at several times over the next few days and weeks (and possibly beyond) and the time was not taken to make it complete. Provide them something with meaning and they will perceive something of value. Make it a memorialization of their loved one and make sure it is obvious that it came from you. The reward will greatly outweigh the cost.
- Don't use a typewriter. We also still hear about funeral homes that use a typewriter to create

their memorial folders and to fill in their register books. We're not even sure where one would find a typewriter ribbon anymore. But, beyond that, your personalization efforts will be limited if you don't include some pictures in your products. Typewriters won't do that. Which leads us to our next "Do."

- Do use images. The old adage, 'a picture is worth a thousand words,' couldn't be truer when it comes to describing a person's life. In today's digital world pictures abound. Encourage families to provide you with the images that tell the story of their loved one. If you feel you need to, ask them to limit their submission to 50 – 80 images. The exercise of them collecting and prioritizing these pictures can provide them a cathartic release, while they sort through them. You may be surprised at how grateful they are to you for helping them recognize the richness of their loved one's life.
- Don't scan one picture at a time. We hear from funeral directors that it takes too long to scan pictures and organize them. Granted, if you don't ask for pictures at all, any time you spend preparing them for use takes you longer. But, don't let that stop you. One very good time saving thing you can do is purchase a sheet fed page scanner. These desktop devices will accommodate up to 8 ½" x 11" pictures and are very fast. You can get a good one for under \$500 and they are well worth the investment.
- Don't spend more than about 15 minutes creating a video. Once you have scanned and saved your family's pictures, there are many things that can be done with them. From memorial folders, prayer cards and register books (of course), to ornaments, medallions and canvas portraits, many options are available. The single most valuable item that you can create for your families is the tribute video. Most funeral homes today do provide these invaluable memorializations. However, many funeral homes spend considerably too much time creating them or spend too much money doing so. The technology service exists today that will walk you through the steps of creating the video, including adding music, and generate the file (ready for download) in mere minutes. The cost is \$20 or less and you can make multiple copies for that money.
- Don't re-type information into different memorial items. We often see where a funeral home has set up "templates" in Microsoft Word for their register

books, folders and such. Certainly this is better than the typewriter, but far from ideal. Once a layout is perfected the user will save that and replace the information there with new info from the current case. Sounds easy enough, but has two considerable weaknesses. One, while the existing data is replaced with new, it is easier than you may think to leave some of the old and not replace it with the new. Also, each personalized item requires information to be typed into it. Thus, the same information is repeatedly entered potentially several times. This is more time consuming than it needs to be. By utilizing a program that is designed for personalizing products, the info is entered one time and automatically "fills in" each product you are completing. Once you have decided upon a layout that suits your funeral home and saved that to your program, entering the data is nearly automatic, regardless how many products you create for that individual.

- Do allow ordering personalized items from your website. More and more funeral homes today are expanding their website to be able to offer personalized gifts to their families in remembrance of their loved ones. This sympathy store concept is not new, but web technology today makes it easy to offer this type of product line. Also, we have found the "Power of the PIN" to appeal to many families. In this case, certain products that are personalized for the deceased are made available to family and friends to purchase online at their convenience. The funeral home does not have to carry inventory nor need to finish products. Rather, they provide their families the means to access a private website where products are available for purchase. It has been our experience that many people will make such a purchase at a later date, sometimes months after the funeral. Why not make these types of things available to your families and realize later sales for your funeral home? You have little invested here and much to gain.
- Do order memorial products for your funeral home online. While we're talking about making products available to your families to purchase online, don't forget that it makes great sense for you to do the same. Order your supplies from a company that offers you 24/7 convenience and take advantage of the ability to "take care of business" when it's convenient to you, even if that's at night or on the weekend. The convenience of making purchases

online in other aspects of your life are exploding, why not do the same for your business?

- Do find ways to improve efficiency while still providing great products. Most all of our technology solutions are meant to increase your efficiency or heighten your product offering or both. Everything I have listed here is available from a number of suppliers to our industry. Check with the companies you do business with and find out how their technology solutions can benefit you. Most all of them should be willing to provide you with guidance and support you along the way.

In review, many funeral homes have not embraced technology as a means of improving efficiency and as a tool to provide the personalization that their families really want. Now is the time. Yet, it is okay to keep it simple and start slow. Just start. Pick a thing or two that you can do that will get you closer to where you really should be and work from there. You will be happy you did, and so will your families. If you need help with any of the items mentioned in this article, talk to your suppliers. Regardless of who you work with, they should be able provide you expert advice and guidance on your quest to evolve.

