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◆ FUNERAL DIRECTOR ◆

MAGAZINE

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June 2022

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## Cremation Direction & CANA Convention

CANA 104th Annual Expo - Atlanta, GA  
CANA Convention Agenda, Speakers & Hours  
Funeral Service Professionals Need to be Cremation  
Specialists by Larry Stuart, Jr.  
Reflections on My First Ten Years with CANA  
by Barbara Kemmis  
Online Shopping: Impacts and Options by Ben  
Farnstrom, Sandra Walker and Ryan Wiseman  
Cremation & Coronavirus by Joe Weigel  
Three Steps to Create a Website That Markets Your  
Cremation Business by Jenny Goldade  
With Cremation It's Always Best to Anticipate!  
by Larry Stuart, Jr.  
The History, Value, and Benefit of Funeral Flowers;  
Part I by Todd Van Beck  
Raven Plume - Cremation Strategies & Consulting  
Expands and Changes Name  
ASD - New Family Texting Solution Set to  
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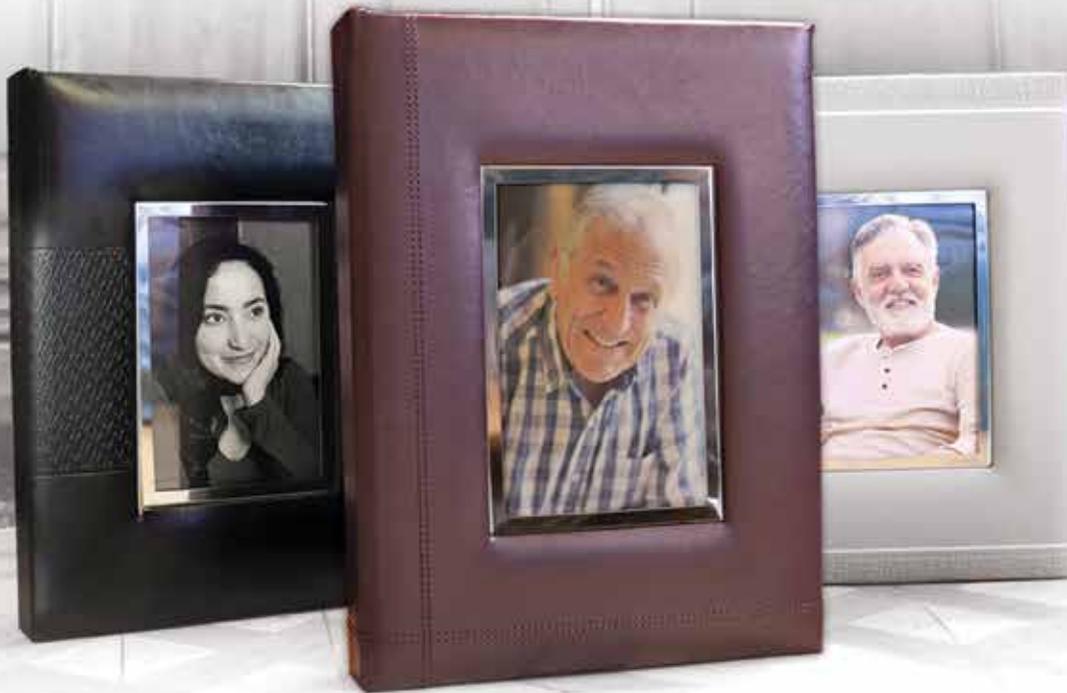
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# CANA 2022 ANNUAL STATISTICS REPORT

TWO YEARS OF UNPRECEDENTED CREMATION NUMBERS AND CONTINUED PREDICTABLE GROWTH RATE



## UNITED STATES

2020

2,900,623  
DEATHS

1,578,080  
CREMATIONS

54.4%  
CREMATION  
RATE

2021

3,424,258  
DEATHS

1,918,898  
CREMATIONS

56.0%  
CREMATION  
RATE

2022

3,388,138  
DEATHS

1,949,074  
CREMATIONS

57.5%  
CREMATION  
RATE

Source: CANA • [www.cremationassociation.org](http://www.cremationassociation.org)



## CANADA

2019

285,887  
DEATHS

208,016  
CREMATIONS

72.8%  
CREMATION  
RATE

2020

307,422  
DEATHS

227,864  
CREMATIONS

74.1%  
CREMATION  
RATE

2021

309,718  
DEATHS

231,542  
CREMATIONS

74.8%  
CREMATION  
RATE

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June 2022

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 with a Southern Accent Since 1919

Celebrating 102 Years of Service to the Industry

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# Atlanta

# CANA

104th Annual Cremation  
Innovation Convention  
August 17-19, 2022



This August, the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) invites you to savor your bite of the Big Peach by attending the 104th Cremation Innovation Convention in Atlanta, Georgia! This premier event brings innovative cremation professionals together to share ideas, learn from experts, and see the newest products and services from industry suppliers.

