



Southern

◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

MAGAZINE

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July/ August 2019

Casket Merchandising is Best Kept Simple
by Bob Pierce

Are the Days of Caskets Dead by Danielle Thacker
Cherokee Child Casket Company Profile

Service Casket Company Still Family Owned
for Over 38 Years

Starmark Innovated Solid Line of Wood Caskets
Profile

Matthews-Aurora Funeral Solutions Artistry
Collection

Remembering the American Glass Casket Company
Is Traditional Media Dead by Joe Weigle

Keys to Service = Encouragement
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notes from the editor

by John Yopp

Traditional vs Cremation Revenue... Will We Ever Close the Gap

With the NFDA International Expo quickly coming up in October in Chicago, one of the most discussed topics in the classrooms as well as the exhibit floors, will be the rising rate of cremation and how can we combat it, if we are to stay in business. Unfortunately, this topic has been the main discussions in the funeral profession for several decades and cremation rates will only continue to get worse.

Most of the statistical figures you see from NFDA, ICCFA, CANA, AARP, etc..., on the average cost of a traditional funeral and/or cremation, as well as the funeral and cremation rates, are all pretty much the same. The traditional funeral rate in the U.S. is 56%, cremation is at 37% and other miscellaneous (Ship in/outs, etc...) is 7%. Give or take, the average cost for a funeral with a vault is approximately \$8,500; with casket only, is \$7,500; cremation with viewing is \$6,250 and basic direct cremation is roughly \$2,800.

Which brings us to the differences between going from \$2,800 to \$8,500. Without getting in to "lost cost carriers" and "\$795 direct cremation operators" we have a large gap of \$5,700 between most offerings. Two things that remain common that will not change: 1. A death occurs in which a "first call" is triggered; 2. the body has to be disposed of either by burial or non-burial alternative.

Many firms are now taking a hard look on how they can "close the gap" on pricing. Every funeral home has its own take on the pricing approach and most of the decisions are driven by competition and/or economics of a community. One of the more aggressive approaches I am seeing more and more in the profession, is a flat service charge to the family, regardless if they choose traditional or cremation...same price. Many more, would rather have a \$3,895 direct cremation charge and cremate 50 calls at that price rather than 100 calls at \$1,800. Same total revenue for either situation, except the 50 cremations at \$3,895 will have a lot less expenses servicing those cremations. Yet, the

alternative argument is that serving 100 families instead of 50 families in regards to cremation, gives you more chances for serving more families in the future. So the marketing strategy merry-go-round starts! Is more less or less more?

One item for sure, is that we need to take a closer look at our pricing. A funeral home will exert the same amount of time and effort on a "first call." You have the initial call, the removal, housing back at the funeral home and minor prep work before the family arrives for arrangements. If the family chooses a traditional service, then you have all the other services associated with a typical full service charge. However, if the family chooses a direct cremation and the funeral director is doing it at a discount, then did you not just give away most of the previous work for virtually free? Should we implement a "minimal declinable fee" and then add our additional cremation charges on top? Some say that "declinable fee" is already included in the cremation charge. Either way, we need to look at our overhead and review our average funeral revenue and make adjustments accordingly, if the firm is to survive the next 20 years.

In closing, since many are motivated by money and revenue, we are sometimes guilty of not providing every family with the same caring and service effort. For example, the family has only \$900, and no more. So do we tend to treat that family any different than one that may be spending \$3,895? One of the best approaches I have seen to date to increase your cremation average sale, is when the family comes in and says "we want just the basic-direct cremation," then funeral arranger can respond "Mr. Mrs. Williams...that is the least we are going to do for you today." That response at least sets the stage for optional services and memorialization to be added for the family.

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Tampa	8:20A	A1	DELAYED
Chicago	8:23A	B10	DELAYED
Dallas	8:27A	C2J	CANCELED
Denver	8:34A	C11	DELAYED
New York	8:39A	A3	DELAYED
Chicago	8:40A	B7	DELAYED
Mexico City	8:44A	B9	DELAYED
Atlanta	8:49A	C2H	DELAYED
Tampa	8:54A	C2	CANCELED
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Casket Merchandising Is Best Kept Simple

By Bob Pierce

Casket sales become a less significant part of a funeral home's profitability with each passing year. While the statement is generally true, it does not mean that funeral homes can place less emphasis on casket merchandising. It only means that funeral homes must fight the battle of profitability on multiple fronts, one of which is casket sales and merchandising.

Casket merchandising has always been about understanding and educating your families and providing them with simple and satisfying options that make them feel that they have made decisions that are appropriate for them given their circumstances. Profit is the by-product of a quality interaction with families. It is a funeral director's responsibility to present merchandising of services and products in a manner that makes families happy with the choices they make. Families are heavily influenced by their initial discussions with the arranger. These informal discussions allow the funeral director to better understand the deceased and the culture of the family. They are an important part of the planning conference. The knowledge that is obtained during this interaction will become useful later as the family works through their options, choices and decisions.

Further, the family must understand of the services, products, materials, etc. that will be presented to them before they enter the showroom. The family makes their choices, but the funeral director constructs the environment in which the family's choices are going to be made. This critical interaction contributes heavily to both family satisfaction and funeral home profitability. Always keep in mind that an educated family is your friend. A confused family is never your friend.

Given the changes in the presentation of services and merchandise, I will use the term "showroom" to refer to all manners in which caskets, vaults, services and other products are presented to families. Please read this article with the understanding that the term "showroom" refers to all manners of display including but not limited to a full-sized casket room, end and

corner cuts, photos, and or a customizable digital visual arrangement system.

To families, caskets are, for the most part, simply boxes with varying degrees of appeal and longevity. They want to feel good about the choices they make. They respond to the merchandising of the showroom but ultimately, they make choices that make them happy, fit into their budget, and reinforce their self-image. Funeral Homes must always remain aware that they are merchandising to the needs of their families, not their funeral directors.

I have represented thousands of funeral homes and I have gained an appreciation for what makes a funeral home profitable and the mistakes or lack of attention that cause a funeral home to be less profitable. This is an example of a circumstance that changed a person's retirement dramatically.

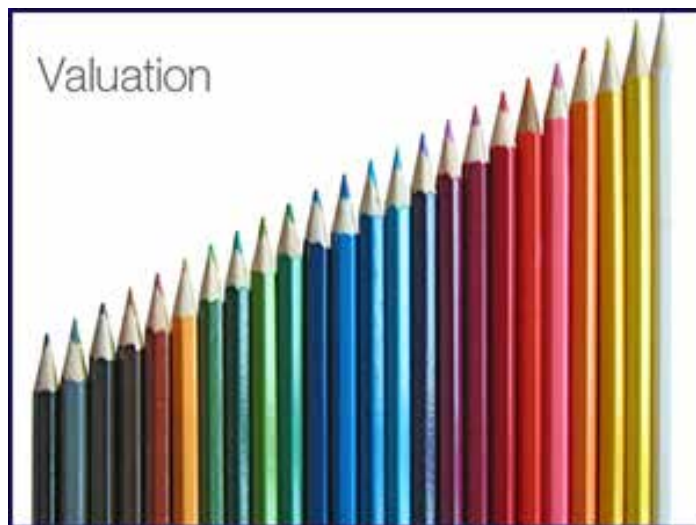
The funeral home in my example was not profitable and, as a result, was not worth much as it was being run, surely not enough to support a comfortable retirement. Here is what I found during my visit. The showroom was nice and generally appeared to be merchandised appropriately with one very obvious exception. The funeral home presented a twenty gauge "value" casket in a stand-alone and lighted display as families entered the showroom. The offending casket was named after



the founder of the funeral home and was offered with several interiors and in several colors. That simple merchandising miscalculation stood between the business owner and a comfortable retirement. It was a simple matter of removing the misplaced, mispriced, and inappropriate casket; changing another unit or two; and renaming a nicer casket after the founder of the funeral home to make the funeral home spectacularly profitable. These simple changes caused the sales, profit and value of the funeral home to increase dramatically and another retirement was saved.

