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MAGAZINE

June 2020

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CANA Expo Goes Virtual Dealing With Cremation During a Pandemic

CANA "Virtual" Expo Agenda & Presenters
CANA Cremation Statistic Report
The Day the World Titled by Glenda Stansbury
Please..... Don't JUST Cremate Me! By Larry Stuart
Is a Pet Value Offering Right for You by Coleen Ellis
Providing Value & Connection in Digital Arrangement
Conferences by Nikki Nordeen
Digital Marketing for Funeral Homes in 2020
by Welton Hong
Keys to Service = Authority by Todd Van Beck
In Memorium Dave Beck
In Memorium Mike Stephens
NFDA Elects 2020-2021 Officers/Directors
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“The Pessimist Sees Difficulty In Every Opportunity. The Optimist Sees Opportunity In Every Difficulty.” – Winston Churchill



June 2020

Southern Funeral Director Magazine®
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with a Southern Accent Since 1919

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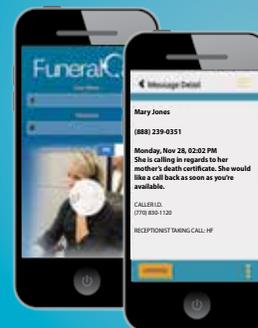


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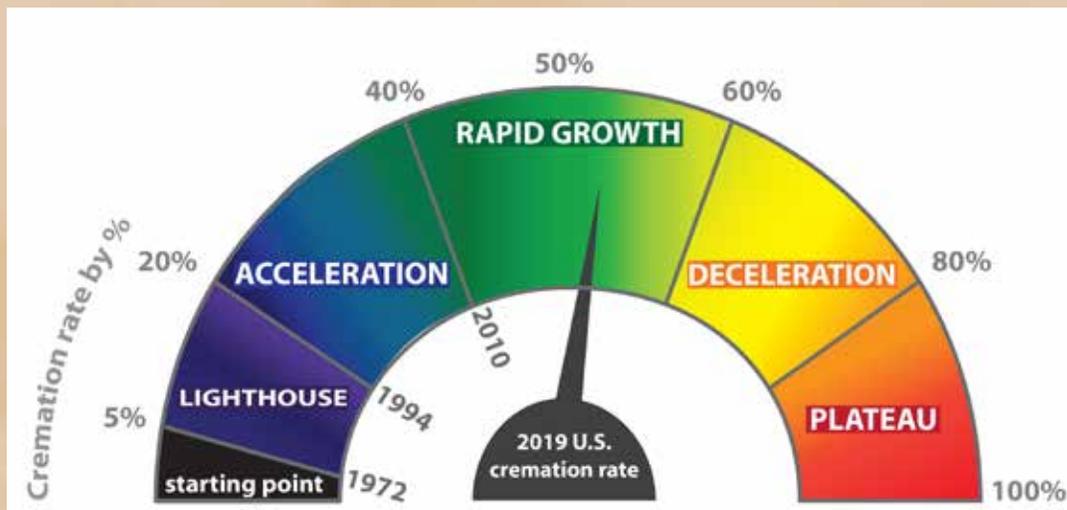


notes from the editor

by John Yopp

CREMATION GROWTH TRENDS: SPEED AND VELOCITY

In order to better understand what factors affect the disparate growth rate of cremation in North America, CANA did some in-depth geographic and demographic research. Our projections show that the national cremation growth rate is reaching its peak velocity and will begin to slow, but cremation rates will continue to grow across most of the country.

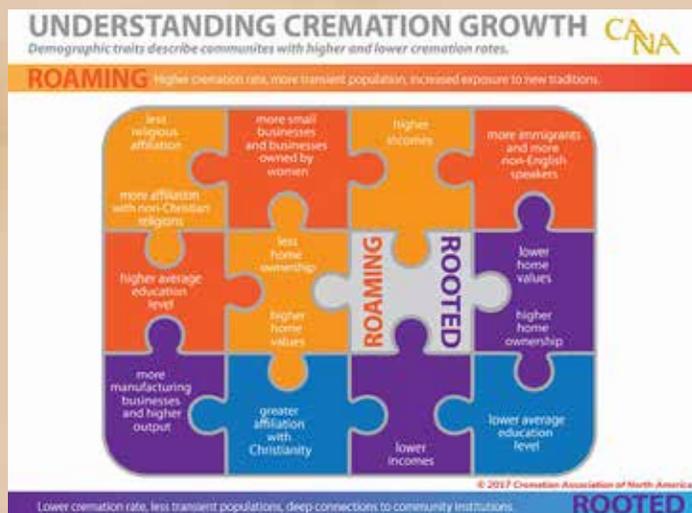


Some regions are just now entering a period of rapid growth, while others may have already reached saturation. We've found that states generally demonstrate a geographic clustering effect, suggesting that what started as individual preference became the norm in the community and heralded a cultural shift to a new tradition: cremation. Cremation will continue to be popular because it is "what we do now."

CANA's second step was to look at the speed at which cremation rates grow. While it can take decades for the cremation rate to hit 5%—in the U.S. it took nearly 100 years—when it reaches 5%, the growth rate is more predictable and steady. There is no evidence that this trend will change or reverse, barring the introduction of a new form of disposition. We are currently in a period of rapid growth that will peak around 60% and then begin to slow until it reaches an eventual plateau.

The graphic below tells an interesting story of demographic factors indicating a break from tradition in opposition to a more rooted environment, each piece just one part of the demographics correlating with higher or lower cremation rates.

AS OF THE DATE OF PUBLICATION, COVID-19 DEATHS CONTINUE TO INCREASE ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA. THERE ARE ANECDOTAL INDICATIONS THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF RATE OF CREMATIONS WILL INCREASE BEYOND CANA PROJECTIONS IN THE YEAR OF 2020 AND BEYOND. THE PROJECTIONS FOR 2024 IN THIS REPORT DO NOT ACCOUNT FOR COVID-19 DEATHS.



Registration Now Open!

CANA's 102nd Annual Convention & Tradeshow Goes Virtual

WHEELING, IL— The Cremation Association of North America (CANA) is responding to social distancing restrictions by reimagining the Annual Cremation Innovation Convention and Tradeshow for an online platform. With this virtual event, CANA is meeting cremation, cemetery, and funeral professionals where they are – serving their communities safely through online platforms. Exhibits, networking, education, and fun packed into two days – August 5-6, 2020.

Unlike every previous location-specific CANA convention, the 102nd annual event will be a Virtual CANA, untethered to a specific hotel or city. While this is a challenge, it also provides enormous opportunities for professionals across the world to connect in new ways. “We’ve talked about a virtual event, and in this case necessity is truly the mother of invention. We’re working hard to translate all of the fun and interaction of a CANA Convention and Tradeshow to a digital platform. CANA never shies away from the challenges of innovation, and our virtual event will be the same,” said Elisa Krcilek, CANA Board President.

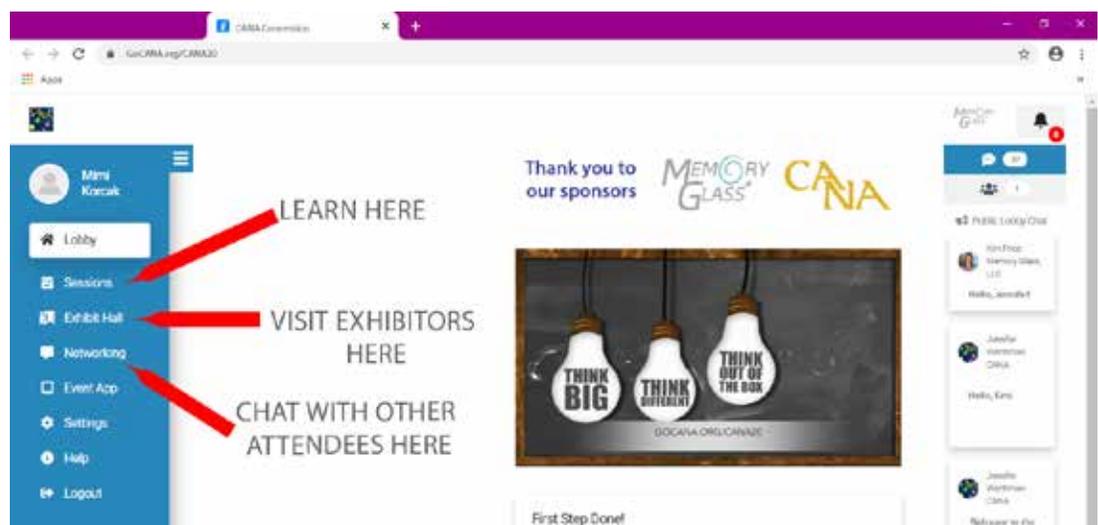
CANA isn’t sacrificing any of the experience you love about an in-person event. Connection is one of the most essential tools for people who work in death care. With Pheedloop, the all-in-one event management software, you have the keys to CANA’s Virtual Convention on any device. Connecting with fellow attendees, presenters, and exhibitors through text chat—and even video—is built right in. This means you get the quality education and networking you expect from CANA, plus tradeshow solutions and specials, without having to travel.

More than your average online webinar, CANA’s Virtual Convention will engage death care professionals with quality content, games and prizes, and networking events. Codi Shewan, former funeral professional, returns to the CANA stage as Keynote and MC for a dynamic, engaging and thought-provoking presentation about how your business can meet the challenges to come. “We are finding speakers and presenters who are excited by the opportunities a virtual platform can provide. We look forward to relevant topics with engaging presentations and discussion,” said Barbara Kemmis, CANA Executive Director. Get the latest on the schedule, plus exhibitor information and more on the event website.

Plus, the event will still provide continuing education credits where accepted. Now that social distancing guidelines have limited travel, quality CE online is more important than ever before. With the greatly reduced registration fee (on sale for non-members at \$75, discounted to \$50 for CANA members) you can earn CE while connecting with your colleagues.

We hope you’ll join us for this exciting and novel event this August 5-6!

Learn more and register:
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CANA

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Innovation Convention
& Trade Show

AUGUST 5-6, 2020

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CANA'S 102ND ANNUAL CONVENTION AND TRADE SHOW GOES VIRTUAL

CANA is responding to social distancing restrictions by reimagining the Annual Cremation Innovation Convention and Tradeshow for an online platform! With this virtual event, CANA is meeting cremation, cemetery, and funeral professionals where they are—serving their communities safely through online platforms. Exhibits, networking, education, and fun packed into two days!

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With the greatly reduced registration fee (discounted price of \$50 for members until July 5, 2020), you can earn CE while connecting with your colleagues. We hope you'll join us for this exciting and novel event this August 5-6!