## Relish the Unique Perks of a CANA Meeting . . .

- 7 hours of CE, sharing insights that can transform your business
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- a friendly and welcoming atmosphere with exhibits, sessions, and meals in one room
- generous networking time with colleagues from across a range of businesses and experiences
- delicious food and drink throughout
- ample opportunity to explore the attractions of downtown Atlanta
- options to tour a successful local business and unwind at a ball game

Savor your bite of the Big Peach and book yourself for August 17-19, 2022, at the Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta. Reserve your room at [canarooms.com](http://canarooms.com)!

Learn more and register: [goCANA.org/CANA22](http://goCANA.org/CANA22)



## Wednesday, August 17

8:00 am - 4:00 pm	CANA COCP (pre-convention seminar)
12:00 pm - 3:30 pm	Exhibitor Set Up/Registration Opens
3:30 pm - 4:00 pm	First Timers' Gathering
4:00 pm - 7:00 pm	Opening Cocktail Reception/Exhibits
9:00 pm - 11:00 pm	After Party - Vues Lobby Bar at the Omni Atlanta Hotel

## Thursday, August 18

7:00 am - 5:00 pm	Registration and Exhibit Hall Open
7:00 am - 7:45 am	Breakfast/Exhibits
7:45 am - 7:50 am	Convention Welcome
7:50 am - 8:30 am	Supplier Showcase
8:30 am - 9:30 am	Session 1 • Waters - <i>Question Everything</i>
9:00 am - 11:00 am	Family Bingo
9:30 am - 10:00 am	Coffee Break/Exhibits
10:00 am - 11:00 am	Session 2 • Johnson - <i>Interactive Strategic Planning</i>
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Session 3 • Dixon, Zavrotny - <i>The Value of Peer Support</i>
12:00 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	Session 4 - <i>Roundtables</i>
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm	Light hors d'oeuvres, beer, and wine/Exhibits
4:00 pm - 4:30 pm	Membership Meeting/In Memoriam
4:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Prize Drawings/Exhibits
5:00 pm	Exhibitor Breakdown
	Atlanta Braves Baseball Game

## Friday, August 19

7:00 am - 8:00 am	Breakfast
8:00 am - 9:00 am	Session 5 • <i>Cremation Trends, Part 1: 2021 Statistics, Pet Cremation Trends</i>
9:00 am - 10:00 am	Session 6 • <i>Cremation Trends, Part 2 • Cremation Memorialization Research</i>
10:00 am - 10:30 am	Coffee Break
10:30 am - 11:30 am	Session 7 • Baker, Olson - <i>Cremation and Preneed</i>
12:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Tour of Southern Cremations & Funerals

# PROGRAM ANNOUNCED FOR CANA'S 104TH CREMATION INNOVATION CONVENTION

WHEELING, IL— Based on advance registrations, the Cremation Association of North America's 104th Cremation Innovation Convention in Atlanta, Georgia is the place to be this August! Suppliers are designing their exhibit spaces and attendees are reserving their seats to enjoy southern hospitality, connection and camaraderie, and innovative ideas at the premier cremation event for the profession.



Forward-thinking speakers are a favorite part of every CANA Convention, and Atlanta's program won't disappoint:

**Brian Waters, funeral director, embalmer, and host of *Undertaking: The Podcast*, opens the CANA Convention** with a plan to Question Everything and examine the why of business operations. Brian will explore the value families are seeking and discuss how we can grow as cremation providers by sharing trends, ideas, and questions about everything we do.

By addressing the profession's challenges head on, **Jake Johnson, President & CEO at Johnson Consulting**, helps attendees set their goals and priorities with Interactive Strategic Planning. For many of us, the problem lies not in failing to meet our operational goals, but in failing to define them in the first place—or in setting our mark too low and only achieving what we were aiming for. Jake will help you rise above the statistics and get one step closer to the ultimate goal of your exit plan.

It's been said that you're only as strong as your weakest link, and staffing is a concern we all share. **Funeral Professionals Peer Support (FPPS) Founder Michael Dixon and Licensed Funeral Director and FPPS US Program Director Kim Zavrotny** talk about stress and burnout in the workplace and how we're Stronger Together: The Value of Peer Support.

This year, CANA hosts not one but two sessions on applying statistics to your business planning. In Cremation Trends Part 1: Statistics and Business Diversification, CANA Executive Director Barbara Kemmis will facilitate a discussion about the profession's response to cremation trends, excess deaths and how businesses are diversifying through the addition of pet cremation—all with expert insights from leaders across the profession.

Then, in Cremation Trends Part 2: Cremation Memorialization, CANA introduces the results of brand-new cremation memorialization research. Delving into the motivations for people keeping their human and pet cremated remains in homes throughout the US and Canada, Barbara Kemmis will facilitate a discussion with leaders on the results of this study and what it means for cremation memorialization today and in the future.

The always-popular Roundtable Session will allow attendees to spend more time diving deeper into the content presented throughout the convention. Each presenter will facilitate a roundtable on their topic, answering questions and encouraging discussion so attendees can collaborate on finding solutions and new ideas for their businesses.

John Baker, Vice President Strategic Partner Development of National Guardian Life Insurance Company (NGL), and Judy Olson, Regional Vice President Sales, take the stage to talk Cremation & Preneed and share their own



data on deaths over the past two years and how an active preneed program can increase at-need revenues.