*Barrie Fleetwood has worked at Messenger, LLC for 25 years in various customer service, marketing and sales positions. Over the years he has been involved with developing Messenger's merchandising systems as well as their personalization programs. He has worked with the outside sales team, on the marketing team and currently is the manager of the company's eCommerce department. At present he oversees the company's technical support team. He can be reached via email at [bfleetwood@messengerllc.com](mailto:bfleetwood@messengerllc.com).*



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## How to Get More Families Choosing Your Firm Online in 2019

by Ashley Montrose, FrontRunner

There is something that all funeral businesses have in common. Whether they specialize in cremation, pride themselves on traditional funerals, run a cemetery or offer alternative death care options, every firm wants to attract more customers, serve more people and grow their business. For most firms, this means evolving past the way they've always done it and position their businesses directly in line with consumer expectations.

Marketing is not what it used to be. As recently as ten years ago, a funeral home in the United States relied on traditional advertising and maybe have a website. Not to make light of the situation, but we now live in a world where people get information by talking to speakers located on the counter in their kitchen. Either that or they turn to Google to help them make their decisions. Put simply; the ball used to be in the court of businesses who could set prices, be active in the community and wait for people to pick up the phone or walk through the front door. However, things are different now.

Consumers now spend majority of their time online, and funeral businesses need to adapt. This means making sure that no matter where families are looking, or when, their business online is what gets found. It means having an informative, helpful and easy-to-use website. It requires being easy to find on search engines like Google and being a part of a consumer's social media experience. Building a strategy like this does not have to be difficult, but it must be a priority. The following tips are just a few things to remember when building your strategy for growing your business in 2019.

### Make Sure Your Website Includes What Families are Searching For

Having a well-designed website is essential. However,

the primary ingredient of any successful site is providing valuable information. After all, that is the critical factor in whether your firm is found on Google or not. To be found online and rank above the competition, your website must be relevant, reputable and informative.

Your content must answer consumer questions, and your site must receive excellent feedback from visitors – whether it be in the form of reviews or repeated visits.

Believe it or not, ranking on search engines like Google does not have to be hugely scientific. You should provide the answers to the questions they are asking. Did you know you can see what families in your community type into Google to find the services offered by your funeral home? There are several free tools such as the Google AdWords Keyword Tool which will not only tell you what they are typing in but also how often. This information is gold and can help you build an entire online plan for your website content, social media channels and more.

### Make Sure Your Website is in Line with Consumer Expectations

If you want to get more people to your website, take the test to make sure where you are sending them makes an excellent first impression.

### First, is your site mobile-friendly?

It is vital that your website is accessible and useful on mobile devices. Of the over 60% of searches start in Google, 93% of those are done on a mobile device. That means most often, people are using their phone or tablet to look for your services. You will want to make sure your website offers a good experience on these devices.

Continued on Page 24

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### **Does it look professional and up-to-date?**

We've all seen a website that needs some work. We usually visit these and immediately leave. Do some research and see how your site stacks up against the competition. Is yours too busy? Too simple? Is it in line with the rest of your brand?

Obituaries are the main reason the public visits a funeral home website. However, there are thousands of families each month looking for planning and grieving resources – the question is, are they getting the resources from you? Content pieces like pre-planning checklists and useful tools like funeral quote builders are some of the main reasons they return. Try and develop a plan to include these in your site; your website provider should have these available. Consumers expect to be able to do their research on their own. They don't necessarily want to come in to see the funeral home right away. Your website needs to be their resource whenever they need answers, even if it is two o'clock in the morning. Having the tools consumers use to conduct their research like planning and quoting tools or grief resources will go a long way in growing your business.

### **Claim Your Local Google Business Page**

Claiming your Google Business Page is critical. It is one of the quickest ways to increase your local rankings on Google. It's located on the right side of the page that shows up next to search results for any business. Google must verify these listings and let searchers know if you are verified so make sure you claim this page. It can make the difference of your funeral home appearing as a trusted service provider when someone searches for anything related to funeral services in your area, or not. You've likely seen these results before without even thinking about it. Google Business Pages help you access relevant information like hours of operation, location details, and contact information. Ultimately, this is another excellent way to drive traffic to your website. Don't you want that for your firm?