This example is, of course, extreme but it illustrates the point of this article. If a funeral home presents one or two inappropriate, mispriced or misplaced caskets, it can affect the profitability of the funeral home dramatically. When merchandising is presented in a manner that makes families feel foolish for not choosing a casket to which they have been “steered” by the merchandising, they can begin to believe that they have been unfairly manipulated into an unsatisfying choice.

Families are interested, for the most part, in the appearance of the casket, whether it is “appropriate” for their loved one, and how it will be perceived by their guests and family members. The family’s approach makes merchandising of caskets very important. It is critical that the appearance and price of each casket make sense within the context of the entire showroom. It is when the price of a casket and the perception of



value are out of sync that families can be made to feel uncomfortable. Families who are made to feel uncomfortable tend to make unsatisfying choices based on price.

“Value” pricing certain units may be done with the best of intentions, but it may steer some families toward an unsatisfying purchase, and it will make the funeral home less profitable. If you present a range of visually appropriate options in a simple understandable manner, families will make satisfying decisions that make them happier and make you more profitable.

This simple concept can be used to change the profit of a funeral home significantly. There are two elements to making a transition to a profitable showroom. First, the funeral director arranger has to take the time to acquaint the family with the different types of caskets, materials, etc. before the family enters the physical (or digital) showroom. An educated family will make more satisfying choices and will be happier with their experience. And second, the caskets in the showroom must have a logical progression of perception of value and price.

Families want to feel good about their choices. The funeral home makes families feel good about their choices by making their options simple and understandable. Profits increase when funeral homes follow this very simple principal.

Conclusion

The management of a funeral home has become considerably more complex over the last several decades. Not only do managers have to be able to



effectively manage and merchandise for many different types of services, they have to make sure that every service is perceived by the family and their guests as having been special and responsive to the very personal needs of their families and their guests. That is a high bar but it is the funeral industry's best defense against direct cremations.

Managers also have to focus on the way a family feels during the planning process. Families have to feel comfortable and have to be presented with simple, satisfying and understandable choices to make them comfortable. Caskets are just one of the family's many choices that have to be made simple, satisfying and understandable.

A well merchandised showroom eliminates the need for salesmanship during the planning conference. It puts the responsibility for profitability on appropriate merchandising where it belongs and, it results in the funeral director having more quality time to spend with the family to make each service more personal and responsive to the culture of the family.

It takes effort to build merchandising that is responsive to the needs of one's families, but it is well worth the effort.

It makes families and funeral directors happier and it makes funeral homes more profitable. Remember to test your paradigms every day, step out of your comfort zone, and manage proactively. If you do, good things will happen. I have been focused on the profitability of funeral homes for more than forty years. I have never seen an instance in which simplicity of presentation has failed to add one thousand dollars and more per call to the bottom-line cash flow of a funeral home. Not ever.

Bob Pierce was a Certified Public Accountant, the Chief Financial Officer of an aggressive cemetery and funeral company and was involved in the purchase and sale of thousands of funeral homes and cemeteries. He is Vice President of Pierce CFO, a firm specializing in profit and value management and sales and acquisitions of funeral homes. Pierce CFO has offices in Gainesville, Georgia; and Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. He can be reached for comments at 470-363-5393, on the web at piercecfo.com, or by email at bob@piercecfo.com.



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Are the Days of Caskets Dead?

By Danielle Thacker



Cremation. It's the word that we hear everywhere. We hear it from our families; we read it in trade journal articles; we hear about it Continuing Education seminars – it's all around us. We can't avoid it. They tell us to prepare our businesses for a "cremation only" world that may overtake our current lives in another 10, 15 or 20 years.

As a result, many have shifted their focus to service charges, cremation merchandise and trying to tackle the universal problem of "How do I cover my costs on a direct cremation, while still being competitive in the local market?". I will be the first to say, these are all great things for us to be thinking of and implementing. However, we can't completely abandon our focus on the burial side of our business. "Why" - you ask? Well, hold on tight, grab your pencil and follow along with this math:

Let's say the average funeral home does 100 calls per year and has a 50% cremation rate equating to 50 burials per year. The funeral home averages a revenue of \$2,500 per casket, thus equaling a total revenue from caskets of roughly \$125,000 per year (\$2,500 x 50 burials). Now let's say you have an average urn sale of \$175 per urn. Guess how many urns you have to sell to equal the revenue of your burial caskets? **The answer is 714 urns (\$125,000 / \$175).** So the question becomes, do you have 714 families to sell your urns to?

That was the top line, now let's look at the bottom line. Let's just assume an average casket sale at \$2,500 yields an average profit of \$1,800 (thus you are paying an average of \$700 per casket). Take this \$1,800 average profit margin per casket and multiply it over the 50 burials and you come up with a profit of \$90,000! In this example, a funeral home earns \$90,000 for simply picking up the phone, dialing the supplier and requesting that the casket be delivered. That's a ton of money! Want to know how many urns you have to sell to make \$90,000? No, you don't. Okay – well maybe you do – the answer is 1,028 urns (\$90,000 profit goal

/ \$87.50 average margin per urn)!!!!

Now take this information and twist it one more way. The industry guru's, the industry studies and the industry organizations all agree that when all expenses are accounted for, the average funeral produces a profit of roughly \$375. Now multiply this over our 100 calls per year and you get \$37,500. This is what is left over at the end of the year according to national averages per call x 100 calls in a year. What happens when we subtract the \$90,000 of profit that comes from caskets? Folks, we would be writing the bottom line of our yearly financial statement with a red pen. By how much you ask? It's simple, do the math: \$37,500 average profit for a funeral home minus \$90,000 profits produced by caskets and BOOM! you are at -\$52,500!!!

The comeback now becomes, "Well I have increased my service charge to account for my decline in burial calls and profits in burial caskets." Guess what? The average funeral home has not increased them enough to offset the loss in burial casket revenues and profits. A funeral home would need to be earning \$900 (\$90,000 casket profit / 100 calls) per call bottom line per call to be able to do this!

So what question am I going to ask next? No, I'm not going to ask it – I'm just going to answer it - the days of the casket are not dead!!! The profits that come from the sales of caskets are absolutely necessary to the bottom line of our business – without them, there would be no funeral home and thus no families to serve.

So enough is enough with the math lesson. Let's now move onto a geography lesson.

Most funeral homes 10, 15 or 20 years ago bought from one of the following: Batesville, Matthews, Aurora, (hopefully Thacker!), or any number of small

independent distributors or jobbers. Most the caskets were produced in the good 'ole US of A. Now, enter the year 2009 or so and the Chinese manufacturers start making a real splash into the U.S. market.

The Chinese manufacturers started with a black eye in that they had quality issues, distribution issues, and general “go-to-market” strategy issues – but they had great prices! Over time, the quality of the Chinese products got better and the challenge of distribution was overcome as many independent jobbers began carrying Chinese product which also solved some of their market strategy issues.