... and there's so much more! Everyone is invited to earn their certification by registering for an in-person, pre-convention CANA Crematory Operations Certification Program™ (COCP™) taught by Tom Krowl of Cremation Systems and Wendy Wiener of WRW Legal. CANA's planned an afterparty to celebrate being together in Atlanta! Plus, tickets are available to attend the New York Mets at the Atlanta Braves game on Thursday night and a there's a tour of Cheatham Hill Memorial Park on Friday afternoon.

CANA is committed to hosting events that are well worth the trip, and our lineup of speakers and exhibitors reinforces that promise. But CANA is also committed to safety. A decision to travel involves more than judging whether you can take time away from family or business—there are other risks and benefits to calculate. An in-person gathering may not be right for everyone, but CANA will welcome those who are ready to Atlanta. Savor your bite of the Big Peach and book yourself for August 17-19, 2022, at the Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta: [goCANA.org/CANA22](http://goCANA.org/CANA22)

**About CANA**

Founded in 1913, the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) is an international organization of over 3,500 members, composed of funeral homes, cemeteries, crematories, industry suppliers, and consultants. CANA members believe that cremation is preparation for memorialization.



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# CANA's 104th Annual Cremation Innovation Convention - Sessions

## Question Everything

### Brian Waters, Undertaking: The Podcast



Brian will examine the WHY of business operations, exploring the value families are seeking and discussing how we can grow as cremation providers by sharing trends, ideas, and questions about everything we do.

BIO: Brian Waters grew up in the apartment above Waters Funeral Home in Hartford City, Indiana which is owned and operated by his parents, Ted and Kay Waters. He graduated from Vincennes University in 2003, where he majored in Funeral Service Education under John Alsobrooks. During his time at Vincennes University, Brian worked and trained with Donald Fredrick at Duesterberg-Fredrick Funeral Home in Vincennes. Brian has been a licensed funeral director and embalmer in Indiana since 2005, working alongside his father Ted, mother Kay, and brother Tod. He is a member of the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice, earning the Certified Funeral Service Practitioner designation in 2018. Brian hosts and produces Undertaking: The Podcast with Middletown, Indiana funeral director Ryan Ballard. Currently in its third year, Undertaking: The Podcast interviews industry leaders and covers industry news for listeners in over 50 countries.

## Interactive Strategic Planning

### Jake Johnson, CEO, Johnson Consulting Group



Where has your company been? Where is it now? Where is it going, and how will you get there? These are just some of the questions you need to be able to answer to create measurable goals to drive and develop sustainable growth. Strategic Planning is the process used to prioritize and align efforts, effectively allocate resources, and ensure your goals are backed by data and sound reasoning. To

achieve success, you must define success. For many of us, a large shortcoming in operations is not failing to meet our goals, but in not defining them, or setting our mark too low and only achieving what we were aiming for. According to research outlined in the Harvard Business Review, 85% of executive leadership teams spend less than one hour each month discussing strategy, and, on average, 95% of a company's employees don't understand its strategy. It's no wonder so many companies fail to reach their strategic targets. Join Jake Johnson, the President and CEO of Johnson Consulting Group, as he dives into how to effectively develop your ongoing strategic planning process so you can rise above the statistic and be one step close to the ultimate goal of your exit plan.

BIO: As President & CEO at Johnson Consulting, Jake began his career at Keystone Group Holdings (now Dignity Memorial Network) as Associate Director, Corporate Development, where his financial analysis and forecasting expertise was foundational to the firm's growth. Jake's unique ability to problem solve complex business problems and communication leads his success in owning a funeral home and cremation center in Sun City, Arizona. Jake's educational credentials include a BSBA degree in Management with an emphasis in Accounting and Financial Analysis from Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. His strong foundation in accounting, financial analysis and EBITDA forecasting is complemented by technology savvy and broad general management qualifications in business development and operations, and will aid in his discussion today.

## Stronger Together: The Value of Peer Support

### Michael Dixon and Kim Zavrotny, FPPS



For our profession to remain strong, we need to change and grow with an ever-changing world. Funeral Professionals Peer Support (FPPS) is an international network providing a healthy

outlet to debrief and meet others who can relate—support provided by peers for peers. FPPS is committed to be the leader in providing resources for the wellness of funeral professionals around the world. Since its formation in 2018, the organization has responded to the needs of funeral professionals with networks in Canada, the United States, and Kenya.

**BIOS:** Michael Dixon is Executive Director and Founder of Funeral Professionals Peer Support and has worked in the funeral service industry for 30 years. He also initiated Reach Up Ottawa, a local mental health charity focusing on teenagers and young adults. He is involved with Partners for Mental Health, a national charity where he served as the Ottawa chapter Chairperson. Michael has addressed the Canadian House of Commons and Provincial legislative committees concerning mental health issues, underlining the need for governments to treat mental health issues as a rising problem in our schools, workplaces, and cities.



Kim Zavrotny is a licensed funeral director working in Harford County, Maryland with the McComas Funeral Homes. Born and raised in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Kim attended Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and received her AAS in Mortuary Science from Simmons Institute of Mortuary Science in Syracuse, NY. Kim serves as Vice President for the Chesapeake Professional Women's Network (CPWN), is an at-large member of both the Welcome One Emergency Shelter and Citizens Care Center, and heads the End of Life Caregiver's Group.