Learn more and register: goCANA.org/CANA20

OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER



CODI SHEWAN, CFSP, CCP
SPEAKER - AUTHOR - CONSULTANT

A practiced hand at hosting meetings—virtual and otherwise—Codi is the President & Founder of EverLearn Associates, a full service, comprehensive management consulting firm, for the funeral and cemetery profession – aimed at engaging and building dynamic teams and successful businesses. Operating across North America, EverLearn Associates is known for aligning closely with clients to provide tailored solutions, which overcome their operational challenges and align their business goals with success. Working with some of the professions finest operators, EverLearn Associates focuses on the tenet of ‘People first; always.’ and has enveloped that philosophy in all of our consulting lines of business; HR, marketing, business strategy, and digital solutions.

SCHEDULE

all times in Central zone (CT)

DAY ONE | Wednesday August 5

Welcome | Announcements | 1:30-2:00pm

Keynote Address | 2-3:00pm

Education Session 1 | 3-4:00

Trade Show, Networking 1 | 4-6:00pm

DAY TWO | Thursday August 6

Trade Show and Networking 2 | 12-2:00pm

Education Session 2 | 2-3:00pm

Education Session 3 | 3-4:00pm

Closing Remarks and Toast | 3:30-5:30pm

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The Day the World Tilted

By Glenda Stansbury

Throughout history, society has marked moments in time when life changed suddenly and completely. Those dates are seared into our memories and we look back to “before” and “after”, what we lost and, perhaps, what we gained.

December 7, 1941 when the fire and terror of war rained down upon our country and America once again found itself fighting a war on foreign soil. For people of a certain age, that day lived on in infamy as the President proclaimed at the time.

April 19, 1995. For my city and state, this is the day that the Alfred P Murrah Federal building came down and we stood in horror as we understood that homegrown hatred can be deadly. The country came to our side as we searched for ways to navigate the loss of our citizens and the loss of safety. This year was to be the 25th Anniversary commemoration with special events and remembrances planned for 168 days to honor the 168 lives lost. While we still stopped and remembered on that day, the gatherings and elaborate ceremonies will have to wait.

September 11, 2001. The next day that lives on in infamy as the entire country was rocked by the sheer overwhelming news that our planes had become weaponized and almost 3000 people were killed in the name of religious and political crusades. Our lives have been significantly changed to this day—how we travel, how we view others, how we think about our relationship to the rest of the world.

March 11th, 2020. Now this date may not mean much to you. But, in my mind, this was the day the world tilted. We had watched the growing concern of this novel coronavirus as it swept through China, then Italy and Spain. We heard rumors of it showing up in Seattle. But we still thought that it was isolated and manageable. Swine Flu, Bird Flu, H1N1, Ebola—all of those dangerous viruses had come and gone and had not impacted our daily lives. What’s to worry about?

Monday, March 9th, I conducted a funeral service for a young woman who had died of suicide. The

church was packed with 400 people. There were hand sanitizer stands stationed around the foyer and we were encouraging people to be careful. But, of course, after the service, the family stood in a receiving line as their friends and family filed by, hugging, kissing, crying, expressing their grief and support.

Tuesday March 10th, I got on a plane to travel to Columbus Ohio to hold a Celebrant Training. My husband begged me to cancel. Don’t be silly, I told him. It’s all fine and I have 20 people who have paid for this training and I’m going to go. I dutifully took my hand sanitizer and wipes (I could still find some then) and flew into the clouds. It’s all fine, right?

The hotel where we stay is across the street from Ohio State University, so a bulk of their business is dependent upon groups who are involved in activities at the university. When I checked in, the hotel clerk told me that a national gymnastics competition scheduled for the next day had just been cancelled, and everyone was heading home. It’s all fine, right??

Wednesday, March 11th, our first day of training. We were more aware of taking precautions. The tables were wiped down, we set the chairs a little further apart, we had hand sanitizer available as they walked in the room. But we weren’t concerned. It’s just 20 people in a room for three days. It’s all fine, right???

Our first day of training finished at 9:00 p.m. When I arrived back at the hotel, my husband blew up my phone. Of course, I hadn’t been watching the news—I was training. “Have you heard?” “Heard what?” And he filled me in on the events of that fateful day. An NBA player had been diagnosed as positive, IN MY CITY, and within an hour, that game and all NBA games had been cancelled indefinitely. NCAA began with the first step of planning the March Madness tournament with empty arenas and then decided that that wasn’t safe. Flights were being cancelled. People were realizing that this was not an Asia or European problem, that it was here, it was everywhere. And then, the final blow of the evening, Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson tested positive. Not Tom Hanks! What’s happening? Is it all



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fine?? For me, that was the day the world tilted.

We asked our participants if they wanted to postpone the training the next day. They wanted to stay and finish, so Thursday and Friday were spent with these lovely 20 people as they learned how to be Funeral Celebrants. I went to the airport that Friday afternoon a little more cautious, a little less cavalier. What is this thing?

March 18th, I conducted a service. The gathering was limited to 50—that was the guidance at the time. The chairs were set a little further apart. The funeral attendants handed a new pen to each person as they came to sign the book. The director recorded the service. He said, “This is probably the last chapel service we will have. The new limitations of 10 people goes into effect tomorrow. I don’t know what this is going to look like”.

No one knew what this was going to look like.

We began the shrinking of our experience. First it was 50 or less. Soon it was 10 or less. Six feet apart. The hysteria of toilet paper and cleaning products. Lessons on hand washing. People talking about N95 masks when a week before they had no idea that such a thing existed. The rolling date of when it would be over. Two weeks. End of March. Easter. End of April. End of May? Oh please, let it be over by June!!

When I look back at the past 75 days, I always think of it beginning on that Wednesday, the day the world tilted, and our lives have completely and overwhelmingly changed. We even quit asking the question if it was going to be fine, right? Because no one had the answer. Those of us in funeral service who make our living speaking and training, presenting vision, ideas, options for changing our practices, for leaning into the realities of new expectations from our families, often use the well-worn cliché of “thinking outside of the box”.

Well, suddenly, the box was destroyed. Gone. There was no safe place to hide behind doing what we’ve always done.

As the public retreated to their homes, to find out what stay at home, shelter in place truly meant, funeral professionals got up and went to work. But work had changed overnight, and we had to figure out what that

meant. And how to adapt to a moving target. Just as we thought we had some answers, the situation and restrictions evolved yet again. I often say in jest that change in funeral service is something like turning the Titanic and rearranging the deck chairs. Now we found ourselves on a jet powered hydroplane boat with little time to think, react, or even know where we were going.

For those professionals in the eye of the storm, where the deaths escalated exponentially each day, just the basic task of dealing with the deceased, of caring for the dead with dignity and respect, of stretching facilities and staff and equipment that were overwhelmed and unprepared was a daily nightmare of logistics. They have been in the trenches of warfare with this invisible enemy and have called upon every inch of skill, planning, stamina, ingenuity, and determination that was possible.

To complicate the horrors, the concern for safety of their own staff, the unbelievable lack of PPE and protection, entering the unknown each day when answers were not forthcoming from the medical professionals, felt like piling on. While we could tell ourselves each day, we were trained for this, truly we were not. No mortuary program, no crematory operator training, no technical seminar could possibly capture on a power point slide how to deal with all of our boxes being destroyed overnight.

In those areas where the system was not overwhelmed with mind-numbing numbers of Covid-19 deaths, life and death was still a process of thinking differently about service each day. How do we conduct virtual arrangements? How do we gently tell the families that they cannot have a gathering of family and friends to tell their loved one goodbye? Do we just tell people to wait until? Until when? And would they come back?

Do we figure out how to have funerals now and what does that look like?

And then there were the families. Those who lost family members to the virus, isolated and alone in a hospital room with medical personnel the only attendants to their final moments. Those who could not go to the care facility to hold the hand of their elderly parent. Those who lost babies, loved ones to suicide, car wrecks or cancer and were faced with the heartbreaking task

of deciding which ten people could attend the final farewell. Or being told that no gathering at all was possible. The grief of loss compounded by the grief of separation. The long-term effects of grieving in the time of pandemic. How do we meet their needs and provide a healthy first step on their journey?

After the first few days of shock and disbelief, the vast majority of funeral professionals jumped on to that speed boat and figured it out. This tradition-bound profession that has not been known for creative innovation or nimble choices, stepped around the box that lay destroyed on the floor and stepped up to the challenges.

The national associations immediately sprang into action. Within days each organization had an entire section of their website dedicated to guidance, suggestions, assistance and regulations surrounding dealing with Covid 19. Webinars abounded with professionals giving of their time and expertise on a wide variety of subjects. The generosity and willingness of funeral professionals to share ideas and best practices in a time when we were redefining “best”

and “practice” was heartwarming. CANA has done an amazing job of keeping the information pipeline open, up-to-date and useful. We all understand that we are in this together and no one has all the answers.

Celebrants have embraced the opportunity with skill and confidence. We understand dealing with unique and challenging funeral scenarios, we do it all the time. Within three days after the world tilted, we had put together a resource book that provided ceremonies and words that spoke to the time while acknowledging the need to be together from afar. We shared it with Celebrants, with state and national associations, with chaplains, with funeral directors all over the world. The response has been rewarding and humbling as funeral professionals and officiants expressed appreciation for a simple booklet that promises that ceremonies and services are possible. We all understand that we are in this together and we have tried to provide some of the answers.

A new sense of support and collaboration has blossomed in the midst of this crisis. The stories have been touching and powerful as we heard about funeral

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directors who left their homes and showed up at those firms who needed extra hands. Funeral professionals who traveled two hours each way to bring a loved one into their care because the funeral homes were overwhelmed where the death occurred. Crematory operators who are working around the clock just trying to keep up. Daily messages on Facebook or study group email threads, encouraging each other and reminding their colleagues that they are not alone. We all understand that we are in this together and we are trying to give physical, emotional, and spiritual blessings to our fellow practitioners.

The amazing strength of the individual funeral professionals who have determined each day to meet the needs of families and acquiring new skills in the blink of an eye.

How to connect with families over Facetime or conference calls. How to discover their inner computer nerd as they conquer Zoom or Facebook Live.

How to navigate virtual viewings. How to open their minds to those companies who have offered online arrangement platforms or funeral webcasting. Those firms who have said “we will never. . .” find themselves on Amazon purchasing a tripod and a speaker system.

As Celebrants, the opportunities have been challenging and, sometimes, heartbreaking. Zoom funerals with family members scattered all over the country. We lit candles and shared flower arrangements on the screen to create a sense of intimacy.