Meanwhile, funeral directors continued to become increasingly frustrated with the large corporate casket companies. Making a funeral home buy “x” of caskets before the fiscal year ends to get back their own money (ahem, rebates), shifting manufacturing to Mexico and large price increases (remember the 9 percent that one year?!?) all led funeral directors to dissension with the “Wall-Streets” of the casket industry.

Between their frustration with the corporate casket

companies and feeling the “profit pinch” funeral homes have been and are forced to look into alternative vendor solutions. At the end of the day, funeral homes realize the profits of caskets are absolutely necessary – but not at the expense of raising the overall cost of the funeral home. So what do they do?

Well, there aren't many options. A funeral director knows that he/she can go down the route of selling Chinese caskets, but it's not the most ideal path. The Chinese products are a quick way to get a round-end Primrose-like casket down in cost by about \$600-\$700 which even I will admit is a great savings! Chinese caskets were seemingly the Hail Mary solution to the profit predicament of funeral directors.

One problem, this all happened in 2009 right when the market crashed. Suddenly, families did not have the expendable income that they used to have. Families pinched their pennies in spending with funeral homes downgrading the service and merchandise options they selected.

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end caskets and moved towards high-eye appeal 20 gauge products they could get for a less retail point than the Chinese counterparts. As a result, the growth of Chinese manufactures didn't completely stall but did slow dramatically compared to expectations.

Here we are 10 years later, and Chinese manufacturers percentage of market share still only hovers around 5-6% of the overall casket market. Now take and compare this to any other industry. In what other industry have the Chinese manufacturers been involved for almost 20 total years and still only hold a less than 10% market share? "Not Many"- is the answer.

At the end of the day, why has the Chinese strategy not worked as well as originally expected? Because they aren't marketing towards a product segment that families are moving towards.

If a funeral director has two options: a) purchase a Chinese made product that wholesales for \$995 versus b) purchase an American made product that wholesales for roughly \$825. Why wouldn't that funeral director take the savings and either pass it along to the family or keep it to aid their own profit situation? Not to mention, they can now tout that they carry American made products.

So, what is being sacrificed for the \$170? Gauge and round ends – and most of the time that is it. Now as yourself a question, when was the last time a family came in and asked for an 18 gauge versus a 20 gauge? And when was the last time your family walked in asking you for a round-end, and not a square-end casket? Consumers today are keen and aware of the dollars they spend and they are not going to spend it on something that they do not see value in (ie. gauge and round ends).

It's time to seek out other alternative vendor solutions. It's time to seek out a solid supplier with a good reputation for competitive wholesale costs on caskets, but also bring you the merchandising knowledge and ideas that will bring on prosperity within your funeral home. Just as the casket is not dead, either is the merchandising of caskets. It is just that the merchandising is done in a totally and completely different way than it used to be. It used to be based upon gauges and round-ends, but today it is based upon the colors, themes and overall eye appeal of a

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CASKETS

casket balanced perfectly with the price point.

Let's now recap and review everything we talked about today and see how this all comes full circle: Everyone always talks cremation => I feel the pinch on my bottom line that cremation is creating => I look at my financial statements and realize I must be more profitable and cannot ignore dollars brought in by caskets => I seek out other non-Wall Street vendor casket providers => I hear about and try Chinese caskets => I'm still not profitable => I realize the products the Chinese vendors are strong in are not the ones I am selling regularly => Seek other vendor alternatives that provide both competitive pricing, and also merchandising help and solutions.

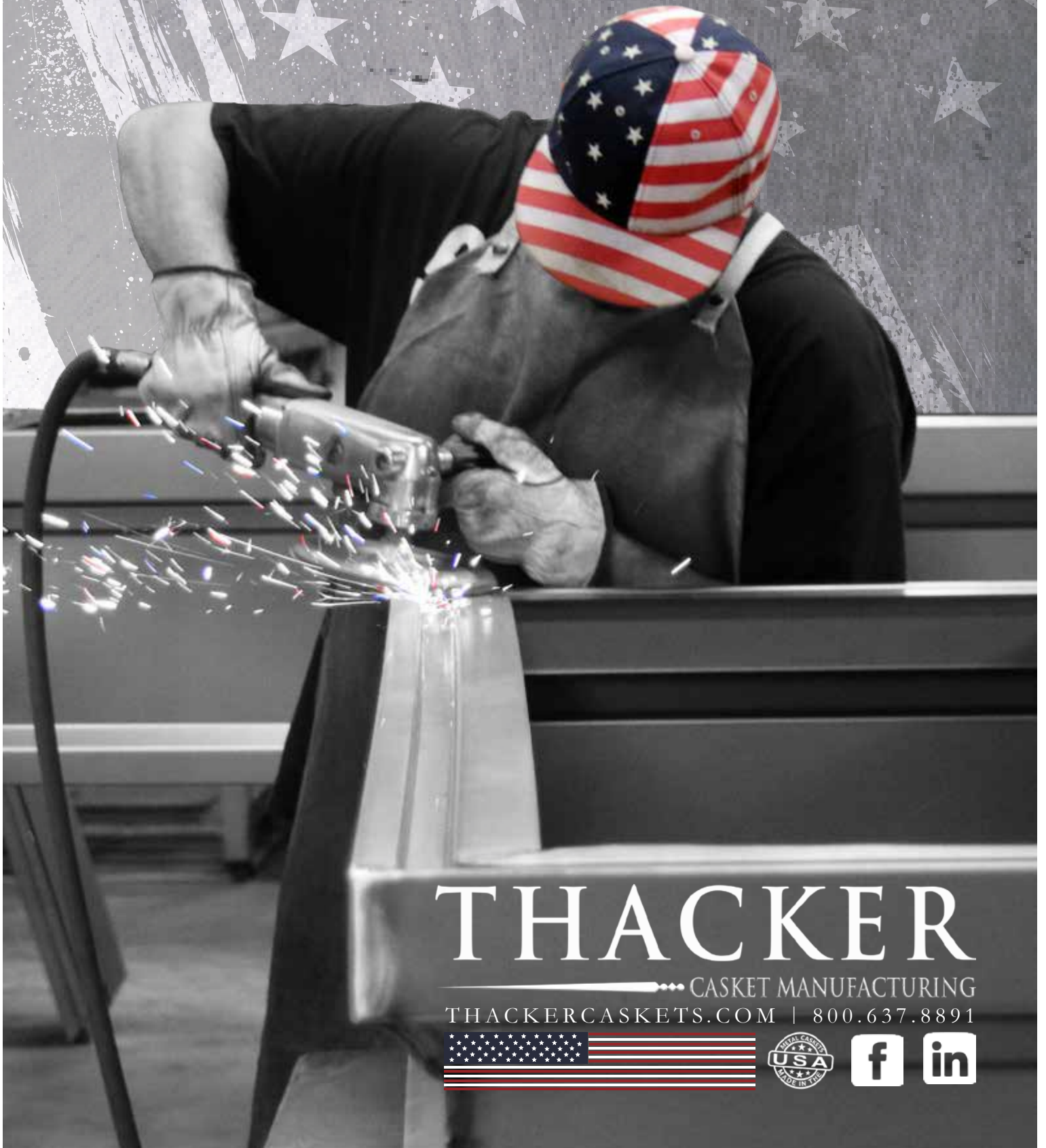
Most importantly, the average funeral director is tasked with running services, coordinating clergy, managing their finances, keeping on top of state and federal regulations, and a boat load more of other tasks. However, they cannot let the task of managing the selection room fall by the wayside for other daily duties – it is too important to their bottom line! Final sentence: get assistance in managing this task – get assistance from an industry consultant, get assistance from your sales representative, or even seek assistance from a peer funeral director who excels in this category. You can't afford to ignore it!