### **Cremation Trends**

**Facilitated by Barbara Kemmis, CANA Executive Director**



#### **Part 1: 2021 Statistics, Pet Cremation Trends**

A discussion about the profession's response to cremation trends and excess deaths and how businesses are diversifying through the addition of pet cremation—all with expert insights from leaders across the profession.

#### **Part 2: Cremation Memorialization Research**

CANA introduces the results of brand-new cremation

memorialization research. Delving into the motivations for people keeping their human and pet cremated remains in homes throughout the US and Canada, industry leaders will delve into the results of this study and what it means for cremation memorialization today and in the future.

### **Cremation and Preneed**

**John Baker and Judy Olson, National Guardian Life Insurance Company**



This presentation about cremation and preneed will explore death data from the past two years and examine how an active preneed program can increase at-need revenues.

**BIOS:** John Baker, NGL's Vice President, Strategic Partner Development, began his career in the funeral service industry nearly 30 years ago working for a family-owned funeral group. He joined NGL in 2013 and concentrates on developing and managing the Preneed sales department.



Judy Olson, Regional Vice President, Sales, has more than 10 years of experience in the insurance industry. Judy works with NGL's Marketing Partners to support their growth and business development opportunities. Prior to joining NGL in January 2008, she spent over 15 years in the financial services industry with both national and community banks where she was responsible for sales development, marketing and community relations.

### **Roundtables**

The always-popular Roundtable Session will allow attendees to spend more time diving deeper into the content presented throughout the convention. Each presenter will facilitate a roundtable on their topic, answering questions and encouraging discussion so attendees can collaborate on finding solutions and new ideas for their businesses.



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# Funeral Service Professionals Need to be Cremation Specialists

by Larry Stuart, Jr.

No matter what you think about the evolution of the North American Funeral Rite, you have to acknowledge that cremation is, and has been for some time, a major part of society's expectation of what happens when someone dies. As the demand for cremation services has increased over the past few decades, funeral professionals have responded in a variety of ways to meet their consumer's expectations. Some have even tried to divert their community's attention away from cremation, to no avail. Regardless, cremation is now fully integrated into our society's funeral ideal and shows no signs of changing anytime soon. Funeral service professionals must now add Cremation Specialist to their long litany of talents.

Most funeral service professionals don't operate cremation equipment, but thankfully, that is not required to have cremation expertise. Knowing what goes on at the crematory, by what means the decedent will travel through the process, and how your firm and the crematory assure the remains that start the journey are the same that are returned at the end will put the family's mind at rest and create a sense of comfort and confidence that their loved one is in good hands.

One doubt many have, which can be alleviated from the start, is how the decedent's identity will be confirmed, verified, and documented throughout the journey. This could be put into words during the removal or as part of the arrangement conference. Knowing and confidently clarifying both the ID process and the chain of custody protocols is good practice for a cremation professional. If you don't feel confident outlining the process, talk to your crematory operators. They can walk you through everything in detail and even if you don't have all of the steps perfectly memorized, sharing with your families that your crematory does indeed have a formal process that is followed consistently is expert-level knowledge. Most believe that cremation causes pollution. Any time something burns and heat is generated, emissions are produced, but the cremation professional takes an educated approach when answering inquiries regarding emissions and the environment. Modern cremation

equipment is designed so well that (when properly maintained and properly operated) the emissions are minimal and insignificant. The sophisticated control systems and airflow design along with the physical design of the equipment assure minimum emissions. According to environmental experts, cremation is one of the lowest sources of pollution and, because of that, isn't regulated by the US Federal EPA (but are regulated at the local level).

If one has to wait for something, they are undoubtedly going to want to know how long the wait will be. The variables involved in calculating how long it will take seem endless. How busy is the crematory at the moment? Are all of the necessary permits and authorizations in place? Is the deceased of average size or will there be extenuating circumstances that may delay the cremation? (For example, the decedent is a larger individual that will require special handling at the crematory). For the most part, if there are no barriers, the actual cremation takes between 1 and 3 hours to perform. There is also the time needed for processing and packaging the cremated remains. Keeping track of all of these variables can be cumbersome, but navigating all that is something a cremation professional does as part of their service.

Often families will have questions regarding the actual cremation process. Knowing the basics regarding how things work is not difficult. Cremation, by definition, is a thermal (mechanical or other dissolution) process that reduces deceased human or pet remains to bone-like fragments. The process also involves the further reduction of the remains via pulverization of the bone-like fragments into pieces that are usually no more than one-eighth inch. The temperatures involved range from 1400°F to 1800°F depending on the make and model of the equipment. All cremation equipment has multiple chambers that combust and re-combust what is produced during the process so the pollution that is created is eliminated before re-entering the atmosphere. For the most part, what goes back into the atmosphere is breathable, clean air.