To claim your Google My Business page, follow these steps:

1. Go To: [business.google.com/create](https://business.google.com/create).
2. Start Typing in the Business Name.
3. Search for a business name.
4. Select the correct business.
5. You'll see a message saying someone else owns this business.

6. Click 'Request Access.'

7. Submit.

Once claimed, update it with your logo, photos and start to ask families for reviews.

### **Use Your Facebook Page to Drive More Families to Your Website**

Now that you have looked at the content of your website and claimed your Google Business listing, it is time to start driving more traffic to your site. How do you do that? Facebook.

The world's largest social network is the #1 way you can grow your business in 2019. This may be my opinion, but it comes from experience managing more than 100 funeral home Facebook strategies from beginning to end at FrontRunner. Our team has personally seen firms grow 300%, get 40+ pre-need leads in one month and more, just from having a creative Facebook strategy that tells a story and drives traffic to a great website. I could go on with examples of how firms have grown using this tool for pages.

### **Why is Facebook a must?**

Marketing has always been about positioning your business where people's attention is. Today that means Facebook. More than two thirds (68%) of all Americans are on the social network, and that audience grows each month. More than likely that means most people in your service area are using Facebook. If you are not there to engage with that audience, a competitor will beat you to it.

What does a funeral home post about on Facebook? It varies. If you ask me what a funeral business should post on Facebook – I'd tell you to bring your business to life. Make the team, the events, the services, the passion behind your operation all known. Take everything you do inside the arrangement room and make it known ahead of time, so they build the trust and get the answers they want from you – long before they ever need your services. Another tip: if you do what was mentioned above, you'll have a great website full of helpful resources and information. You can make social media posts that encourage them to learn something small and visit your website to read the full article or use the tool.

## Not Enough Time? You Need to Make Time.

I've heard it all, whether it's not having enough time, wanting to stick to tradition and what is comfortable or simply being unsure about what to do. There always seems to be a reason why some funeral homes don't make digital marketing a top priority, yet they all want to grow their business. Sometimes I even hear that "what I've done for years has always worked, why do I need to change?". Well, the answer is simple. Technology is continually changing and evolving. With it is the habits of consumers. As a software provider to close to 3,000 funeral homes, I can tell you that if you need more time in your day, look internally and see how much time you waste on inefficient processes and data entry. A great piece of business software alone can save you hours each day and give you the time you need to grow your business. People have become so used to getting information instantly and having convenient shopping experiences online – that they have come to expect it and nothing else. This change may not be impacting you today, but it will in the very near future.

**FrontRunner provides integrated software and marketing solutions to close to 3,000 funeral homes across North America. For more information about FrontRunner, visit them online at [www.FrontRunner360.com](http://www.FrontRunner360.com) or contact 1-866-748-3625. Mention this article to save 20% on any FrontRunner technology solution or marketing service.**

*Ashley Montroy, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of FrontRunner Professional, is committed to helping funeral professionals understand and excel in today's*



*digital age. Ashley holds a bachelor's degree, diploma and multiple marketing certificates, and has a long-standing history in funeral service, growing up directly above a family-run funeral home and her father*

*being the founder of FrontRunner Professional. She has taught thousands of funeral professionals at more than 40 funeral conventions across North America and has been voted a top 5 speaker at the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) convention. Using her passion combined with FrontRunner's experience of providing technology and marketing solutions to close to 3,000 funeral homes, she empowers funeral professionals to not only understand their markets, but educates them on the tools and knowledge they need to truly grow their business.*

*To learn more about FrontRunner's SEO services, visit [www.frontrunnerpro.com/search-engine-optimization-services](http://www.frontrunnerpro.com/search-engine-optimization-services). To speak to a FrontRunner representative about developing a strategic online marketing plan exclusive to your firm, contact Jules Green at 1-866-748-3625 x 507.*

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The copy and the photo were not retouched, Jim actually floated in the pool!