Danielle Thacker serves as VP of Sales & Marketing for Thacker Caskets. Danielle leads a team of 17 sales representatives throughout the East Coast and the Midwest. Visiting hundreds of funeral homes on an annual basis, Danielle enjoys learning the challenges that each individual firm faces and creating solutions that help them be the strongest small business they can be!



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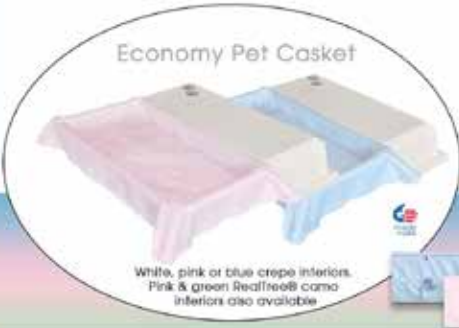
Paw Prints by Cherokee, introduced by Cherokee Specialty in 2019, offers a full line of pet caskets, urns, keepsakes and memorials. They have two styles of economical pet caskets that give dignified and respectable burial options. These specially designed units will meet the needs of pets of various sizes. Unique urns, keepsakes and memorial jewelry give a beautiful option for a loving pet parent to bid a last goodbye to their companion. Personalized pet monuments and markers can be used to remember a pet in a home garden or a pet cemetery.

Most individuals will lose three to five pets in their lifetime. This is another opportunity for your funeral home to reach a large portion of your community. Giving grieving pet owners a compassionate option for pet burial or cremation containers, Cherokee can help you exceed the expectation.




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Scott, Sr., conceived the company and its' name because "I wanted 'service' to be a big part of my business, so I decided to name it Service Casket Company." Today Service Casket provides and distributes a full line of top quality hardwoods, metal, cloth, youth and a large selection of oversized caskets, suits, dresses, embalming supplies, cremation caskets, shipping containers, urns, keepsakes and a wide variety of panels and embroidered panels. In addition, to adapt to the ever changing cremation trend in our profession, Service Casket in 1996, added a retort to their warehouse to help service

local funeral homes and some other funeral homes in the surrounding cities. At that point in time the Columbus funeral homes had to take their cremations to crematories outside of Columbus. Today they have two retorts for human cremation and a third retort for Pet Cremation Services. Scott Sr., and Scott Jr., continue to take an active role in their profession outside their business. Scott Sr., served on the CFSA Board of Directors from 2001-2004 and was President of CFSA in 2009. He has also been President of the Georgia Funeral Supply Sales Club (GFSSC). Scott Jr., is currently serving on the CFSA Board and holds the title of Secretary/Treasurer for GFSSC.

Service Casket Company also employs two full time representatives to cover Georgia, Florida and other nearby states in Johnny McClurd and Carlos Barrett. For more information contact Service Casket at (800) 226-1245 or visit the website at www.servicecasketcompany.com



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Starmark® Introduces Innovative Solid Wood Casket Line

New Product Line Offers New Caskets Suitable for Either Burial or Cremation

Richmond, IN July 9, 2019 - Starmark Cremation Products, a leading provider of innovative products, announced an expansion of its line of value-priced solid wood caskets. The expanded line features caskets that are suitable for either burial or cremation, with an adjustable wood bed that is cremation-friendly. These caskets address the needs of funeral homes and their families that seek value-priced wood caskets without sacrificing quality and eye appeal.

The line currently consists of nine caskets crafted from six designs:

- Cooper solid wood caskets available with a canyon brown, cherry mahogany or walnut stains
- Carson solid wood caskets available with cherry mahogany or walnut stains
- Legacy solid wood oak casket with classic oak stain
- Auburn solid wood oak casket with fawn brown stain
- Mission solid wood oak casket with classic oak stain
- Timber solid wood oak with walnut stain and a rustic finish

Already well-known as a leading cremation products

company, Starmark has set its sights on becoming the leading cost-effective solid wood casket supplier as well. Designed by the R&D team at the Starmark headquarters in Indiana, these solid wood caskets are priced right and benefit from the Starmark team's decades of experience in consumer market research and manufacturing know-how.

"Given the success of our solid wood burial caskets we debuted earlier this year, we are excited to introduce these new, low cost solid wood caskets that feature more traditional casket designs that both burial and cremation families will appreciate and funeral homes will value," said Gerald Davis, President of Starmark. "These new caskets reflect Starmark's mission to make products that families want to select and funeral directors want to offer."

"We've concentrated on cremation for so long, it's easy to miss opportunities that have presented themselves on the burial side of the market," commented Davis. "These caskets fill the void left by other casket companies – making low cost, solid wood caskets. And since they are appropriate for either burial or cremation, they can help reduce inventory carrying costs at the funeral home."

While many other casket companies have moved production out of the United States, Starmark remains committed to manufacturing in the United States. The new caskets are made from a combination of furniture grade plywood and locally-sourced poplar and oak hardwoods. Each casket features environmentally friendly water-based stains and tailored interiors.

"By combining solid hardwood and furniture-grade plywood components, we are able to offer customers low priced, high value caskets made in America," added Davis. "These innovative caskets provide the same beauty as solid hardwood, but are stronger and more tolerant to temperature change and humidity."





was founded in 2004 and manufactures in its more than 200,000 square feet of space in Richmond, IN with special distribution from its Lakeland, Florida warehouse. The company manufactures cremation products sold directly to funeral homes and crematories nationwide and through a growing network of distributors.



These units are available through distributors, One Source Prime and directly from Starmark. To learn more about Starmark and the new line of low cost caskets, visit www.starmarkcp.com or contact Starmark at 888-366-7335.

Starmark® Cremation Products began in 2004 designing and marketing a small line of engineered cremation solutions with mixed success. Today, Starmark shares a 130,000 sq. ft. manufacturing space at 1620 Rich Road, Richmond, Indiana and manufactures hundreds of alternative containers and rental inserts daily. www.starmarkcp.com

About Starmark Cremation Products: Starmark® Cremation Products, a division of Vantor Corporation,



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THE ARTISTRY COLLECTION™



Matthews Aurora™ Funeral Solutions introduces *The Artistry Collection*™, a line of premium hardwood and metal caskets. This extraordinary collection showcases some of the finest caskets available today, selected for their expert craftsmanship, hand-applied details and exceptional materials.

Our *Artistry Collection*™ hardwood caskets offer the natural warmth and beauty of superior hardwoods sourced from around the world, including majestic single-sourced mahogany from Africa, and black walnut, America's preeminent hardwood. Discerning families want to honor their loved one with a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, and Matthews Aurora's premium hardwoods offer families the outstanding quality and fine details they desire. Our hardwoods are carefully selected for their allure and durability. Each casket is hand polished for protection and appeal, and is individually grain-matched to ensure it is as singularly unique as the person being honored. Some of the hardwoods feature hand-carved details indicative of generations of handcraftsmanship. Such careful attention to detail makes Matthews Aurora's hardwood caskets stand out from other available choices.



The Artistry Collection™ also features premium metal caskets that convey an aura of elegance and nobility. Metals such as bronze and copper have been used for generations to craft our most magnificent monuments and artistic tributes. Much like these marvels, Matthews Aurora's premier metal caskets feature handcraftsmanship and artistry applied with great attention to every detail.

Each casket in *The Artistry Collection*™ portrays a distinct sophistication all its own. This special collection will appeal to families wanting only the best for their loved one's final resting place.