Facebook Live services at graveside or in a chapel with the limited immediate family and the rest of the family and friends sitting in the parking lot tuned into an FM receiver. A final drive-by with family and friends standing on the street waving and sending virtual hugs. Funerals in drive in theaters. Services written to be posted on the funeral home obituary page for everyone to read.

In many areas, the collaboration between Celebrants and funeral directors, managers and owners has created a connection of partnership as we seek each day to provide meaningful and healing services at the most important moment—now. To encourage our families to understand how powerful ceremonial words of goodbye can be, especially for our cremation families

who might choose to wait, trying to put their grief on hold. Of course, behind all of this adaptation and adjustment, the thought hovers around the back of our minds—when will we get back to normal? And what will normal look like? The box is gone. Now what?

The challenges of the upcoming days will be apparent as people begin to emerge into the world again, as we brace to see what the health implications might be for gatherings, as we continue to practice vigilance and safety measures. What does it mean for funeral service?

Do we escape back into the traditions that were comfortable and predictable?

Do we embrace the lessons learned from having to think differently about what a service looks like?

Do we stretch those new muscles of flexibility and responsiveness in order to offer creative and engaging approaches to honoring, remembering and commemorating?

Do we finally consider the possibility that having a Celebrant available as an officiant makes a lot of sense for the families and for the firm? Do we understand the importance of on-going training and engagement for all staff members?

Do we learn lessons in preparedness and never take our facilities and supplies for granted?

Do we consider how to change the design of our buildings to better serve a diverse community with expanded expectations? Do we upgrade our computer and cyber abilities? Do we truly consider what arrangements online and posting of prices will feel like?

Do we rebuild the box or discover that our business practices and our ability to serve has been set free?

Time will tell. For many of us, this will be the moment in time, when the world tilted, that we will look back and understand that funeral service changed in innumerable ways, big and small. It will be scary. It will be exhilarating. It will be an opportunity. It will be uncomfortable. It will be amazing. It will be fine, right? Right.

A message from InSight Books

The singular need of the human race is to gather. During this unique and unsettled time in the history of the world, we are prevented from following our natural instincts. How can we honor a life and mourn a death or support those who are ill without gathering?

Instead we are called upon to be together from afar. To trust the power and mystery of spirit that will join our hearts and minds together. Because we can create community even when we are isolated.

The InSight Books family recognizes that these days are difficult, and we stand with you to provide resources that may help. To protect our staff, we are working from home for the most part. Orders will be filled but it may take a day or two extra from our normal turn-around time. If you call the office, please leave a message and we will respond.

There is something special about receiving a card. Please go to our Card section of the catalog to find ones that speak to you. We're all in this together. Be safe, be well and be assured that our family is thinking of your family.

Before joining In-Sight Books, Glenda worked for 12 years for the Oklahoma Education Association as a trainer/facilitator. She was responsible for developing and delivering teacher training all over the state of Oklahoma and was cited by the National Education Association as one of the top trainers in her field.



Prior to that, she was a Special Education teacher in the field of emotional disturbance and also has taught prepared childbirth, sign language for the deaf and music.

She has worked as Marketing and Development Director for In-Sight Books for 15 years and has been Dean of the In-Sight Institute for 14 years, co-training over 2500 Funeral Celebrants across North America with Doug Manning.

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CANA Annual Statistics Report

Featuring final 2018 data, newly released 2019 data, and projections to 2024

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Introduction

Over the past three years, CANA has reported the different phases of cremation rate growth. The United States is squarely in the Rapid Growth stage and the cremation rate continued to rise steadily and predictably through 2019. There are two trends worth noting which may impact this model:

• New forms of disposition

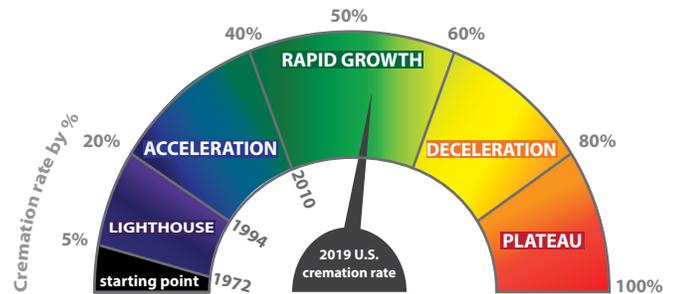
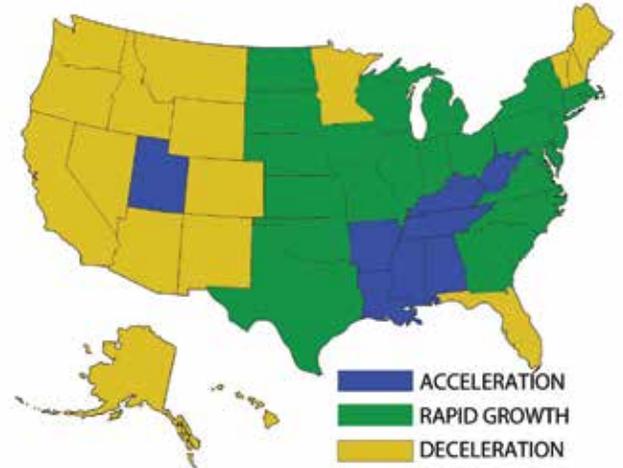
Twenty-one states report Donation or Medical Research as a distinct form of disposition separate from Cremation and other forms of disposition on the death certificate. While the majority of body donations are ultimately cremated, those numbers have not been included in CANA research as the source of that data is derived from death certificates. The national rate of medical donation is estimated to be 1%. Two states, Arizona and Colorado, appear to exhibit plateauing cremation rates earlier than expected due to higher than national rates of body donation.

In some states, Alkaline Hydrolysis (AH) is counted in cremation figures, in others it is separate. In CANA's Annual Statistics Report, AH is always included with flame-cremation figures. As of this report, there's no indication that AH is significantly impacting the cremation rate.

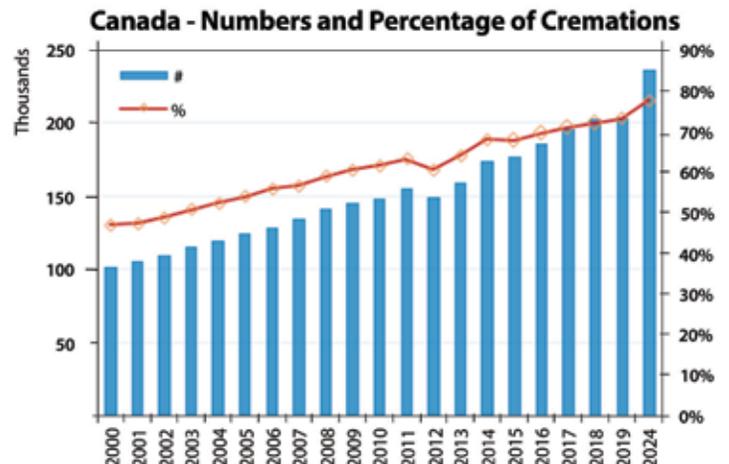
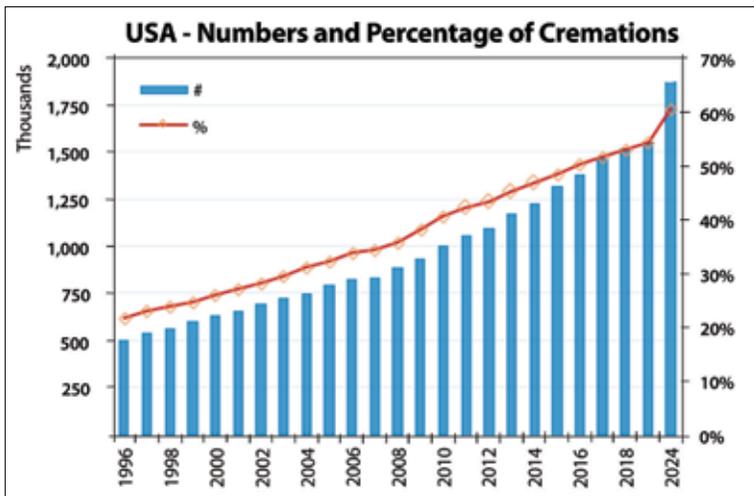
• Impact of COVID-19

As of the date of publication, COVID-19 deaths continue to increase across the United States and Canada. There are anecdotal indications that the total number and rate of cremations will increase beyond CANA projections in the year 2020. The projections for 2024 in this report do not account for COVID-19 deaths.

Since 1913, CANA has been collecting death and cremation data. Using figures primarily obtained through state and provincial governments in the United States and Canada, CANA has determined the annual percentage of cremations to deaths and forecasts future cremation percentages. For detailed information about our methodology, contact info@cremationassociation.org.