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## Weigel Strategic Marketing Teams with Rannko Online Reputation Platform

### Collaboration Will Allow Funeral Homes to Better Monitor and Manage Their Online Reputation

Tampa, FL – As part of its pledge to offer a complete spectrum of marketing services for funeral homes, Weigel Strategic Marketing has announced a new venture with Rannko online reputation management suite. Rannko is the most affordable digital reputation management software platform that helps local businesses like funeral homes control their online presence. By utilizing the power of the Rannko platform, funeral homes can better manage their online brand. From both a reactive and proactive standpoint, the way to a better online reputation for funeral homes starts with the Rannko Reputation Marketing Platform. “Not too long ago, it was easy for funeral homes to monitor their reputation in the community by simply following the local news and attending service club meetings. Now there are dozens of places for families to leave comments on the web and online reviews have never been more important,” said Joe Weigel, owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing. “Platforms like Google and Yelp make it extremely easy for families to hear about a bad experience with a funeral home. Rannko helps funeral professionals get control of their reputation by integrating information and monitoring reviews across the internet from one platform.”

With more than 100 places to list business information on the web, Rannko offers a funeral home the ability to sync their key information with each of them using just the click of a button. This way, when a funeral home’s information changes, it can be updated in Rannko and pushed out to these listings with ease. And with 85 percent of consumers trusting online reviews as much as recommendations from a friend or family member, it’s crucial that funeral directors stay abreast and take control of conversations about their firm online.

“We’re very excited to be working with Joe on this collaboration, and in particular, impressed on what he knows about marketing in the funeral profession,” said Rannko CEO Jason Payne. “It’s very challenging presenting our value proposition to a profession that at times can be slow to change, but Joe has been instrumental in helping us create our offering.

Rannko saves valuable time when it comes to managing a funeral home’s online brand. Whether the firm’s business listings need updating, their online presence and reputation require monitoring or the firm is just looking for suggestions on how to improve the funeral home’s website, Rannko is a one-stop shop. In short, Rannko helps funeral directors take ownership of the many aspects of their digital footprint beyond simply their online reputation.

With the help of Weigel, Rannko has already launched a new landing page ([www.rannko.com/funeralservice](http://www.rannko.com/funeralservice)), where funeral directors can learn more about the comprehensive Rannko platform and to sign up for Rannko. Together, they are exploring additional marketing programs to help bring the Rannko message to the funeral profession.

“As professional caregivers, funeral directors spend endless hours meeting with families, helping them plan funerals for their loved one and then ensuring every last detail of the service occurs without incident,” commented Weigel. “With so much time being spent on the running the firm, there is little time to monitor and invest in the funeral home’s online presence, that is, until now. Rannko is the innovative solution to growing a families’ satisfaction and ensuring that a funeral professional’s time is spent working with families rather than on attracting them to the firm.”

According to 2018 research by the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), more than half of all families have visited a funeral home’s website. And these families are not hesitant to provide reviews about the service they receive from funeral homes. The challenge is staying abreast of all the online conversations taking place.

“A general rule of thumb for marketers is to spend 20% of the time creating content and 80% of the time promoting it. Funeral homes understand better than most businesses how challenging that can be when a day is filled up with arrangements, phone calls, and funeral preparations,” said Payne. “Rannko enables funeral directors to spend their time where it matters most by taking out the tedious aspects of social media

management. With Rannko, funeral directors can view, manage and post to their social accounts all from one place and schedule out their weekly content with the click of a button.”

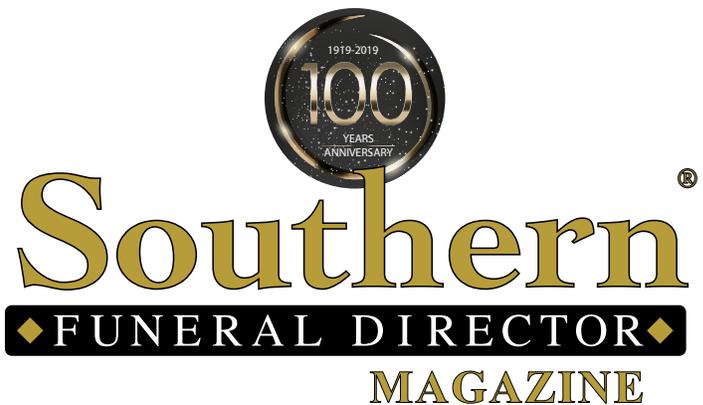
**About Rannko:**

Rannko is the #1 online digital platform for reputation management, social media management, listings management, and web analysis. With Rannko, you can automate your digital marketing efforts to save you time and optimize your digital footprint simultaneously. Rannko was designed with local businesses like funeral homes and law firms in mind. Rannko enables funeral professionals to build, consolidate, unify and empower their funeral home in a way that will attract families, increase the funeral home staff’s productivity and operate a successful online presence. Rannko can be contacted at 888-909-9939 or by email info@rannko.com.