For more information about *The Artistry Collection*™ contact your
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Remembering the American Glass Casket Company



Patent Information on Casket Plate for DeCamp Consolidated Glass Casket Co., Factory



DeCamp trimming room, Cut No. 13 from Bib 52588 – DeCamp Consolidated Glass Casket Co., Muskogee, OK, USA.



Glass casket from Bib 45886 – DeCamp Consolidated Glass Casket Co., Muskogee, OK, USA.



DeCamp Glass Salesman Casket, photo provided by Jeff Arneson



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Is Traditional Media Dead?

Rumors of its death have been greatly exaggerated

by Joe Weigel

Rumors of its death have been greatly exaggerated. No matter where you turn, the Internet and social media are everywhere. From organizations blogging their latest news to consumers “liking” a local business to get special offers, the World Wide Web and social media have become the darlings of the marketing scene.

As the Internet continues to impact the commercial landscape, funeral home and cemetery owners no doubt have been asking themselves, “Surely our website and social media postings are all we need to promote our company. We can stop running those radio commercials and placing newspaper ads.” Well, I beg to differ.

Multiple Sources

It’s no secret that families are integrating the Internet and social media more and more into their lives. However, they haven’t abandoned traditional media sources and media habits. As recent news events have demonstrated, consumers get information from multiple sources, turning their attention to different media types at different times for different reasons. For example, earlier this year when the Twitter feeds announced that Robert Mueller had delivered his report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election, consumers turned to their television to substantiate the news. The next day, many grabbed copies of daily newspapers to get the expanded, in-depth story.

While I encourage my clients to include social media in their advertising and public relations efforts, I do not advise anyone to drop traditional media. It’s just too important.

It may seem like traditional media is losing its usefulness and its effectiveness. Some newspapers and magazines have folded. More and more people are turning to social networks to get their news. And popular bloggers are reaching an increasing number of people.

All this is true.

However, funeral homes and cemeteries still need traditional media for marketing to families. Here are five reasons why:

1) Traditional media outlets are instantly recognizable. Chances are families can recognize your town’s newspaper or radio station rather than the most popular blog in your community. Traditional media have been around longer than social media and many have built identifiable and credible brands.

2) Traditional media gives your firm instant prestige. Because traditional media are recognizable and often seen as credible, getting exposure on them give you and your firm instant status and credibility as well. On the other hand, being interviewed on a blog or web TV may not have the same effect on your families.

3) Traditional media still reaches large audiences. As long as a traditional media outlet is still publishing or airing, chances are it continues to reach a big enough audience to keep it viable. Research shows that families continue to spend more time with TV than any other media. This is why so many online stories take off only after TV and other traditional media have talked about them.

4) Social media feed on traditional media. Bloggers often write about what’s going on in traditional media, whether it’s a new TV commercial or a story that ran recently in the news. If you land an interview on your local radio station or a news story about your firm that runs in the local paper, you’re likely to catch the attention of social media as well. Further, appearing in traditional media gives you something to blog about on your website, post on Facebook page or tweet to your Twitter followers. It’s what I like to call the “media multiplicity” effect.

5) Traditional media have a huge social media presence. Traditional media outlets often have their own Internet presence, such as websites, blogs, and

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Admittedly, the stats are pretty impressive. No other insurance assignment company can boast the number of funeral homes served or the amount of money paid out yearly to make sure every funeral goes off without a hitch. But what's truly impressive is the way in which we work with our clients, as if each one is our only one. And serving them quickly and painlessly is our only job, which, in fact, is so. While bigger isn't always better, sometimes it is. As in the case of the company you want servicing your insurance assignments.

social networking profiles. Those media outlets usually get more traffic than even the most popular blogs.

So if you were ready to get rid of traditional media for social media – don't! Social media needs to be part of your marketing plan, but you still need traditional media to reach an audience and establish your credibility.

The most important thing is to target the media outlets that your families are embracing, whether it's a digital media or a traditional one. Chances are you'll do best to have a mix of both.

Joe Weigel is the owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing, a communications firm focused on the funeral profession that delivers expertise and results across three interrelated marketing disciplines: strategy, branding and communications. For more information, you can visit his website at weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com. He also can be reached at 317-608-8914 or joseph.weigel@gmail.com.

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Weigel Strategic Marketing is a marketing firm providing strategic communication assistance and branding expertise to a diverse portfolio of funeral service clients.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Ambulance and Coach Makes Delivery



Ambulance and Coach Sales, Nashville, TN, recently delivered a 2019 Cadillac S&S Coach to Stan Hatmaker, Hatmaker Funeral Home in Rocky Top, Tennessee





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Professional Vehicle Veteran Added to the American Coach Sales Team

Cleveland, Ohio – American Coach Sales announces the addition of Derek Henry to its sales team. Henry brings a wealth of knowledge to the team with his 35 years of experience in the Professional Vehicle Industry. “I am excited about joining American Coach Sales,” said Henry, “they are one of the most revered professional vehicle companies who have been serving customers for 50 years.” “They really take care of their customers”, Henry went on, “and that is why they are still going strong in a market where the customer has a high expectation of exceptional service.”

Robert Mazzearella, Sr., American Coach Sales Owner, says, “We are excited to bring Derek on board. In this highly competitive market, we need hard working sales individuals with the knowledge to back it up.” Mazzearella added “I have known Derek from the

manufacturing side of the business for over 25 years. He has the work ethic and product knowledge to be an asset to American Coach Sales right out of the gate”.

American Coach Sales is based out of Cleveland, Ohio with offices in Columbus, Ohio and Cincinnati, Ohio. They have been in the Professional Vehicle business since the late 1940s. Professional Vehicle products represented include Sayers and Scovill, Superior Coach Company, Armbruster-Stageway, Federal Coach, Eagle Coach Company, Platinum Coach, MK Coach, and K2 Products. For all your Professional Car needs call 888-321-6613 or online at www.americancoachsals.com

American Coach Sales – It is not just the *what*, it’s the *who*.....

Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions Launches Stationary Personalization and Other Solution Center Enhancements

Pittsburgh, PA – Matthews Aurora™ Funeral Solutions today announced the launch of a new stationery personalization feature and other enhancements to its online customer Solution Center, available exclusively to Matthews Aurora funeral home customers.

The new stationery personalization feature is compatible with all stationery templates available in Matthews Aurora’s Cherished Memories™ stationery catalog, including its exclusive, best-selling Honoring our Heroes line of memorial stationery crafted from authentic military uniform fabric, designed by Jonathan Field. The personalization feature is easy to use and requires only basic Adobe® Acrobat® and a standard printer. Service information is entered into the system once and then can be auto populated to print register book pages, service folders, bulletins, prayer cards and bookmarks. The system also includes a search feature, making finding the right stationery product quick and easy.

Matthews Aurora also recently announced enhancements to its Solution Center App, including

enhanced visual design, improved selection guides that help arrangers and families find the perfect casket, the ability to select and compare favorites, a new “Kiosk Mode,” and consumer information videos on “Selecting a Casket,” “I’ll Remember You® Cremation Choices,” and Personal Expressions™ 3D Printed Urns. The Solution Center App is now available for Android® and Apple® smartphones and tablets from the Google Play Store™ and the Apple App Store®.

The Solution Center also now includes electronic order forms for Personal Expressions™ 3D Printed Urns and 3D Crystal Tributes, and an urn engraving preview in the ordering cart.