United States and Canadian Cremation Trends



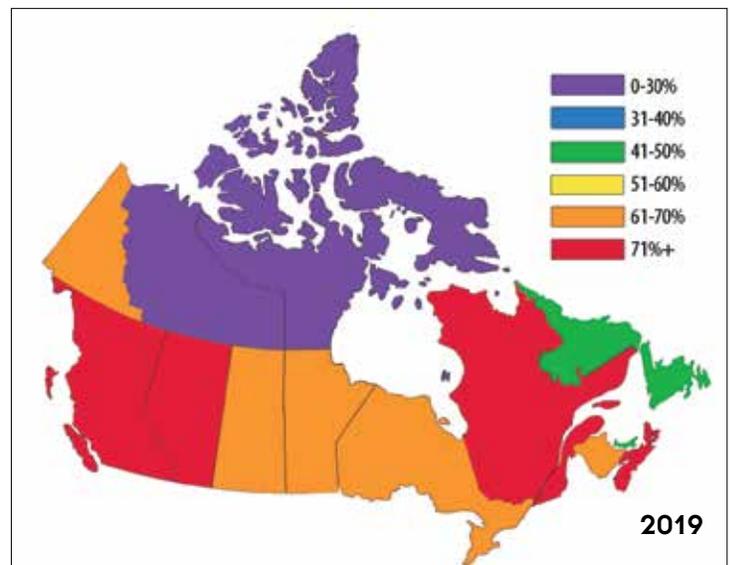
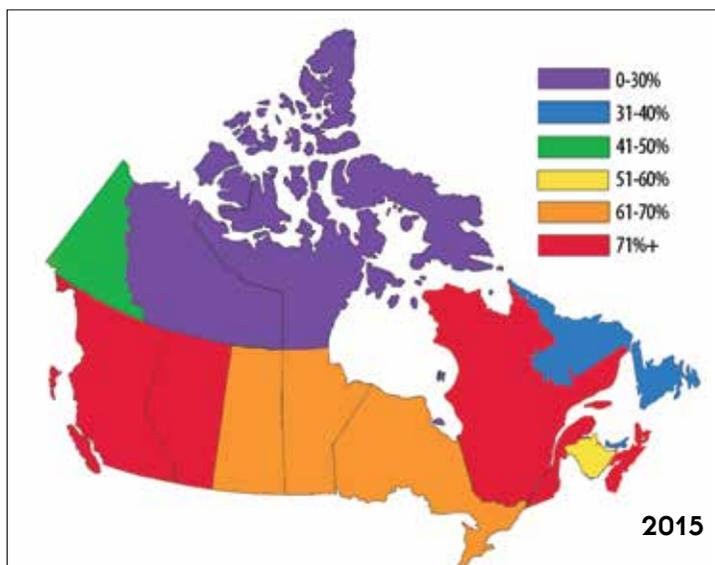
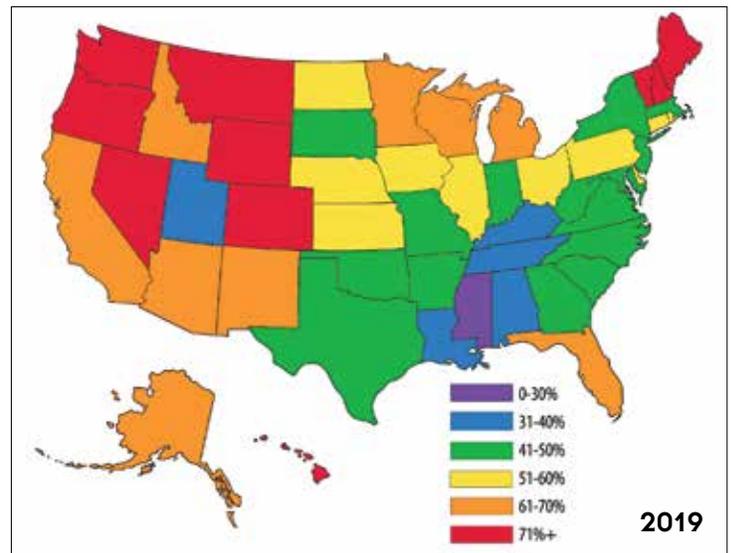
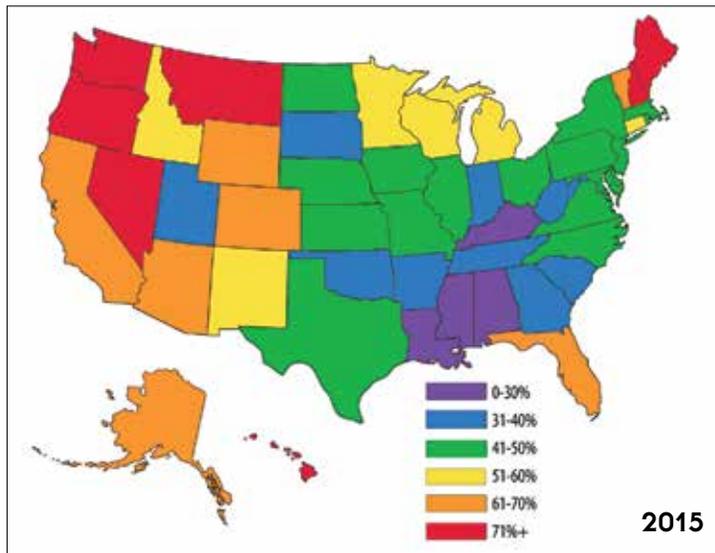
Annual Growth Rate

The annual growth rate is the difference between the yearly percentages of deaths cremated and averaged over a five-year period. The tables below show the rates for the United States and Canada from 2004 through 2019. Further, these tables illustrate that the cremation rate is increasing exponentially, with the current average growth at 1.52% annually in the U.S. and 1.06% in Canada.

Annual Growth Rate – Five Year Average USA	
Year	% Cremated
2004	31.2%
2008	38.3%
2014	47.0%
2019	54.6%
% Change 2004 - 2009	7.2%
% Change 2009 - 2014	8.7%
% Change 2014 - 2019	7.6%
Annual Growth Rate per year over 2014-2019	1.52%

Annual Growth Rate – Five Year Average Canada	
Year	% Cremated
2004	52.4%
2009	60.5%
2014	67.8%
2019	73.1%
% Change 2004 - 2009	8.1%
% Change 2009 - 2014	7.3%
% Change 2014 - 2019	5.3%
Annual Growth Rate per year over 2014-2019	1.06%

Percentages of Cremations in the States/Provinces for 2015 and 2019



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Please...Don't JUST Cremate Me!

By Larry Stuart, Jr.

While backstage at a convention a few years ago, waiting to present, I ended up chatting some with Jack*, the 30 something-year-old AV technician. The presenter on-stage at the time mentioned something in his narrative regarding the price of a cremation without a service that happened to cost \$1,800.00. Jack was blown away. He said, "You've got to be kidding me!" I thought he was thinking that was remarkably inexpensive based on a personal experience he had or something similar. I was wrong. Me being me I decided to engage him with an "I know right? So cheap!" He looked at me like I was nuts. Jack couldn't believe that it cost THAT MUCH to cremate someone! "Just throw me in the trash, for God's sake!" I decided right then that it wasn't worth it for me, right before going on stage to deliver an address to a theater full of eager funeral professionals, to enlighten Jack at that time. We hear this type of thing all the time, so I admit I can be a bit jaded. But, for some reason, Jack's fulmination resonated. I went on to deliver my presentation without missing a beat, but I couldn't shake the feeling that, because of Jack's feelings, I was on the verge of an epiphany.

It came to me later that evening, over a beer or four with colleagues. This whole mindset of "just cremate me and throw me in the trash" or "I don't want to be a burden on my children" could be born out of guilt and an intrinsic lack of self-worth. When most of us contemplate our death, we don't want to imagine anyone celebrating our life when we die. We feel (subconsciously) guilty that we are leaving our loved ones behind, and don't want to cause them any pain. At the same time, we are humble and don't feel worthy of any kind of tribute to a life well-lived. We feel guilty about "being a burden." We think that making it easier will make it hurt less. "Don't go through any fuss after I die, just cremate me!"

I've always found this thought strange because the fact is you dying is the actual burden! If you don't want to be a burden, DON'T DIE! Nothing is going to change the fact that we are all going to die, and arranging a funeral, life celebration, home going, memorial, or whatever you want to call it is therapeutic and healing

for the living.

Why can't we understand how to and allow others to love us especially after we die? All of us are worthy of someone feeling sad when we die. Death is inevitable, and it is OK that your friends, family & loved ones have a chance to grieve, remember, cry, feel sad, and even smile, together. A gathering arranged at a set time for everyone to get together for this purpose is healing, healthy, and yes,

necessary. You want to be there too, don't you? Whether you're in a fancy casket or an urn, you should be there, with all of your friends and loved ones.

A funeral is going to happen no matter what you do. The problem is this; if your loved ones do nothing after you die except cremate you and put you on a shelf in a closet you lose control of the how and when. The "funeral" could happen 6 months later, while your spouse is grocery shopping and they bump into a friend that they have been out of touch with. The friend asks about you, not knowing you died. Your spouse is stuck with informing the friend of your death and the grief and emotion come flowing out like a deluge.

I want to be cremated, but before the cremation, I want to be laid out in a Marseilles 710 Presidential casket made of eight quarter (2") solid mahogany planks. This model casket weighs in at 400 lbs and takes about 6 months to construct, all by hand. The high gloss finish is hand-rubbed to a brilliant shine and takes 16 hours to complete. You might ask "Larry, why would you waste the money on a casket like that simply to burn it up?" (it's worth mentioning here that this casket can retail (if you can even find one these days) somewhere in the neighborhood of \$25,000.00). I always respond with "Because I want to look great for my family and friends and I AM WORTH IT!" I also try to explain the fact that there is no difference in burning it by cremation or burying it in the ground to rot in the dirt. Besides, I won't be wasting any money as I will be dead, and I am NOT going to pre-pay!

To quote someone far smarter than me –

“You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection”— Buddha

Even in times of pandemic, there are options for memorialization. Funeral directors have gone above and beyond to provide safe and appropriate funerals for families that lost loved ones during this time. I have a friend that lost her grandmother during the pandemic and the funeral director arranged a digital funeral using ZOOM complete with a celebrant service and time to gather online before the service. She said that even though everyone was in different areas of the country, including the celebrant, it was wonderful and included everything but the hugs.

Whether we have lived 10 weeks or 100 years, each one of us is loved by someone and the only burden upon our death is the death itself. Don't deny your family and friends the chance to love and celebrate you after you are gone. There is no way that we can lessen the burden our loved ones will face unless we don't die. And we

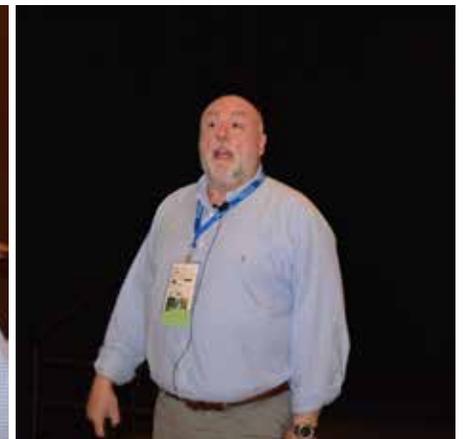
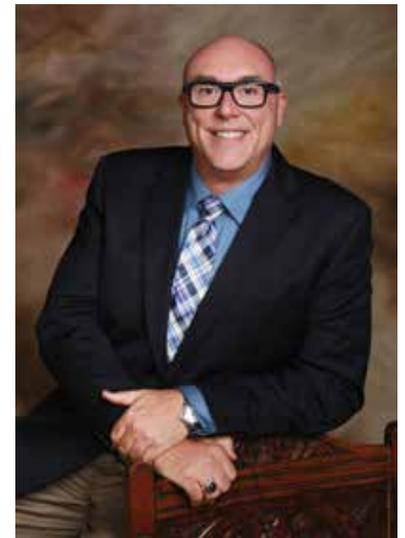
know that is not an option; we just don't like to admit it. The burden is heavier if your loved ones are not allowed to grieve. Yes, please cremate me when I die, but the act of cremation alone does not contribute to turning a dead body into a living memory. The time spent arranging and the money spent on a funeral is worth it, just as you are, and it is anything but a burden.

*Names have been changed to protect the innocent!