Another important characteristic of a cremation specialist is their lack of assumption that the cremation family does not find value in more traditional funeral services. The cremation specialist knows it's their duty to help the family find the right services to honor their loved one in concert with their choice of disposition. This may be nothing more than the removal of the deceased at the place of death, curating the necessary forms and authorizations, and the actual cremation — but it may be more. It may be a full-on “traditional” funeral service complete with embalming, visitation, rosary, livery, procession, church or chapel service before the cremation, and a graveside committal service. It may be something in between. The funeral director cremation specialist is, at their very core, a funeral director regardless of the choice of disposition, and facilitates an event appropriate for their families. With any consumer transaction, the more you know about the products and services you offer, the happier your client will be. If someone wants to buy a new Ford F-150 pickup they are going to head to the Ford dealer, not the Volkswagen showroom. Value is perceived (and directly related to) the expertise of the professional facilitating the transaction and funeral service is no exception.

Larry Stuart, Jr. is the Principal and Founder at Raven Plume Consulting, President and Founder at Cremation Strategies and Consulting, and the former President at Crematory Manufacturing & Service, Inc., a leading manufacturer of technologically advanced cremation equipment. Raven Plume and Cremation Strategies help funeral professionals serve more families better by providing expert leadership, planning, organization, training, education, process improvement, and strategic planning for the funeral profession. Through outreach and transparency, Larry works to educate our professional peers, our clients, and the public about funeral service, its indispensability, its history, cultural significance, and best practices to advance the success of funeral professionals and the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of their facilities.




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# Reflections on My First Ten Years with CANA

By Barbara Kemmis

Ten years and four months ago I decided the next step in my career was to become an executive director. I started looking at job postings and stumbled across one for the Cremation Association of North America. My first reaction was to chuckle and marvel that there really is an association (or three) for any profession. I applied for the position, bombed the phone interview, aced the in-person interview and the rest is history.

Too often, we talk about how slow this profession is to advance. Looking back, however, it's been an exciting decade of change and growth for the industry and our association in particular. In 2011, CANA was 98 years young – a startup transitioning from an association management company to hiring their first association professional to take the organization to the next level. Cremation was still a threat rather than a reality for non-members. In 2021, cremation is the new tradition and other forms of disposition are clamoring for their own place. CANA's staff is some of the most dedicated in the business, continuing to evolve our offerings to meet the needs of members and the entire profession. I can see how much I have learned and continue to learn. Here are ten reflections on cremation and CANA in 2021 compared to 2011:

## 1.) CREMATION IS MAINSTREAM

In 2011, CANA was the primary cremation education provider and I was routinely told by well-known thought leaders that cremation was irrelevant and a fad. Others were angry about the growing adoption of cremation and accused CANA of destroying their businesses. Cremation was still considered to be a fringe disposition to be feared or ignored.

“Cremation is taking food out of my children's mouths!” expressed a tipsy monument dealer at one of my first professional meetings in fall 2011. I didn't take this personally at the time, and he later apologized, but I soon learned that cremation had a greater negative impact on cemeteries and memorial suppliers than other types of businesses. That impact continues, but even then, there were opportunities going unexplored.

If cremation is the opposite of casketed burial, as consumers seem to understand it, then traditions linked to burial are often viewed as disconnected to cremation. Why then were cemeteries largely offering burial for cremated remains as the only permanent placement option? Why were the companies building and selling monuments and mausoleums avoiding building columbaria? When I asked these questions early on in my career, I heard variations on the theme that these are business decisions.

Now it is clear that cremation is a persistent trend and all types of CANA members are aware of that and eager to explore how it can grow their businesses. Today's business decisions incorporate cremation in planning and product development. Those previous era's thought leaders are largely retired or have changed their tune. We have all learned a lot.

## 2.) CANA'S BRAND IS MORE THAN CREMATORY OPERATIONS

“I don't own or operate a crematory, so I don't belong to CANA,” was the common response I received when pitching CANA membership. And it was true, CANA was and is the market leader in crematory operations training and expertise. I learned how to answer questions posed by members and regulators alike. Funeral directors were fielding questions from families choosing cremation and needed to learn more about the technical process to respond with accurate and valuable information.

Membership has tripled over the past decade and the growth is among businesses without crematories. They join CANA to learn how to increase profitability and learn strategies to better serve grieving families beyond the basic (though all-important) crematory operations.

## 3.) CREMATION ADOPTION IS 100% CONSUMER DRIVEN

Since 2011, the cremation rate has grown from 63.1% to 73.1% in Canada and from 42.2% to more than 56.1% in the U.S. — almost a 15% increase. I wish that the five CANA staff members and I could claim

that we move the cremation rate forward. That would be a remarkable accomplishment. Rather we, like you, are focused on keeping up with and reporting consumer preferences and trends. The more we understand, the better we can bridge the growing disconnect and mistrust between death care professionals and the public. I am proud that we have created a website with cremation memorialization material that helps consumers make decisions and is so valued.

#### **4.) CANA RESEARCH IS THE MOST ACCURATE AND RELIABLE OUT THERE**

Research is my favorite part of the job. I am a librarian by training and I love helping CANA members find information that helps them. But when I am asked the same question more than a few times, I see a research opportunity. CANA is best known for its rock-solid cremation trend analysis and projections. Building on that reputation, we are expanding into more consumer research with our recent Cremation Insights report and some exciting projects planned for the coming years.