Customers who are already Solution Center users may begin using the new stationery personalization feature and other enhancements immediately. Customers not yet registered for the Solution Center may contact their Matthews Aurora™ Funeral Service Consultant or Customer Service. Customer Service may be reached at 1-800-457-1111.

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The Davis Whitehall Co.® Publishes New Cremation Catalog

Updated catalog offers funeral homes a professional tool for presenting cremation

The Davis Whitehall Co., the premier provider of personalized and customized urns to funeral homes in North America, has announced the availability of an updated HeartFelt Tributes® by Davis Whitehall® Volume 3 catalog. Funeral professionals can use this new catalog to more thoroughly inform families about cremation products and how they can be personalized and customized to capture the memories and celebrate the life that was lived.

The new 76-page, four-color catalog features the latest urns from Davis Whitehall. Among the new products featured in the catalog:

- **The Amish Series** – A collection of eight urns handcrafted in the heart of Amish country by woodworkers using the knowledge passed down to create unique, one of kind memorials.
- **Ambrosia Maple** – A solid maple urn featuring a unique graining pattern and a contemporary design.
- **LoveUrns™** – A series of urns and keepsakes

in various colors, finishes, and themes, each handcrafted with love by LoveUrns™.

- **Clarkston and Renaissance** – Each individually handcrafted and detailed in solid wood, these two new models join the Photo Urn collection.
- **Eco Series Additions** – A new Bamboo scattering model has been added to this beautiful, eco-friendly collection.
- **The Majestic Series** – These cultured marble urns are hand-crafted in America and feature a 4-inch diameter opening for ease of filling.

In addition, the catalog presents Davis Whitehall's new metal engraving capabilities. The company now offers the ability to personalize these urns and keepsakes with the use of a custom-designed engraver providing precise engraving on metal urns and keepsakes. Up to now, this level of detail could not be achieved by typical rotary engravers. "The updated catalog has been a long time coming," commented Terry School, president of Davis Whitehall. "The entire team at Davis Whitehall has been gratified by the catalog's outstanding reception by customers and their families."

The catalog still features the innovative Heartfelt Keepsakes®, Davis Whitehall's distinctive memorialization product that provides families with a healing connection to their

The new 76-page, four-color HeartFelt Tributes® by Davis Whitehall® catalog features the latest urns from Davis Whitehall. Funeral professionals can use the catalog to more thoroughly inform families about cremation products and how they can be personalized and customized to capture the memories and celebrate the life that was lived.



loved one's memory. Exquisitely hand-crafted from select hardwoods, these keepsakes can be customized with photos, or personalization and offer a small canister in the bottom where a portion of their loved one or a locket of hair may be placed.

"The rising cremation rate continues to challenge many funeral home operators in serving their families," added School. "However, the word 'cremation' should be a launching point for a discussion on services, not a roadblock. Our catalog helps initiate a conversation on the many choices available, as well as presenting our urns."

As in the past, the catalog also showcases the various images and type fonts that can be engraved on the urns. The catalog also provides helpful hints on how to get the best results when customizing or personalizing a Davis Whitehall urn, especially when submitting a photo. The catalog can be viewed digitally at <https://tinyurl.com/Davis-Whitehall>. Printed copies of the catalog are available by contacting Davis Whitehall at 800-818-8414 or emailing deonne@davis-whitehall.com.

About Davis Whitehall®:

Headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, The Davis Whitehall Co. is a family-owned business with an unwavering dedication to quality and service. Founded in 1991, the company is recognized as one of the premier sources for handcrafted, laser-engraved hardwood cremation urns and cremation keepsakes. For more information, visit www.davis-whitehall.com.



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Working with the Media

Keys to Service = Encouragement

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

The American culture measures much of what we do in terms of time and we set a great deal of value on time as to whether we fail or succeed.

Our cultural slang, jargon is resplendent with old sayings concerning time. Have you ever heard this? “A stitch in time saves nine,” (whatever that means?) or “Time waits for no one,” or “Time is money.” Therefore, time, how it is used and or abused is an important factor in the funeral interview because time is important to people. These days “quick time” “fast time” are ingrained in the American psyche. If a fast meal at McDonald’s takes too long people get impatient, annoyed get angry and some people simply march out and go somewhere else.

Now I am not in the least suggesting that ordering a Number 3 at McDonald’s is on the same level as being involved with a death situation, but at the same time (pardon the pun) I am saying that people will care for their dead in a consistent manner with how they live their lives. If people expect fast food in fast time, and they have lived with this expectation for years, the probability is high that they will march right into the funeral/cemetery office with the same expectation.

The central subject of this article, in my series on the “Keys of Service” is time. So let us begin by asking important question concerning our professional work and our attitude towards time – and particularly our client’s time, not just ours.

When we schedule a funeral interview for ten in the morning, are we there and actually available in person to the client family at ten in the morning?

This may strike some as a strange place to begin, but I have seen some terribly disorganized funeral operations that even this minimal responsibility becomes the

impossible dream.

Promptness and organized schedules is more than merely a matter of courtesy. The longer bereaved clients (or any client’s for that matter) are kept waiting the more they can easily start to wonder (most times in silence) what else will be mishandled? They might silently be thinking whether they are of no importance to us? Or whether we are keeping them waiting intentionally for some dark ulterior purpose unknown to them (changing prices or something worse)? Or whether we are being or will even be fair with them since by our actions of not being ready to meet them and help has already set the stage for mistrust.

Every experienced funeral director or cemeterian knows full well that many times what the client family’s imaginations can whip up about us is amazingly unreal, but the important point to remember is that no matter how unfounded or exaggerated their thoughts are it is real to the person who imagined it!

You get the point. They might already be suspicious of us, so why add to this already risky situation by being late or tardy for the set appointment time?

What this means in terms of client trust and respect concerning us is obvious. Appointments should be kept on time or at the very least a very good and sufficient reason should be given for an honest explanation as to what happened, and we don’t need to include any “shop” talk in our explanation either. Here is an example of what not to do: “Oh, I am sorry I am running late, we just got back from a house call, and you know how slow the police are in situations like this.”

If your desired result is to unleash your client’s wild imagination on the loose just use this type of explanation

of why you are tardy, and you will succeed beyond your wildest hopes and dreams. Your explanations should be like the old woman's dance, short and sweet. Something possibly like this, "My apologies to you, I was unavoidably delayed, and I do hope you will forgive me."

I feel it wise to never use phony and feeble excuses like we have all experienced in places like the pharmacy, the auto mechanic, the dry cleaner and yes even in the hospital.

There are few if any experienced funeral directors who have not experienced the following. Someone had died at a hospital and mysteriously the head nurse or the security guard in truth just simply forgets to call the funeral home about the death. At 9:00 a.m. the next morning the bereaved family walks in and announces they are in our establishment to make arrangements for a decedent which we didn't know anything about.

After an internal investigation the error is finally uncovered, a phone call is made from the funeral home to the hospital and inevitably the nurse or the security guard once again offers the well-used, worn out, utterly predictable and terribly feeble excuse: "Well the shift was changing, that's what happened." I actually used to believe that excuse, until a veteran funeral professional set me straight.

Time can be abused in other ways. For instance we all have had this happen. Someone rushes into the funeral home/cemetery unannounced, without any prior appointment and insists on seeing you at once.