Larry Stuart, Jr. is the Founder of Cremation Strategies and Consulting, and the former President of Crematory Manufacturing & Service, Inc., a leading manufacturer of technologically advanced cremation equipment. Cremation Strategies and Consulting provides expert leadership, planning, organization, training, education, process improvement and strategic planning for the cremation profession. Larry is also a Certified Funeral Celebrant and believes that every life deserves to be honored in celebration remembrance.

Larry is a graduate of Kent State University and is a former member on the Board of Directors of the Cremation Association of North America, and Editor in Chief of The Cremationist magazine, published by CANA. Larry is also a Cremation Coach for the International Cemetery Cremation and Funeral Association as (ICCFA). Larry is also a past member of the National Funeral

The following is a list of cremation education programs I am involved with in some way (writing or reviewing curriculum, serving as faculty or otherwise).



Is a Pet Value Offering Right for You?

By Coleen Ellis

Are you still trying to decide if this addition to your service offerings is right for you? Still confused as to the benefits and the pitfalls? Here are a few thoughts.

Why **should** you consider adding this sort of service to your existing business operation? Pet ownership is still growing by leaps and bounds, according to the American Pet Products Association. In 2020 over 67% of the U.S. population now owns a pet with expenditures expected to hit an all-time high of \$99B (yes, that's BILLION!). Pet "friendliness," be that as simple as integrating the fact many consumers enjoy the companionship of their pets while they visit your place of business, or offering a service line extension that includes pets, has become a differentiator in many business segments.

For instance, landlords are saying they not only need to permit pets, but they also need to even encourage pets in their units as they market to younger renters. The odds are high that a Millennial has a pet, maybe two! (45% of pet owners own more than one pet, by the way.) Businesses like Ralph Lauren clothing stores have dog walkers on staff, encouraging their shoppers to bring Fluffy shopping with them, to be pampered and cared for as Mommy spoils herself with a bit of retail therapy. Fairmont Hotels are not only pet-friendly on their properties, they complement the welcome packet of a pet parent traveling with a four-legged companion with a pet-menu of services and treats. They also have pets on staff! Dogs that can be scheduled for a quick walk around town, for a run in the local park, or possibly just to get a fix of petting a dog in the privacy of one's own room, curled up by the TV, just like home! Of course, that's what Fairmont wants experientially.

What does the market look like? As I mentioned previously, 67% of Americans own a pet; and 83% of them identify themselves as pet parents, not pet owners.

Baby boomers began empty-nesting roughly 15 years ago and pets became their new children. This explained a lot about the launch of: doggie spas, boutique doggie bakeries, doggie facials, and doggie daycares with suites complete with TV's and nanny-cams for these



over-protective and over-indulgent pet parents. The Boomer's children, the Millennials, oftentimes wait to have children. They also decided pets would be their children. In fact, Millennial couple surveys point to pets essentially constituting a "trial-run" before having kids. This also helped escalate the pet industry, with more businesses and services that treat those pets just like children.

Key watch-out – everyone in your organization MUST support the program if you opt to offer a pet value offering. Handling deceased pets just like you would handle a human loss, with the same amount of dignity, respect, and care, will be vital. The landmine is when one person within your enterprise doesn't understand or respect pet loss and grief, creating brand damage will be off-the-charts. The bottom line for this program is to handle pet parents because you truly WANT to service this segment. The profit margins are much smaller compared to handling a human family, however this can be a wonderful opportunity to expose the members in your community to your services by assisting with their four-legged family members, demonstrating the high level of care your company should be known for.

Pet parents have become very picky in how their precious loves are treated. Anthropomorphism is rampant with this segment of the population, meaning the assigning of human characteristics to non-human things. Attend any pet expo and you will see animals dressed up, being pushed around in baby buggies, and talked to, or more-than-likely reprimanded, like small children at a social outing. Therefore, they WANT the

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same level of care as they would receive for a human loved one.

Here are a variety of business questions and ideas as you consider offering pet loss services to your existing operation. If you are already offering pet loss services, here are some ideas for changes, additions, or marketing avenues to consider:

- What type of business model makes the most sense for you: B2B, B2C, or B2B2C?
 - B2B: offering services from business to veterinary clinics, which will require a sales team, vehicles to make routes to the clinics, quantity supply of cadaver bags for the clinics, and a wholesale pricing structure.
 - B2C: offering pet loss service from business to consumer, and marketing pet loss services directly to families. This should require those client-facing types of services and the physical set up of the facility to aid in a client experience much like a human funeral home or cemetery.
 - B2B2C: offering pet loss services from business to business to client. This type of a model would have a wholesale pricing strategy for veterinary partners as well as a different value offering for direct clients.
- Hours of operation.
- Physical layout. Create a designated pet area within your funeral home that is respectable and leaves an impression with a family that your firm truly cares about their loss. Appoint the area so that it's respectful for a family as they hold their visitation or service honoring their pet and is a place where families would be proud to bring their beloved pet.
- Preneed integration. Handling pets is also a preneed advantage. Get the preneed team members proactively trained to look for pets in the homes to leave behind a brochure on your services or a pet Guide To Planning Ahead. GREAT lead generation!
- Removal standards. Handle every aspect of the care of the pet with the same amount of care for a human loved one. For B2C operations, consider using a respectful little casket for the removal, with the pet wrapped in a blanket and being treated with an amazing level of care. If you are operating a B2B business model, create branded cadaver bags which are more respectful than a black plastic trash-like bag.

- Marketing collateral. Quality pet specific brochures and print pieces.

The tactical marketing opportunities when offering pet loss services are abundant! Here are a few for you to consider as you are evaluating these types of services:

- Pet Loss Support Groups. Specific to a pet lover and speaks to the experience of pet loss in a safe and non-judgmental environment.
- Holiday Pet Remembrance Ceremony. If you're already doing a memorial program at the holidays, add a pet specific event.
- If you Own a Cemetery. Partner with a local shelter or rescue organization in facilitating a charity dog walk through your park. Doggie waste bags and water bottles with your logo will have "sticking power," not to mention your park being associated with such a wonderful philanthropic event.
- National Pet Memorial Day. The second Sunday of September. Partner with your local ministers to host a memorial ceremony in your parking lot or chapel.
- Consider doing a bubble release, having an area where children can create their own memory box, have families bring their living pets and have a station where clay paw prints can be done, and create a memory wall of paper or fabric where families can put their pet's name.
- Before the Pet Memorial Day ceremony. Have families send photos of their pets and create a memorial tribute video. It's a great way to add names and their contact information to your data base for future follow ups.
- Extend your services to the local K9 team, SAR (search and rescue) organizations, and therapy dog groups. Honor the work they do. August 10th is International Assistance Dog Week. In honor of the service they gave, or are giving, and the work they do to serve us daily, create a ceremony to say thank you.
- Feast of St. Francis. It's October 4th, St. Francis, the patron saint of the lowly and animals. Throughout the month of October, many organizations will host Pet Blessings. Host your own at your facility.
- Partner with a local attorney. Share the nuances of pet trusts and allow families to complete their own Guide to Planning Ahead, for themselves

AND their beloved pet. Have your preneed team there to schedule appointments to help the humans with their wishes, as well as their wishes for the pet. (Download a Pet Guide To Planning Ahead here: <https://twoheartspetlosscenter.com/brochures-pet-loss-care-journal/>)

- Cross Market to Your Families. After you decide to host some of the above events, or have those resources available, let your current families know. A powerful marketing message to let people know you now have support for any type of loss they're experiencing. Message your current client base, strategically place an ad in a local pet publication, share on your social sites, as well as your website and hang flyers where pet people hang out!

For those offering amazing and respectful end-of-life services, thank you! For those whose family members do come with paws and fur, all we want is a memorable end to a beautiful life shared!

In 2004, the death of her dog, Mico, guided Coleen Ellis to start Pet Angel Memorial Center. In 2009 Coleen founded Two Hearts Pet Loss Center, assisting

others in providing meaningful pet death care services, as well to be an educational resource in the pet grief discipline. She is Certified in Thanatology, a Certified Pet Loss Professional, and teaches Pet Loss & Grief Certification courses. In the fall

*of 2011, Coleen released her first book *Pet Parents: A Journey Through Unconditional Love and Grief*. In 2014, she helped found The Pet Loss Center, and remains a consultant and advisor.*



She is a founder and past co-chair of the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance, past president and current Executive Director of the IAAHPC, and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for her alma mater, Fort Hays State University where she was the 2018 Alumni Achievement Award recipient.



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Providing Value & Connection in Digital Arrangement Conferences

By Nikki Nordeen

With the rise of the COVID19 pandemic, we have all been required to make changes to the way we operate our businesses. For most of us, our primary concern is the safety, health, and security of our staff, along with ensuring that our businesses are able to keep their doors open.

Beyond the logistical and operational challenges associated with COVID9, funeral homes are also dealing with the emotional toll of this virus on funeral professionals and families. Many funeral professionals are personally struggling with the limitations in serving families right now. Not only are they overloaded with an increased case loads, but they are dealing with long lead times for cremations, funeral services attended by less than 10 friends and families, decedents buried alone due to cemetery rules. In person arrangement conferences may or may not be possible and funeral directors and arrangers may not feel their normal level of connection with the families they are serving. For those who have been called to this profession, all of these challenges together can be devastating.

Some funeral professionals – without their normal in person arrangements and while feeling overwhelmed – have resorted to recommending that families go online to find the memorial products they wish to order for their loved ones. In fact, with the recent death of one of my own family members, the owner of the funeral home we selected told me, “I tell families just go order their urn or keepsakes online. If I order an urn from one of my vendors, I will have to take a mark-up, so they can get it cheaper if they order it themselves”. While this solution may seem faster and easier for the short term, it is certainly not the best for the long-term success of your business.

When you drive your families away from your business to make small decisions and purchases, they may begin to question what value you bring them as their funeral professional. Be sure to reiterate to your families that by purchasing these memorial products through your business, the funeral home can prevent any delayed shipping issues and reduce unnecessary steps when handling delivered packages. Purchasing an urn and

keepsakes through the funeral home not only gives families a much broader selection, but brings peace of mind that the funeral home is responsible for the entire ordering process. Additionally, when a funeral home orders merchandise through one of their trusted vendors, they have the confidence that the products they order will be delivered, on-time and with the quality that the funeral home knows they can expect.

We believe that now is the time to ensure that you and your teams are continuing to build relationships with the families you serve.

To that end, we strongly recommend that you take a few extra steps to ensure that all families receive the same level of care and attention in their digital arrangement conference as they would have prior to the disruption due to COVID19.