**About Weigel Strategic Marketing:**

Weigel Strategic Marketing is a full-service marketing firm that is focused on helping businesses in funeral service succeed. From funeral service suppliers to cemeteries and funeral homes, Weigel Strategic

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## Working with the Media

## Keys to Service = Symmetry of Balance

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

We don't think about this much but in a real sense the funeral experience, the funeral interview is full of phases, divisions and stages. This is very important for without phases, divisions and stages the funeral experience, and the funeral interview gets stuck.

If forward movement in the overall funeral experience is absent, this usually indicates that we are stuck and when a funeral director gets stuck this most often results in there being painfully slow movement forward, it becomes an exercise in verbosity, an exercise in exhaustion for both the funeral director and the family clients, and the worst consequence of all it ends up being an abuse of our client family's time. What we do is critically important, but for us to think that the funeral experience is the only thing a bereaved client has to do is an exaggeration of our importance.

A word of clarification. When I write about a funeral director getting stuck I certainly don't mean to say that there ought to be the rush on time, not in the least. Also I don't mean to communicate that being stuck means our doing or saying nothing. In fact being stuck in the funeral arrangement conference/interview or in the general funeral experience is usually not because the funeral director is not talking, it is precisely the opposite; the funeral director is wasting the family's time because we are talking way too much. This case study should illustrate my point.

### **CASE STUDY: The Kind but Unbalanced Funeral Director – He Talked Way Too Much!**

Most of the readers know that I just like funeral directors. I have always liked funeral directors, and it makes no difference who they are or where they come from. I like talking with them, I like working with them, and most of all I like learning from them.

Early in my career I was blessed by being mentored by some mighty fine funeral directors, and these great ones all had one stellar characteristic in common – they were kind hearted people. Looking back it is clear that most of these great personalities weren't great business people, they didn't know a profit and loss statement from a pipe organ, they were better than that: they were great funeral people.

Having a kind heart in my humble opinion is the one of the major keys of service in our great and beloved profession. TVB's has had this philosophical opinion about the DNA of funeral service for many years. All funeral service is in the end local, and all funeral service in the end is a matter of what is in the funeral directors heart. Nothing, absolutely nothing that promotes permanent good in our great profession happens until FIRST something good happens in a funeral directors heart.

Of course as we will soon see having a good heart does not equate into having inner balance. Not too many years ago I was involved with a consulting project with a large funeral home operation. The company was very old and highly respected. The family was very proud of their heritage (the firm opened in 1888), and this particular funeral family got along, they liked each other. On the staff of this funeral home was one particular gentlemen. The moment I was introduced to him I liked him. He had a cherub like baby face, a great big welcoming smile, he dressed immaculately, and exhibited good taste all the time, and he had brilliantly polished shoes. He had been at this funeral home for decades.

The staff uniformly liked him (now there is a miracle), he was meticulous on funerals, and he was an outstanding embalmer. He even told me that he still mathematically figured out the HCHO demand for

each and every decedent he was privileged to embalm! However, for all his outstanding characteristics this funeral professional regularly got stuck in making funeral arrangements, and as a consequence he would innocently offend many of the families he was asked to serve.

Routinely family satisfaction surveys would arrive and this funeral director had negative comments which showed a trend in his unbalanced approach to his professional responsibilities. Here are a few of the comments that I personally read: "Great guy, but WOW can he talk!" "I was ready to shoot myself!" "I thought we would be in and out in short order, hell Dad pre-arranged everything!" "I know he was trying to help us, but please tell him to talk less and help us more by finishing instead of going on and on and on!" Here was the most brutal comment: "I was ready to blow my brains out!" Here was the most creative comment: "Listening to him talk was like attending an endless insurance seminar."

You get the idea. This gentle man, this kind-hearted man was out of balance because he was just talking too much. He didn't have a mean bone in his body, but yet his inability to guide the client's funeral experience was stymied because he just kept talking. No matter how sincere he was in his heart, the comments on the family satisfaction survey's proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that first, what he was rambling on about was overdone, and second the family clients had concluded that after a while their time was being abused.