#### **5.) CANA, THE MEMBERSHIP ASSOCIATION, IS STRONGER THAN EVER**

In the macro world of professional and trade associations, membership is decreasing (as is attendance at conventions). With social media and “free” information online, more people are choosing not to affiliate with an association, but seek connections elsewhere. CANA bucks these trends with a +95% member retention rate and attracting more than 100 new members a year.

Fundamentally, associations reflect their member’s challenges and successes. Associations must change and adapt to meet these needs. For example, CANA responded to the growing adoption of online education by creating an online version of its Crematory Operations Certification Program (COCP) in 2017. By 2019, more operators were certified online than in person for convenience and accessibility reasons, but all received the same training and content. I am grateful that CANA’s education offerings are diversified. Building on that success, we offer CE courses, webinars, and professional development online – we’re investing to make CANA Education available anywhere.

Trends like consolidation, business closure and briefer attention spans are real challenges for all associations that CANA addresses head on.

#### **6.) BOTH/AND IS OUR NEW REALITY**

This term may be unfamiliar to you, but “both/and” is the concept that when new technologies or products come along, you must add those to existing offerings without dropping anything. CANA members are definitely facing this challenge. Most continue to serve casketed burial families as well as cremation, but the proportion of each type of death call has likely flipped. Or perhaps the proportion of calls received via a website versus the brick-and-mortar funeral home has reversed. Cemeteries are making significant capital investments in cremation product options, while still supporting casketed burials. And the increased desire for personalization is another layer of creating new traditions for families who are choosing cremation for the first time.

#### **7.) THE CREMATION CONTINUUM HAS SHIFTED**

A decade ago, as I was analyzing CANA member records and meeting members, the majority of members had multiple brands. The brand that was primarily cremation-focused was often the business that held the CANA membership. All funeral service providers could support cremation consumers, and many funeral homes had added “& Cremation Services” to their business names. Generally speaking, cremation societies were largely considered to be “bottom feeders” by their traditional, brick-and-mortar competitors. Advertising on price was a newer, controversial concept. Fast forward to a world where many CANA members retain their Funeral Home and Cremation Society, and have added an online brand as well. The goal of this diversification is meeting cremation consumers where they are and offering a variety of options. This trend is true for the national, publicly traded members as well as regional or local providers. Advertising on price is widely accepted and expected for the value brands, whereas the service-oriented brands tend to promote personalization and excellent service. Cremation consumers have more choices in service providers than ever.

#### **8.) THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM PERSISTS**

The assumption that cremation consumers choose cremation for the lowest price persists and it is damaging to our profession. Very few businesses can survive, much less thrive, on the volume necessary to support low prices. There are low-cost providers in nearly every market already, but emphasis on market share is

crucial.

Low income and poor families don't default to cremation because of price. They crowd source funeral funding for the disposition they want, or, sadly, they abandon their loved one. Indigent deaths are on the rise and that is the result of a complete lack of funding for an unexpected death. Assumptions are creating more distance from the consumer and add to misunderstandings.

### 9.) CREMATION IS THE NEW TRADITION

In May 2019, CANA and Homesteaders Life Company conducted joint research on the cremation experience. This research resulted in 7 key insights, but our first critical lesson was when designing the research. We contracted with focus group research centers to create groups for us divided into Direct Cremation and Cremation with Service groups. We defined Direct Cremation as people who chose cremation and did nothing, conducting no services. The contact called us back and said they had hundreds of potential participants in our focus groups who chose cremation and were willing to talk about their experience, but they couldn't find any Direct Cremation consumers. The mistake we made was defining Direct Cremation as doing nothing, when we meant doing nothing with a cremation provider.

People who choose cremation always do something—the question is whether they view the funeral director as an expert to help them create new traditions, or as a body handler. This is my primary question as I face the next decade.

### 10.) CREMATION IS PREPARATION FOR MEMORIALIZATION

CANA has believed that for over 100 years and CANA members agree to the Code of Cremation Practice as a condition of membership. Promoting permanent placement, ceremony and all the other aspects that memorialization supports continues to be our challenge and opportunity. That monument dealer, who adjusted his model and is still in business, was correct, in part. We are fighting against consumer resistance to memorialization and permanent placement, but it is a fight worth winning.

Ten years ago, I joked that I was the executive director of a 100-year-old start-up, but that is the culture I have attempted to maintain over the past decade. CANA is

progressive and committed to creating and delivering content that supports our members and promotes ethical, transformative cremation experiences. I am still learning every day and the staff and I always appreciate your feedback, questions and suggestions.

This work is hard and requires imagination, reliable data to make decisions and collaboration. I hope you will join me in raising a glass to my first ten years with CANA and all we have accomplished together!

October 17, 2021 was 10-years to the day that Barbara started as Executive Director of CANA. Join the staff and board in celebrating and congratulating Barbara and the whole association on the achievements of the last decade. There's no end to the celebration in October: wish her a Happy Birthday October 24th!