9 Tips for Conducting Virtual Arrangements:

1. Ask families if they prefer completing arrangements by phone or video conference (video conference is highly recommended if possible – we like Zoom or GoToMeeting).
2. Be familiar with different online meeting tools to accommodate families who are experienced using a specific one and have a preference. Ensure that your funeral directors and arrangers have their own logins set up and with audio and visual tested prior to initiating each arrangement call.
3. Provide an audio dial in option when offering a virtual arrangement conference in the event that a strong WiFi connection is not available for all attendees.
4. Ensure clear audio by using a good quality microphone or headset.
5. Use adequate light from overhead or in front. A ring light is recommended for perfectly balanced lighting. If possible, try not to stand in front of bright windows/natural lighting (keep the natural light in front of you instead of behind you).
6. Email each family an agenda prior to the arrangement conference to detail what items will

be discussed.

7. Manage expectations for each family prior to starting the arrangement conference.

“This afternoon we will spend time planning a tribute that honors mother’s life and best fits your family’s needs. I’ll be going into detail about what is permitted and what your choices are for planning a service this week and in the future. Part of this arrangement conference also includes gathering important information for completing legal documents and writing a meaningful obituary. It’s important that I do spend time getting to know your mother and the special relationships she had with family and friends. This will help us plan a service that is reflective of the life she lived. In regard to viewing caskets, urns or outer burial containers you will be able to see our digital catalog on your screen. While this is a very different way to make arrangements and we’ve been presented strict requirements to follow I assure you that what we plan not only to honor your mother, but help everyone who was touch by her life feel connected to your family during this time.”

8. Utilize available digital resources. Many industry vendors have pivoted their businesses to ensure that funeral homes have access to online arrangement

tools in leu of in person arrangements. Utilize screen share for attendees to view available product selections selection and to view personalization proof.

Terrybear’s digital tool (Memory of a Lifetime®) is available via online distributor portal or via digital catalog that funeral homes can plug retail pricing into. Utilizing these digital tools during the arrangement allows for families to understand the full variety of product options they have access to through your funeral home.

9. Share updated pictures of visitation rooms that show social distancing guidelines implemented.

Effective Discovery Questions

A funeral director’s greatest asset in the arrangement conference is their ability to ask effective discovery questions. By asking the right questions a funeral director can determine how to guide a family in planning a meaningful private farewell or a future memorial that includes extended family and friends.

- If social distancing restrictions were not in place how do you envision your loved one’s funeral?
- How do you feel about your loved one’s funeral being live streamed for family and friends to attend

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remotely?

- What are your thoughts on encouraging family and friends to submit their recorded memories to be included with the video tribute?
- May I ask if immediate family members had the opportunity to see or speak with your loved one before they died?
- What are your concerns about the grandchildren during this time?
- What questions can I answer for you?
- How hands on would you like to be in planning a future memorial?
- What are your initial thoughts on mailing customized invitations to your father's tribute in the fall?
- How do you feel about having an interactive virtual visitation with guests?
- May I share details on how a drive thru visitation or drive in funeral can take place?

Planning a Future Memorial

During the arrangement conference share with families the idea of planning a future memorial when social distancing restrictions have been lifted. For some families this will be a second memorial honoring their loved one's life and for other families it could be the only memorial. As social distancing and quarantine continues during COVID19 families will find that the time to prepare and plan accordingly for a future tribute can result in valuable behind the scenes participation with family members. The opportunity to discuss in detail how a loved one's tribute can be personalized will

take place over the course of several weeks allowing a family to work on their budget and carefully make informed decisions. For family members who desire to be more hands on they will spend this planning period collecting inspiration and look for ways to include other individuals who are also touched by the loved one's life. Out of town family and friends who wish to attend a future memorial will appreciate the extra time they now have to make travel arrangements.

It's more important than ever to ensure that families understand all their options and now the rules and regulations when it comes to funeral service and their memorialization options. Utilize the digital tools from your vendors and these tips to ensure you maintain that high level of connection and value for your families.

Nikki Nordeen has spent the last fourteen years at Terrybear. She is currently the Director of Sales and Marketing. Since 1994, Terrybear has been focused on investing in innovative urn designs by utilizing progressive materials and finish details. The Terrybear team works with customers and business partners in a spirit of trust and



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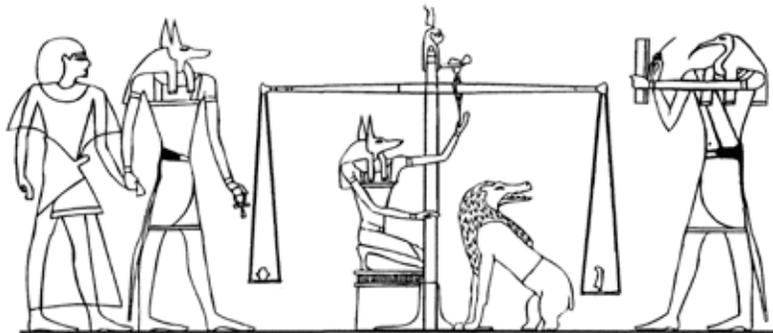


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Digital Marketing for Funeral Homes in 2020

By Welton Hong

America—or frankly, anywhere in the world—without at least touching upon the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health crisis has affected literally everyone and everything to some degree or another in 2020, and many of ways funeral directors had to modify their practices during coronavirus lockdowns will factor into their practices now and in the future.

With all of that said, this article is not focused on the virus or the resulting lockdowns and restrictions on practices.

Some of those issues very well might be affecting your funeral home and others in your area, depending on where you're located. But I think it's safe to assume we've all more than had your fill of news about COVID-19.

Virus or no virus, funeral directors still have a job to do. That never stops. And especially in turbulent times, when burial and cremation service providers are dealing with a recovering economy, it's critical to be using the best practices for marketing your funeral homes—both online and offline.

Even before any of us had ever heard of coronavirus, I was preaching to my funeral home clients how important it was to focus on change.

My team and I were advising them to be prepared for ways technology was changing everything. We got many of them set up with videoconferencing tools. We did lessons on digitally streaming life celebrations. For the firms that do their preneed sales in-house, we went over how to do “virtual” preneed seminars over Zoom, a much more cost-effective and efficient alternative to standard lunch-and-learn seminars.

When the virus arrived and many state and local authorities began mandating stay-at-home orders or at least restricting large gatherings, many of my clients were ready. Some were not. Some still are not—but more are getting the message every day!

But regardless of the health crisis, change has been radically affecting deathcare firms for years now. Even before then, I was advising funeral home owners just like you that you can't just sit back and coast on what they did last year.

That's because virtually every facet of business in America would evolve every time you toss out an old calendar and put up a new one.

You can credit technology—or more likely, blame it—for this rapid change. I realize that things used to be much simpler. An independent retail store could focus on selling its wares. A bicycle repair shop could focus on repairing bicycles.

And a funeral home owner could focus on serving families. While some time still had to be budgeted for advertising and other marketing efforts, it typically was fairly minimal.

Of course, that's not where we are in mid-2020. Competition is fierce in many areas, and especially with growing corporate ownership of local funeral homes. Direct cremation has become a major factor, pushing independent funeral homes to change their approach and try to differentiate themselves—or join in the bargain-basement pricing with limited services.

So in this new landscape, what are the most important things to know about marketing your funeral home? Here's the quick version:

Your website's user experience on mobile devices is now much more important than its desktop user experience.

Voice search has skyrocketed in popularity over the past year, and it's something that will demand much more attention going forward.

Online reviews have become much more powerful, both for establishing trust with families and improving your website's SEO.

Mobile-centric marketing techniques such as hypergeotargeting are bigger factors than ever, helping you

deliver your message to the right demographics in precise areas.

What's most important? I'd usually kick off by talking about local search optimization or the importance of having a high-converting website, but this time we're going straight to online reputation.

Here's why: Although having a whole lot of online reviews is one of the very best ways to attract families to your business, far too many independent funeral homes still don't take it seriously enough. They don't like asking for reviews. They're like, "If it happens, it happens."

I can hardly express what an enormous mistake that is. What's more important to a funeral home than its reputation?

It's long past the time funeral home owners stopped thinking of reputation as purely word of mouth in the community, or at church, or at the local chamber of commerce.

Those all remain very important, of course, but with people now researching death care providers in droves on the internet, why wouldn't you focus on burnishing your reputation there?

I certainly understand why many funeral directors are reluctant to overtly ask families for online reviews. Unfortunately, that reluctance is massively undermining their efforts to market their firms online.

And if you have a local competitor who's decidedly less reluctant to ask for reviews, watch out. Imagine searching for providers in your area and seeing one with six reviews (let's say that's you) and another with 60 (that's your competitor). The decision is over before it started.

Frankly, it doesn't even matter if your competitor has a few subpar ratings—three or even two stars—and your handful of reviews are all five stars.

In that situation, your sample size isn't large enough to make a dent with potential clientele. And when ranking funeral homes in your area and determining whether to include them in the Local 3-pack, Google focuses far more on quantity of reviews than quality.

Make a commitment for the rest of 2020 to generate many more reviews for your funeral home. It will generate much more visibility for your website on search engines, deliver more people to the site, and help it convert better. It's absolutely worth getting past a little bit of discomfort.

The funeral industry is doing a little better here, at least as compared to online reputation. The concepts behind search engine marketing and search engine optimization have been around for a while. But there's still a lot of room for improvement.

It's especially critical for local businesses to appear in the Google 3-Pack. Google is by far the leader among search engines, with over 90 percent of the search market share. And for local businesses, there's no better real estate than being in the 3-Pack. The three companies listed there receive close to 65 percent of all clicks in search results.

There's no one element that ensures you'll be included in the 3-Pack, but you greatly improve your chances by focusing on the usual chief SEO techniques:

- ranking highly for keywords relevant to your business
- having lots of great relevant content on your website
- getting plenty of positive reviews
- completely filling out your Google My Business page

Even if you're not in the 3-Pack, the higher you are on the search engine results page, the better. I realize everyone knows that, but I wanted to assure that it hasn't changed substantially. People have a lot of trust in organic results and click on them.

Of course, search isn't limited to organic (unpaid) results. You also can get excellent visibility in search very quickly by doling out some dough for pay-per-click (PPC) ads. If you need to bolster your at-need calls right away, a PPC campaign is the most effective tool.

Mobile marketing also keeps growing in influence in 2020. We've reached a point where smartphones and tablets are ubiquitous among Americans of all generations.

Which is why it's critical that you focus on the mobile experience and take advantage of all the techniques mobile has to offer, such as click-to-call technology, mobile PPC and hyper-geotargeting. Mobile lets you surgically target potential clientele, particularly for at-need cases.