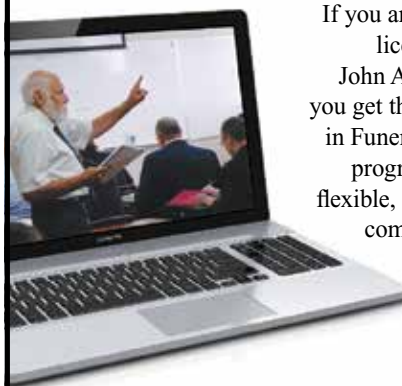
This can be a sticky wicket because many times there is no compelling reason to or sometimes even beyond our ability to drop everything and see them. I have concluded many years ago that the death of another human being can indeed create a crisis, but I have discovered that what is a crisis to a client should not toss the funeral home/cemetery into a crisis. I am not talking about a death emergency where it is a house call, a police/coroner call or the like. These instances require immediate attention, and certainly our traditional "walk-in" clients must be served, but they also must understand patience if their announced presence risks putting the schedule of the funeral home/cemetery in jeopardy.

I know this sounds harsh but I have seen many funeral operations thrown into absolute bedlam because some person "walked in" and demanded to see a funeral professional when none was available. The operative word here is DEMAND!

I believe we need to re-evaluate our historic stance that ALL death situations are in reality dramatic emergencies which compare to a building burning down with people still in the building. I believe this historic approach to death in a mortuary is overstated and overdone. To be sure it is understandable that most any person would be upset, nervous, grieved, and sad when they need our attention, but no funeral interview takes that long, OR SHOULD TAKE THAT LONG, that a "walk in" cannot be tended to in a reasonable time frame. What is not necessary is the ancient theatrical reaction that if someone does not get up on the floor "a.s.a.p." disaster is waiting for the funeral home around the corner.

Professional activities (even hospital emergency rooms and veterinarians) function on schedules and appointments. When no appointment was made, and if you are serving another client or on a service, or have an already scheduled appointment then you are

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legitimately occupied. If the client family must see you that day then they will have to wait until you are free or make an appointment so see someone else, or set up a scheduled appointment at a set hour and day to see you.

This is not a policy that is uncaring, for on the contrary were you to see this family when preoccupied with other client concerns, or the very worse try to see them both simultaneously (see CASE STUDY), you would be so distracted and tense to listen to either of them in the way you would like. There are always exceptions to this, but honesty has a way of smoothing out relationships. It is the honest helping procedure to do everything we can to set up appointments, and stick to them, and if we cannot see a walk-in or random appointment without taking away from other set appointments we need to be firm but gentle that a set appointment needs to be made.

CASE STUDY: It is a liberating feeling to admit to the reader that I have made every mistake in the funeral book. It is true, but through it all my love of our beloved profession has kept me going. It is love that makes all the difference in the world. Part of my love of funeral service is my memories of the extremely interesting funeral professionals who I worked with in the infancy of my career. I mentioned in the last paragraph the high risk activities of trying to serve two family clients simultaneously, you know the funeral director who want to do it all, even though help is available.

I bring this up because I actually saw one funeral director attempt this (serving two families at once). I believe to this day that he thought it would work, but in the end it was a colossal flop.

Oh, here is a footnote. This funeral professional was the poster boy for the self-obsessed egotist. He was a modern day “Narcissus.” Because of his addiction to his own self-absorption he actually thought that he could say whatever he wanted to anybody (except of course the boss). He also thought that any death call required a response time which would compare with our ambulance calls complete with high speed, siren and lights.

For instance the coroner’s office would call and give us a first call on the death of a homeless unknown person who had been in the morgue for a month and this chap

would fly into overdrive action. I was young, but even back then I thought he was a “nut.”

One day a scheduled family arrived, and in they went with this particular funeral director to make their arrangements. About ten minutes later a second family just walked in coming directly from the hospital where their father had died. As I was explaining to the second family that the funeral professional was engaged (which they totally understood) my agitated egoist associate came flying out of the office, he saw the second family, froze in his tracks, and then plunged and bungled into our conversation and told them that he would wait on them immediately. He took them into a second office, and then the funeral arrangement acrobatics began. In fact the funeral home staff just stood in the foyer of the mortuary watching him run from office to office like a lunatic. One staff member actually had a stop watch on his wrist watch and kept time. This odd and strange scrambling funeral director got through it, but the truth is both families felt rushed, and one even complained. I thought both could have complained.

Even when confronted with the client complaint this funeral director refused to admit that he had done a foolish and reckless thing by trying to show off in front of the people he worked with by being totally insensitive and totally disorganized about his own use of his professional time. Our awareness, our respect, and our sensitivities to time is very important, and in our fast paced life, which seems to laugh at time sensitivities I would humbly suggest that this issue is today all the more magnified in a profession such as funeral and cemetery service.


Setting interview times, and moving the funeral interview on with gentle persistence has wisdom and will help solve a myriad of potential difficulties. Sometimes boundaries must be clearly drawn, because some people go on talking without realizing they are repeating themselves. Some clients honestly may not know how to end the interview, and then get up, and leave. Being products of our society, they may feel that the polite thing to do is to sit and await a signal from the funeral professional that the funeral interview is actually over. I do not mean that we should ever rush the client family, but I do mean that we should make clear to them the time available so that they can orient themselves within it. I have no precise answer as to how long an interview should be but as one

veteran funeral director said to me many years ago two considerations concerning interviewing time need to be at least considered 1) we are not wasting the family client's time, and 2) the funeral interview has to come to an end sometime.

One final practical point: If you must and are compelled to interview several client families in one day, always allow a few minutes between funeral interviews to write or fill in your notes, to think over what has just gone on, or just to relax and get ready for the next family. Otherwise you may like I have done many times, in your mind, keep on talking to family "A" while family "B" is sitting there. Family "B" is entitled to your full attention.


Get family "A" off your mind before seeing family "B". To do this you may well need a few minutes to mull things over, note on your work sheet what you promised family "A" you would look into, or just sit back or walk around the funeral home once to get ready for family "B".

Try it. It works.



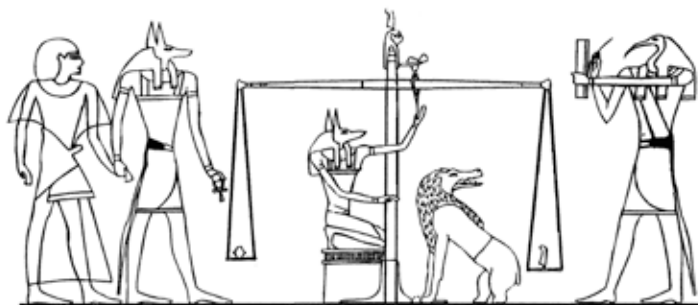
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Funeral Service Foundation Welcomes New Executive Director

Brookfield, Wis. - Funeral Service Foundation Board of Trustees is pleased to announce the appointment of Lee Wiensch, CFRE, as the Foundation's executive director. A proven non-profit leader, effective communicator and principled fundraiser, Wiensch's robust experience, infectious energy and creative innovation will help carry forward the Foundation's mission to support funeral service in building meaningful relationships with the families and the communities it serves.

The Foundation's board, together with the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), conducted a national search to seek out the ideal candidate to head the association's charitable arm. "Lee's background in foundation and association management uniquely positions her for this very important leadership role," said NFDA CEO Christine Pepper. "Her insight, passion and values-centered leadership style will strengthen both organizations as we work together to enrich the funeral profession and build upon the incredible strides the Foundation has made in recent years."

For nearly 30 years, Wiensch has served as a non-profit and community leader, serving in a variety of roles at the fundraising, program, executive and leadership levels. Foundation Chair Bob Arrington described Wiensch as a "mission-driven, effective and inspirational leader."