Barbara Kemmis, CAE is Executive Director of the Cremation Association of North America, where she promotes all things cremation through member programs, education and strategic partnerships. After more than 20 years of experience in association leadership, Barbara knows that bringing people together to advance common goals is not only fun, but the most effective strategy to get things done.

Barbara has served two prior professions as the Director of Member Services at the American Theological Library Association and Vice President of Library and Nonprofit Services at the Donors Forum (now Forefront). Barbara earned a master's degree in library science from Dominican University, a graduate certificate in nonprofit management from North Park University and a B.A. from Earlham College. In 2021, Barbara earned the Certified Association Executive credential in recognition for her expertise and experience.





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# Online Shopping: Impacts and Options



Data show that online shopping and purchases increased during the pandemic, but this trend is not new. CANA is curious about how online shopping has impacted deathcare-related businesses, the trends owners and managers are keeping an eye on, and where industry professionals see it going in the future. We queried a few practitioners who offer online shopping options and suppliers who provide the platforms to ask for their observations and recommendations for their industry peers who are considering options for the online shopping market.

## **BEN FARNSTROM, FOUNDATION PARTNERS GROUP**



Sales of merchandise and ancillary items are improving for our locations using the e-commerce/online process. Online shopping gives families more time to review, design and discuss their plans outside the funeral home, which benefits families and increases merchandise sales.

Foundation Partners Group's experience with online shopping is similar to that of other industries. The funeral industry had to make a number of radical changes to serve families during the pandemic and, for many funeral service operators, online shopping was one of them. However, online shopping for funeral services and merchandise was not entirely new for us since we began rolling out at-need and preneed e-commerce solutions in late 2018, well before the pandemic. In fact, Foundation Partners began offering virtual selection rooms at some locations nine years ago.

What is new for all is that the utilization of online shopping has increased tremendously as a result of the restrictions put on face-to-face meetings during the pandemic. Our local team members' primary focus remains on serving families and making sure they are aware of all the options available to them—whether it's in person, virtual, or self-service through our websites.

Online arrangements and merchandise selection seem to alleviate some of the stress families experience when making at-need arrangements. It's an emotional experience and knowing they have the time and luxury to make decisions from the comfort of their homes is a big benefit for many families.

As an example, we recently served a family that opted to go 100 percent virtual for all of their arrangements via our e-commerce portal at [www.oregoncremation.com](http://www.oregoncremation.com). The family selected the cremation service and the merchandise they wanted from their home, surrounded by family members. They purchased an urn for their dad and selected some ancillary items for family members. Within a few days, they contacted our funeral home and asked if they could order additional items for their mom, who had passed away two years earlier. They logged back into our online store and ordered a new urn for Mom and keepsakes to match Dad's. This example illustrates the value of giving families the freedom to shop in their own space, in their own time. It not only helped this family create the perfect memorial for both parents, but also resulted in increased sales for the service provider.

Most funeral service providers should be adding e-commerce capabilities as consumers are beginning to expect it from all companies they do business with. I believe it will be an important channel and the simple way of the future. My recommendation would be to add online options but be careful not to lose focus on offering personal and compassionate service to families. This is still a high-touch interaction. It's important to remember that moving to self-service arrangements also requires establishing new processes, from digital document handling to providing the information and assurances to families that their loved ones are being cared for appropriately. Setting up an e-commerce solution on your own can be daunting, but experienced industry partners like eFuneral and Parting Pro can help guide you. An online store is just a convenient way for a family to personalize a once-in-a-lifetime purchase for a very special person. Online shopping also translates into reduced labor costs for funeral service business owners and higher average sales on cremation packages.

Online shopping has been a game changer. It has proven we still can offer a high level of service at the time and pace families desire. Whether they shop online or come into our arrangement and selection rooms, we still maintain effective and efficient communication with the family—via email, phone and, more recently, text as well. Adapting and responding to the needs of funeral industry consumers are crucial to customer service and business success.

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*Ben Farnstrom is vice president of business development for Foundation Partners Group. A 25-year funeral industry veteran, he joined Foundation Partners as Western Area vice president of operations in 2016. Ben is the son of funeral home owners, and he began his career in 1997 when he co-founded and served as vice president of Central Mortuary Services in Salem, Oregon. He graduated mortuary school in 2002 and, along with his brother, bought and grew the family mortuary business in Independence, Oregon, to three locations and co-created and established the Care Cremation Society. When they sold the business in 2012, Ben joined SCI in the San Francisco Bay Area as a location leader and rose to area general manager before moving to Foundation Partners.*

## SANDRA WALKER, FAIRMOUNT MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION



We launched our online option for families March of 2020. There is some truth to families making higher dollar amount purchases online. Our families are selecting more than the minimum in most instances. Online selection allows the family the convenience of time to really think about what it is they want.

In general, people do not want to be sold to. In my experience with families in the arrangement room, they come in with the assumption that we are

trying to sell to them or take advantage of them. The online option gives families total control. It also eliminates the influence of whatever beliefs the funeral director holds about his or her role in the decision-making process for what the families select.

Online shopping eliminates the in-person arrangement process. We primarily follow up to firm up the details that were submitted online and complete the cremation authorization form based on our statutes here in Washington State. In the sessions I have arranged, I have found the process to be very efficient. Convenience and ease are what our families are finding.