In the end this kind hearted funeral director was just too set in his ways to change, and the owners of the funeral home were too nice to reprimand him out of respect for his good points, so in the end the funeral owners simply waited it out, tolerating the negative comments, until this really nice funeral director retired. This is only one example of being stuck by having an unbalanced character flaw. Out of balance attitudes and activities can happen on funerals, on cremation activities, burials, receptions, any myriad of activities which go on in funeral homes. Most every activity in a funeral home, to be optimally effective requires forward movement in both time and space.

It seems many times in the process of learning our inner balance of helping people (which is the premier mission of the funeral profession) that the pendulum

swings in an exaggerated movement from way too far on this side and way too far on the other side. Much of emotional health is to be found when we discover how to live in the middle of the tensions created by the opposite in our lives.

Not to sound impossibly inconsistent in this article, but an example of this exaggerated zig zag movement would be the opposite of the funeral director who gets stuck in talking too much, to the funeral director that makes the funeral experience so rapid and swift that it is very difficult for a client family to determine just where one phase of the overall funeral experience ends and the next one begins.

One quick conclusion that we can make right now is to say given what I have just shared it is clear as a bell that being an effective funeral professional is NOT AN EASY TASK! So what to do? I don't have the total answer, but here are some humble thoughts. TO BE CONTINUED...

*(Part II continued in March issue, as we learn to understand the "Symmetry of Balance")*

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## Bill Forsberg Acquires ADDvantage Casket Company

Raleigh, NC – Bill Forsberg, former Executive Director of the North Carolina Funeral Directors Association, is pleased to announce the acquisition of ADDvantage Casket Company from Vickie Zimmerman. The sale was consummated on October 5, 2018.

“Since founding the company six years ago, Vickie has built an excellent growing business and developed an enviable reputation for customer service and product quality,” stated Forsberg. “I am thankful that Vickie is staying on as an advisor and ambassador for ADDvantage. The success of her company is due largely because she has focused on her customers in a personal and sincere way like few others have.”

“I wanted to transition out of the day-to-day activities, yet ensure that the business went to someone who could build upon the growth and brand reputation,” said Zimmerman. “I can’t think of anyone who possesses the experience and passion of Bill as it relates to the funeral profession.”



(L-R) Bob Horn, Steve, Vickie Zimmerman, Holly and Bill Forsberg (owners), during the recent South Caroline Mid Winter Expo

Bill has spent more than 30 years in funeral service, is a licensed funeral director/embalmer and has MBA from Loyola University Chicago. He served as Vice President for Wilbert Funeral Services and later as COO for the Lane Family Funeral Homes in Ohio.

“The ADDvantage team remains to ensure our customers don’t experience any disruption in our service levels,” commented Zimmerman. “Our group has done an exemplary job of building a solid foundation for service and value as we expanded in the Carolina’s.”

To learn more about the value of ADDvantage Caskets, please call Vickie or Bill at (919) 210-3406



Holly displaying her “Tie 1 On” display with Addvantage



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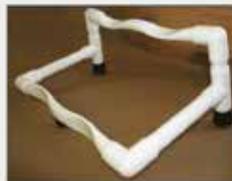
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## Creedy Announces “A Dummies Guide to Buying & Selling” Workshop

### Hands-on Seminar to Focus on Succession Planning For Beginners

Raleigh, NC: Alan Creedy, chief strategist at Creedy and Company, is known to say, “For funeral home owners, nothing can be said to be certain, except death, taxes and succession”. At some point in their career, every owner is confronted with the question, “What do I do now?” Creedy’s “A Dummies Guide to Buying and Selling” workshop will help funeral home owners begin the process of planning for the inevitable exit from the profession – or, conversely, how to go about acquiring additional firms should that be the goal.

“Years ago, I realized that practitioners don’t learn well in seminars. Too often, they return home and fail to apply what they learned to their own business,” commented Creedy. “So, I developed the Un-seminar, styled after the book Blue Ocean Strategy. My Blue Ocean Tours take practitioners through ‘hands-on’ experiential workshops that enable them to apply what they are hearing to their own business... before they go home.”

Blue Ocean Tours have been specifically designed to empower practitioners to learn and apply simplified concepts to their own business. The results have been dramatic and permanent. Blue Ocean attendees implement what they learn within months of returning home with great results.

“According to The Financial Post magazine, as much as 75% of small business owners are expected to exit their business in the next ten years,” added Creedy. “This means that almost every independent funeral home owner will be sitting on either the buying or the selling side of the table in some respect.”