"Lee's character, integrity and inherent understanding of our profession make her a perfect fit," said Arrington. "The Board and I are very pleased to have her join the dedicated Foundation staff and carry forward the Foundation's good work in our profession and beyond."

Wiensch joins the Foundation team from Executive Director, Inc. (EDI), an association management company in Milwaukee, where she has served as the executive director for the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) Foundation since 2015. At the helm of the AAAAI Foundation, Wiensch led strategic planning and rebranding efforts, oversaw the growth of the endowment to \$15M and implemented initiatives that increased major giving and sponsorships by 400% and 800%, respectively. She also oversaw the organization's grantmaking procedures, and budget and program development. At EDI,

Wiensch also served as a fundraising consultant for the American College of Mohs Surgery Foundation.

"The Foundation's mission strongly resonates with me and drew me to the role," said Wiensch. "I look forward to working with Foundation and NFDA leadership and staff to further enrich relationships within the profession, and cultivate the Foundation's scope and significance within the funeral service community."

Raised in New England, Wiensch holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Government from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. In 2018, she earned her Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) credential, which certifies knowledge of fundraising best practices, accountability, the highest standards of ethical conduct and service to the philanthropic sector. Lee and her husband, Adam, have been married for 30 years and are the parents of a college-aged son and daughter. They enjoy hiking, travel, spirited discussions about grammar and Milwaukee's vibrant performing arts scene.



About the Funeral Service Foundation

Since 1945, the Funeral Service Foundation has served as the profession's philanthropic voice. As the charitable arm of the National Funeral Directors Association since 1997, the Foundation receives operational support from NFDA and donors across the profession to help advance its mission to support funeral service in building meaningful relationships with the families and the communities it serves.



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"Planning a funeral is one of the most sensitive, emotional times in a person's life, and Funeralocity.com is a tool that makes the experience less painful," says Ed Michael Reggie, the site's founder. "We offer the largest and most up-to-date set of prices for funeral homes and crematories that users can search in the privacy of their homes. Often, people planning services are not in the location of their loved one, so finding a funeral home from afar can be a daunting process. Funeralocity.com makes it easier."

"We are bringing transparency to the funeral business," Reggie continues. "People planning services are often doing it for the first time and don't know where to begin. Funeralocity.com is the place to compare all options in one place." Additionally, the site includes a special designation of "Excellence Provider" that indicates a fully-vetted funeral home that meets the site's exacting standards. The criteria for accepting a funeral provider that applies for this designation include confirming licenses, and government standards compliance and requiring adherence to Funeralocity.com's Excellence pledge.

"Distinguishing the most qualified funeral homes is key to the mission of Funeralocity.com," Reggie noted. "We already furnish the most up-to-date pricing and information, but pointing consumers to the very best providers is a core objective of our business. Our

'Excellence Providers' are funeral homes and crematories that meet our very strict criteria and pledge to continue to offer those services that have made them the most reputable in their communities."

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- Charge families based upon its General Price List posted on Funeralocity.com;
- List the name of the Funeral Director in Full and Continuous Charge ("FDFCC") on the funeral home's profile on Funeralocity.com
- Provide to Funeralocity.com families a complete and clear itemized list of charges for services, facilities, equipment, merchandise⁶⁰⁷ and cash advanced items, and agree not to make any additional charges without their approval
- Inform Funeralocity.com within thirty (30) days of any action taken against the funeral home(s) or funeral home director(s) by any governmental or regulatory agencies
- Report any changes in license status to Funeralocity.com at funeralhomes@Funeralocity.com within ten (10) days of said change

Funeral homes and cremation providers that meet the site's criteria and take the pledge are able to feature more detailed service information as well as reviews, photos, videos and testimonials on Funeralocity.com.



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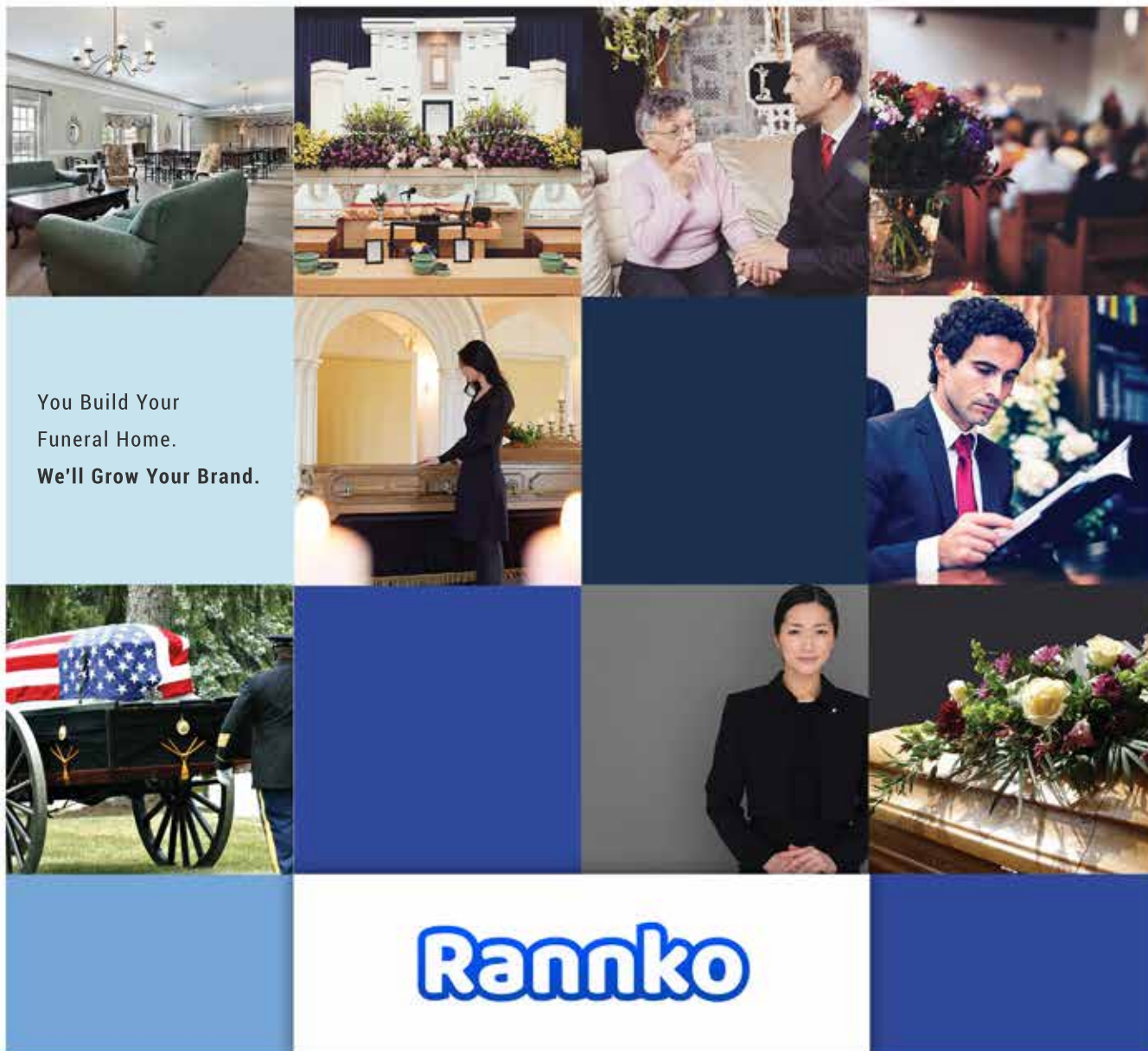


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