When you get visitors to your website, of course, it's time to get conversions. That's still a sticking point for many funeral homes. Your website can't exist simply to provide an online presence. It must actively convert visitors into clientele.

Every element of the site has to be focused on that goal. Chief among them: Develop a clear, persuasive, easy-to-understand call to action (CTA) and prominently display it on every page.

Finally, let's take minute to cover social media, because that's one area where I have seen decidedly more potential for funeral homes as we kick off a new calendar year.

To be clear, if you're purely focused on at-need calls, you don't need to concern yourself too much with social media. It's really best used for generating preneeds and for overall branding. It has very little direct effect on generating at-need calls.

Also, if you're unable to put in the time and effort to post regularly, you frankly shouldn't do social media at all. There's nothing worse than a half-hearted social media campaign. Posting irregularly is worse than not posting at all.

However, if a large portion of your business comes from preneed arrangements—or if you simply want to make preneed a much larger focus for the rest of the year—you should embrace social media, especially on Facebook, which is the best platform for targeting older people.

The key to marketing your funeral home on social media is not to simply post about death care issues, but to post about all sorts of topics that would interest your target demographic.

For preneeds, of course, that demographic is mostly over sixty, but it can include fifty-somethings as well. And while both women and men contract for preneeds,

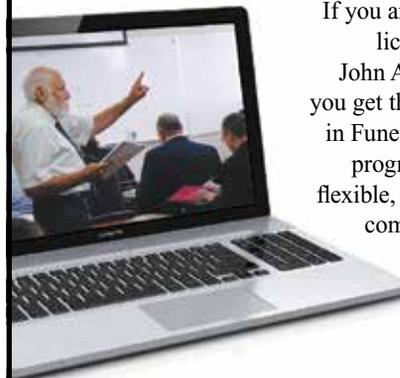
women do tend to purchase slightly more. So it's critical to focus your social media on women over sixty and branch out from there.

Of course, it takes a lot of time and effort to do social media in-house, especially for an independent funeral home. With rare exception, you'll want to contract with a great marketing firm to both produce social media content and publish it for you

Welton Hong, founder of Ring Ring Marketing®. Welton is a leading expert in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. He's the author of the book Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes and a regular contributor to American Funeral Director magazine and several other publications.



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Working with the Media

Keys to Service = Authority

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

The issue on the table is how funeral/cemetery professionals apply authority in helping clients and to what ends.

If as funeral/cemetery professionals we use our licensed authority as a defense and barricade while the funeral interview and experience is proceeding, are we indicating, implying, or stating: “This or that is not to be discussed,” “That is a professional secret,” “You’ll just have to take my word for it,” “I know best,” “This is final; there is nothing to add”?

When the client family is confronted with such attitudes particularly in our present time, it is not surprising if they feel that they are being hemmed in and treated like an object. They may well submit, as they certainly did in years gone by in our profession, but in the 21st century I see that they rebel and sometimes kick back by surfing the internet for answers and options in front of us.

THE DICTATOR CASE STUDY:

This will be a short case study. I am thinking that many of the veteran funeral director’s reading this may well relate to the following. When I started my career I worked for a dictator funeral director. He told people where to sit, when to stand, and he even told priests following a Funeral Mass if he thought they had talked too long during their homily. I was terrified of him.

Looking back however is the glaring fact that he was very successful in being a great American funeral director. People liked him very much and admired and respected him even more. We had no cremation – none. His funerals were cookie cutter funerals – literally the same repeat time after time after time.

The difference is not necessarily the makeup and

character of my first boss, because I will make a statement that I suspect there are still “dictator” funeral directors out in the great big world.

The difference is that the culture changed. My first employer died just as the “consumer” movement was beginning in this country. No one ever price shopped our firm, no one ever questioned his directions, and trust me folks he directed people. Looking back his approach of “I know what’s best for you” actually worked.

Of course anyone reading this knows those days are long and forever gone!

What about authority in the 21st century then? Here are some random thoughts. If as a funeral/cemetery professional, you tend to talk as much or talk even more than the client family, chances are good that you are blocking communication from them to you by asserting artificial authority.

It is quite likely that you are acting as an authority, as the superior in the funeral interview who must be respectfully listened to, and that you wish for the client family to perceive you in this way. The problem is that these days’ people are not looking for dictatorial authority they are looking for dedicated relationships.

Do we tend to let the client family finish what they have to say, or do we often finish it for them and then turn around and reply to our own response? Do we tend to interrupt the client family because we feel confident that we are so bright and quick that we can actually catch their intent, read their minds so to speak, and then become impatient if they keep on talking, because we have already GOT IT? Believing that we have heard “this kind of funeral stuff” many times in the past and then do we become bored and cut them off?

Or do you view ourselves as an extremely experienced funeral professional that has developed the enviable skill of magical telepathy and mind reading? These are mighty difficult questions. My prediction is that most readers already have certain people popping into their minds.

Interruptions which are stimulated by the funeral directors authority complex creates a major communication obstacle in the funeral interview moving forward with grace and dignity. It cuts short vital and important communication that should actually be taking place. Most funeral professionals who interrupt constantly usually confess with great sincerity that their motives are all for the best, but in the helping process it can be seen as an abuse of authority. To show our client families that we understand them so well that we can finish their sentences is truly an abuse of our authority. Altruistic motives notwithstanding in reality when we are interrupting we are actually choking off what is coming our way, although we may sincerely believe ourselves to be helping the conversation based a misguided notion of imagined authority that we have been given by possessing this or that certificate which hangs on the wall.

Case of the Abuse of Authority – The Preoccupation with Self

Have you ever been introduced to any funeral directors who you concluded after the introductions had great big egos? If you can answer this question in the affirmative this portion of the writing ought to be of interest.

A basic factor in funeral communication relates more to the funeral professional's behavior than to the client family. As the funeral interview proceeds, you, the funeral professional, may be asking yourself what to say or do next. This concern with your own role may so absorb your attention that you will not be genuinely listening to the client family. You will be preoccupied with that small voice inside that insists on knowing how to act next. This inner voice constitutes a clear authoritarian obstacle to communication. This is not to be confused with the other inner voice that brings you closer to the world of the client family – that "third ear" with which you suddenly understand something haltingly expressed from the client family.

This is the voice of authority that insists on knowing

what to do next and is in truth a block between you and client family, and being more concerned with the impression of authority you will make on them than with the impressions they might make on you if you were listening and trying to understand them.

Another Authority Pitfall: The Issue of Questions

Let us examine the absurdities of the endless overloading of questions. I am referring to what is known as "bombarding" with questions. Here the helping tool of using endless questions becomes a weapon based on authority wielded in reality against the client family, if not in a deadly manner, then at least in one that can hardly inspire trust, make for rapport, or create an atmosphere in which the partners in the funeral interview find themselves safe, secure and tended to by a person of kind sensitivity. The use of unbridled authority can easily create the environment which is the opposite of security and safety, but instead creates an environment where people are caught in a hailstorm of questions; and if the client family runs (escapes) to the nearest shelter (like the funeral home parking lot or restroom facilities), we can only admire their urge to survive.



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Authority, dictatorial behaviors rarely do well in the helping experience which is the hallmark of most funeral homes and cemeteries.

We shall give several examples of question “bombarding” stimulated by inner feelings of authority without further comment as the questions speak for themselves. Here goes: “Do you know the answer?” “Do you need more time to think?” “Do you realize there is a newspaper deadline?” “Can’t you remember?” “Isn’t there anyone you can call to get this?” “Do you know how important this insurance information is?” “You forgot the discharge papers – again?” “Didn’t I make myself clear enough?” “Do you have the deed?” “Can you get the deed?” and “When can you get the deed?” “Oh, did you remember the discharge papers?”

These are unbelievably all true questions that have been asked by funeral professionals over the years. Here is a good rule to go by: if you think you are bombarding the client family with questions you are bombarding the client family with questions, slow down, regroup and heighten your own sensitivities and let go of the addiction to authority.

Authority in funeral/cemetery work has a 19th century concept that has long ago worn out its welcome!

How to Put the Desire for Authority in its Place: Put the Shoe on the Other Foot. Let me ask a question: how did any of us feel when people we turned to for gentle kind help pulled out the authority card and played it to the hilt. As odd as this is going to sound I feel certain that we ought not to reply to every question or situation as being the ultimate funeral authority. In fact I don’t personally believe that the ultimate funeral authority even exists or ever existed for that matter.

It seems abundantly clear that our culture is crying out not for authority, but for relationships. There seems to be so many lonely people in the world, and hence the consequences are even more magnified that funeral/cemetery professionals should seriously attempt a successful transformation for self- perceptions of being authority figures, as was certainly true some years ago, but instead create the reality of the transformation to servant, with a servant humble attitude towards the worthy ideal of being of service to others in a great time of need.

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Foundation Partners Group Adds Two Sarasota Firms

Jennings Funeral Home and Gulf Coast Cremations Join the Foundation Partners Group Family

Orlando, FL – June 10, 2020 – Foundation Partners Group, a leading provider of innovative funeral and cemetery experiences and products, has announced the company has acquired the Jennings Funeral Home and Crematory in Sarasota, FL as well as Gulf Coast Cremations in Sarasota and Venice, FL. The purchase adds to the growing network of Foundation Partners Group firms on the gulf coast of Florida.



“The acquisition of Jennings Funeral Home and Crematory and Gulf Coast Cremation fits well into our strategy of expanding in Southwest Florida” stated Bob Bukala, President and CEO of Foundation Partners. “The Jennings family and their team have shown a dedication to providing exceptional, compassionate care for more than 20 years in the Sarasota area and we’re very pleased that they have chosen to become part of the Foundation Partners family.” Doug Jennings has enjoyed a long career in funeral service having opened and operated several funeral homes and other funeral businesses in the past. He started Jennings Funeral Home and Crematory in Sarasota in 2000 – his fifth successful funeral services firm. Ten years later, he opened the doors to the first Gulf Coast Cremations in Sarasota and added a second location in Venice, FL in 2017.

“My family and staff feel a real ‘fit’ with Foundation Partners and I sense that they share the same feeling,” commented Doug Jennings. “Having been through this process in the past, I sincerely appreciate Foundation Partners’ transparency, commitment to innovation and investment in a smooth transition process.” “Even in these unprecedented times of uncertainty, Foundation Partners Group is growing and remains dedicated to identifying and partnering with independent funeral homes and cemeteries who align with our culture and purpose,” stated Justin Baxley, Vice President of Business Development at Foundation Partners Group. “I have known the Jennings family for a long time and am grateful to have the businesses they have successfully built become a part of our family of firms.”