This one and a half day workshop is intended for those seeking to learn more about the buying and selling process. The workshop is scheduled to take place from March 31 to April 2 and held in downtown Charlotte. As with past Blue Ocean workshops, the seminar will include a mix of classroom learning and a field trip.

#### Key Workshop Takeaways for Sellers

- How to build value and increase cash flow



### A Dummy's Guide To Buying & Selling

A DIY Workshop  
March 31 – April 2, 2019  
Charlotte, NC



- EBITDA Vs. Seller Discretionary Income
- How to plan your succession and get Uncle Sam to help
- What kind of buyer do you want – your kids, your employees or a third party

#### Key Workshop Takeaways for Buyers

- How to generate buying opportunities
- How to value a business
- How to make an offer
- Know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em
- Post-purchase issues

Creedy has assembled an all-star faculty of speakers for the seminar including:

David Hernandez – a first generation funeral director who over the past decade has grown from one location to ten firms, serving more than 1200 families each year. Greg Rollings –the President and CEO of Rollings Funeral Service. Since 2001 Greg has accumulated a total of 35 firms serving more than 4000 families each year.

Erin Whitaker –the Senior Vice President of Foundation Partners Group, focusing on Business Development. This role gives her a sound and practical perspective on buying and selling.

Danny Jefferson – American Funeral Director Magazine’s 2017 Funeral Director of The Year, Danny has a rich and successful funeral service career.

Steve Shaffer – is the President and CEO of Homesteaders Life Company. Steve is a well-known



and influential executive in the funeral and cemetery business. In addition to learning the various aspects of succession planning, attendees will also understand how to address critical management and staffing issues including how to position a firm as the community innovator and how to improve sales value in the arrangement conference.

Cost to attend the seminar is \$995. Additional members from the same firm can attend for \$795. Lodging and travel accommodations will be arranged directly by each attendee. Workshop fees include

seminar workbook (paper and electronic), all meals as well as bus transportation to and from all offsite events associated with the seminar. More details about the seminar as well as information on registration are available at: <https://funeralhomeconsulting.org/2019-blue-ocean-tour/>

“This year’s ICCFA convention begins April 2nd in Charlotte and we have booked the headquarters hotel, the Westin Downtown Charlotte, for our seminar,” added Creedy. “This will allow seminar attendees to stay over and attend the convention with minimal hassles or interruptions.”

About Creedy & Company: Headquartered in Greensboro, NC, Creedy & Company is a Business Advisory Service founded by Alan Creedy in 2008. His hands-on industry experience of more than 35 years enables him to quickly analyze core problems, develop and prioritize solutions and implement strategies for quick turnaround. For more information, visit [www.funeralhomeconsulting.org](http://www.funeralhomeconsulting.org).



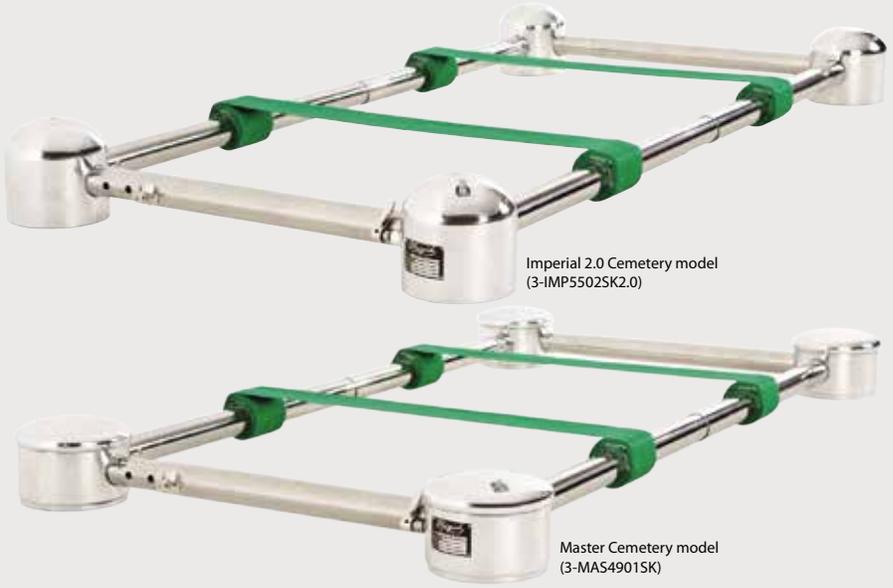
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