Miller Berry and Sons, Inc Acquired by Thacker Caskets

Thacker Caskets is excited to announce that the company has reached an agreement with Miller Berry and Sons, Inc for an asset purchase as of May 12, 2020.

Miller Berry and Sons, Inc is a multigenerational family-owned business since 1968. The company is a leading funeral supplier in adjustable bed mechanisms, bed mounting brackets, bed frames, and bed mattresses. Before deciding to retire, The Miller Berry Team wanted to ensure that their longstanding customers will continue to receive quality customer service. To make certain that their customers’ needs are being met, the company that acquires Miller Berry must be an independently owned business with the capability of understanding the value of building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Thacker has been providing innovative products, made right here in the United States for over 80 years. A commitment to customer service has been a cornerstone of the business since its inception and their new customers acquired from Miller Berry can expect the same level of dependability to be passed on to them. Miller Berry customers can trust that their reliable source for mattresses and hardware will continue to be there. From the very beginning, Thacker’s mission has been to be the most trusted supplier to more families by providing an honest product at an honest price, with honest service. The acquisition of Miller Berry is just another step by Thacker to maintain its high standards of customer satisfaction with high-quality products.

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In Loving Memory of David Allen Beck

Mr. David A. Beck, longtime leader and president of the Clark Grave Vault Company of Columbus, Ohio; past president of the Casket & Funeral Supply Association of America (1994-95); recipient, Lifetime Recognition Award of CFSA (2009); passed away May 29, 2020.



David Allen Beck, 81, of Columbus, Ohio, passed away May 29, 2020. He is preceded in death by his parents Myrwood “Red” and Cora Naomi Beck. He is survived by his high school sweetheart and loving wife of 60 years, Nancy (Metzger): children, David (Pam), Mark (Lisa), Doug (Jennifer); grandchildren, Matt, Michelle, Chris, Tim, Zac, Jake; great grandchildren, Lauren, Cora Catherine; sister, Myrna Wetzel. Dave began his career at The Clark Grave Vault Company working at state fairs as a young boy in 1950. After attending college, he began working full time as a production foreman, then moved into sales as the company’s sales manager, and in 1988 was elected president.

During his career, Dave served the funeral industry however he could – speaking at hundreds of conventions and colleges, serving 30 years on the board of the International Memorialization Supply Association, board member and president of the Casket and Funeral Supply Association of America, as well as serving on countless committees on both the state and national levels. CFSA recognized Dave for his dedication to the funeral industry by presenting him with the 2009 Lifetime Recognition Award and in 1994 he won Entrepreneur of the Year in the State of Ohio for manufacturing.

Dave was a lifelong member of Christ Lutheran Church and served on the board of Lutheran Social Services. He was actively involved with Charity Newsies for decades. Dave thoroughly enjoyed traveling with Nancy and loved traversing America in their motor coach, ‘Steel Away,’ spending time in their favorite places like the Florida Keys and Hilton Head Island. A longtime supporter of The Ohio State University and an avid Buckeye fan, he loved to travel in Steel Away to see his favorite team play – Go Bucks!

Family will receive friends noon – 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 3 at the Schoedinger Midtown Chapel, 229 East State St., Columbus, Ohio. Private family funeral service to be held Thursday, June 4, 2020. Pastor Tim Iseringhausen officiating. Private Interment Green Lawn Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Charity Newsies, 4300 Indianola Ave., Columbus, OH 43214, or Christ Lutheran Church, 2314 E Main St., Bexley, OH 43209, in his memory. Condolences can be sent to the family at www.schoedinger.com.

Mike Stephens, Retired NGL Regional Vice President Passes Away

It is with deep sadness that National Guardian Life Insurance Company (NGL) shares the passing of Mike Stephens, retired NGL Preneed Regional Vice President, on May 15, 2020. Stephens retired in February 2019 after 35 years in the funeral industry and more than 10 years at NGL.

Stephens was a valuable member of our Preneed sales team. During his tenure at NGL his vision, leadership and knowledge were appreciated. He was a kind, humble person who was gifted at turning a customer relationship into a meaningful longtime friendship.



“Mike Stephens was truly a legend in a profession that he helped create. He was one of the smartest people when

it came to business, cared deeply for others, and he was a connoisseur of spaghetti, meatballs and red sauce. The industry and I lost a great friend and he will be dearly missed,” shared John Baker, NGL Vice President Strategic Partner Development.

Stephens grew up in Cincinnati working for his family’s Italian bread bakery. While there, he learned every aspect of running a small business until it was sold in the late 1970s. Stephens then moved to Los Angeles and began his career in sales, first working as a door-to-door copier salesman where he honed his sales skills.

Litton Industries’ copier division noticed his success and recruited him to head national accounts in Southern California. In 1984, Stephens joined The Forethought Group, a new start-up company where he spent the next seven years in various sales management roles.

In the early 1990s, Stephens had the opportunity to join a start-up funeral home acquisition company. Stephens focused early on acquiring funeral homes and then served as head of Preened sales. He then returned to The Forethought Group in business development and trust sales roles until 2007 when he joined NGL and became a Regional Vice President and key member of the sales team.

“Mike was a client (Prime Succession), associate (Forethought and NGL), mentor and great friend. He loved golf, sports cars (Godzilla) and his Cincinnati Reds. We will miss him, his infectious personality and sense of humor more than words will describe,” shared Casey Wolfe, NGL Regional Vice President.

The obituary for Mike Stephens can be found here: <https://www.newcomercincinnati.com/Obituary/184706/Mike-Stephens/Cincinnati-OH>



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NFDA Officers Elected by Acclamation

Randy Anderson to lead association as 2020-21 president

Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is pleased to announce the following individuals have been elected by acclamation to serve as officers on the 2020-21 Board of Directors: President-elect John O. “Jack” Mitchell IV, CFSP, CCSP; Treasurer Douglas R. “Dutch” Nie II, CFSP, CCO; and Secretary Christopher P. Robinson, CFSP, CCO. The 2020-21 NFDA Board of Directors will be led by President Randall P. “Randy” Anderson, CFSP, CCO. The officers will serve one-year terms of office that begin following the 2020 NFDA International Convention & Expo.

During a recent meeting, the NFDA Board of Directors received a report from the Leadership Development Committee confirming that only one individual was nominated for each of the three officer positions. Because each candidate for the three officer positions ran unopposed, the Board exercised its right to record in its minutes that, in accordance with Section C.8 of Article VIII of the NFDA Bylaws, each is hereby elected by the members to take their respective offices at the close of the 2020 Convention. Given that the officers were elected by acclamation and there are no other matters at this time that need to be voted on by members, there will be no NFDA election in August.

Current NFDA President R. Bryant Hightower Jr., CFSP, will continue his service on the Board with a one-year term as immediate past president that commences at the end of the 2020 NFDA Convention. Also continuing their service on the Board of Directors are 2019-21 At-large Representatives Linda Allan, CFSP, and Daniel J. Ford, CFSP, CCSP.

During a meeting this summer, the NFDA Policy Board will elect two individuals to serve as at-large representatives alongside Allan and Ford. The successful candidates will serve two-year terms (2020-22) that commence following the 2020 NFDA Convention. The at-large representative candidates are: Chris E. Christian, CFSP, CCO

Amanda Crates
Jay Hunn, CFSP, CCO
Beatrice “Bea” Lewanduski, CFSP
James “Jimmy” Olson, CFSP, CPC

Information about the officers elected to serve on the Board of Directors and the at-large representative candidates, can be found on the NFDA website, www.nfda.org/vote.

NFDA is the world’s leading and largest funeral service association, serving more than 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit www.nfda.org.



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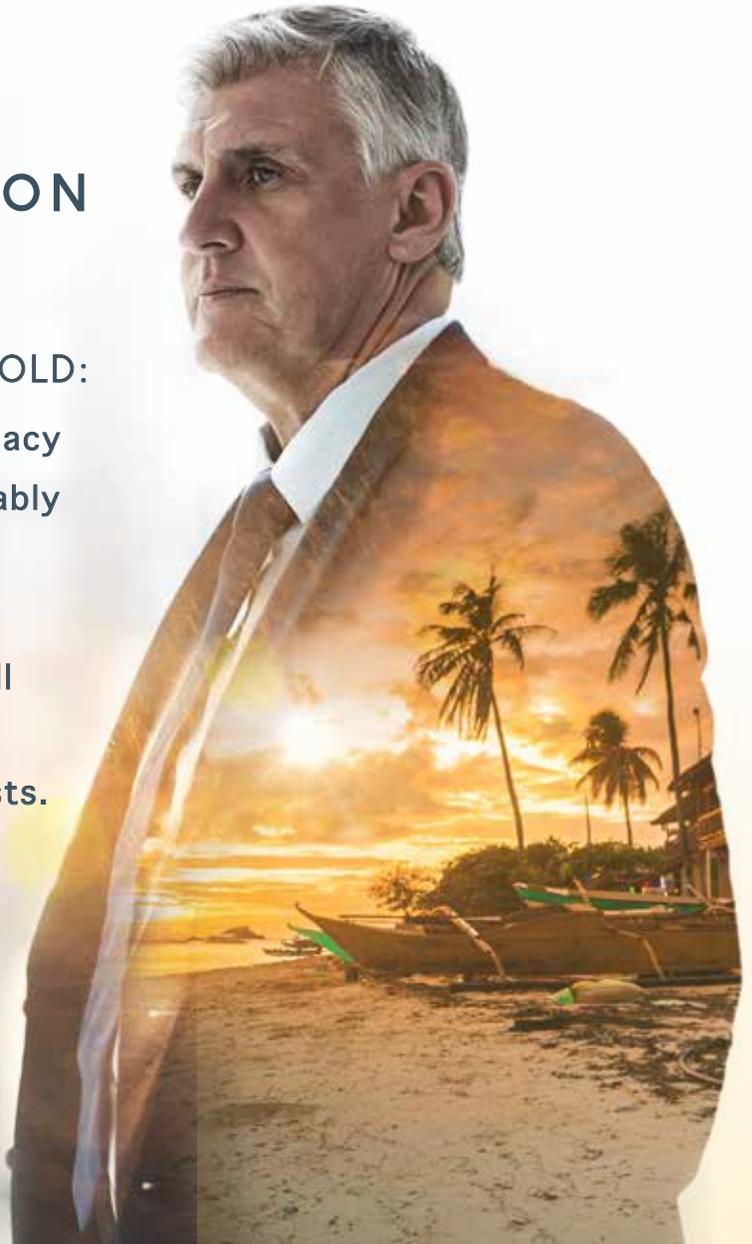
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