I don't know that the overall experience for our customers in person vs. online is different. We care for and are attentive to all our customers, regardless of the mode of arranging. The online purchasing program is extremely successful with our pre-planning customers. Those who purchase online are typically the cremation customers.

It helps us know what the customer wants before we meet with them. Almost two years into this, we have not gotten a complaint about the process yet. Our goal with all our customers is to shorten as much time between having their loved ones brought into our care and returning their cremated remains to them.

I recommend understanding what your business needs are and who your consumers are and what you are hoping to accomplish with this option. The technology required is what the consumer needs to access the Internet and the online portal, such as computers and smart phones. Do a majority of your clients have access to phones and computers and the Internet? Is the portal you are using easy and user friendly? If you have multiple locations, I would test for any improvements with one location first.

As stated previously, online shopping really cuts time in the in-person arrangement conference. As far as the timeline for permanent memorialization, it's based on other factors typically associated with doctor's signing off on death certificates, getting proper authorization, etc.

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*Sandra Walker is a licensed Funeral Director and Life Insurance agent in the States of Washington and Idaho. She is currently Vice President of Strategic Business for Fairmount Memorial Association in Spokane, WA, and current President of the Washington Cemetery Crematory Funeral Association. Sandra also sits on the CANA Board of Directors.*

## RYAN WISEMAN, PORTER FUNERAL HOME



In my experience, we have seen sales continue to be very similar at this time for online purchases vs. face-to-face arrangements with a funeral director. Numerous families complete arrangements online and then add on to their purchase, such as buying an urn or keepsakes when they come in to meet with a director and pick up their loved one's urn.

However, we find that when a family is planning for a traditional funeral or a cremation with a memorial service,

most still prefer to meet in person with a funeral director, due to the many available options and the questions a family might have.

When the family completes arrangements online, it does shorten the amount of face-to-face time they spend with a funeral director. The family can work at their own pace when completing the arrangements online. Families we are working with today also come in more educated about what their options are and what is available. Many of the people we are working with have seen information online—some of which is correct and some of which is not accurate—that we as funeral professionals help address and correct.

When a family is completing an arrangement online, our customer service has changed when compared to face-to-face arrangements. Families still have a lot of questions when arranging online and will call or email us to find answers. These questions or concerns would normally be addressed in person, face-to-face with a director.

As a funeral provider you have to make sure you are answering their emails or calls in a timely matter. In my experience the family will move on to another provider very quickly if they aren't getting the information they are looking for. The families we have helped who have completed online arrangements have been very pleased with the process. Most families assumed they would have to come in to handle these arrangements in person, and were pleased when they found out everything could be accomplished online.

If a funeral provider is going to add online arrangements to their website, they need to make sure the program is as user-friendly as possible. The steps the customer will need to complete the arrangements must be made as clear as possible and the whole experience should move quickly. We have found that the longer the online process, the more quickly people are to get frustrated and fail to complete the arrangements online. Because a majority of families complete their shopping arrangements from a smart phone or tablet, you want to make sure your website is optimized to support mobile devices or tablets vs. having the website setup only for desktop viewing.

*continued on page 10*



**Foundation Partners Group**  
4901 Vineland Road, Suite 300  
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## MARC & JANICE BRUSIE

BRUSIE FUNERAL HOMES  
AND CEMETERIES

We almost sold our business a few years ago, but the process was a struggle and the deal fell through at the last minute. In hindsight, it was the best thing that could have happened for us. Once we started working with Foundation Partners, it was an entirely different experience since their values and mission closely aligned with our own. They genuinely cared about what was important to us – the continuation of our legacy and ensuring our staff will be well taken care of and provided opportunities to grow. We didn't sell to someone who is only interested in our business for a profit. We sold to someone like us – funeral home owners who care about families and the communities they serve.

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I believe online arrangements have provided another option for families who want to make funeral or cremation arrangements in their own time frame. Instead of setting a precise appointment for meeting with a director, they can complete the steps when they are ready.

The families we serve are often spread throughout the United States. Online arrangements allow families who are not geographically close the convenience to access all of the information online.

We have had families who have purchased urns or keepsakes several weeks—or even years—after their loved one has passed away. At the time of their loved one's passing they weren't ready to make any permanent memorization purchases, but when they are ready, the options they are looking for are all online for them to see.

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*Ryan Wiseman is a funeral director for Porter Funeral Home in Kansas City and Lenexa, KS. He graduated from Kansas State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and is a 2004 Graduate of Kansas City Kansas Community College with an Associates Degree in Mortuary Science. A CANA Board Member since 2018, Ryan is married with three children.*

## LUKE FRIEBERG, eFUNERAL



eFuneral started as the only company to enable funeral homes to sell preneed online. Our digital sales and lead generation platform is the first of its kind. While many of our competitors focus on at-need arrangements or preneed lead generation, we can take any consumer—at-need or preneed—through a guided, step-by-step experience that allows them to shop, select and purchase their arrangement online.

This experience also generates a large volume of high-quality leads for providers to follow up with and close at an efficient rate. But, most importantly, we work to take the burden off providers and their staff with online solutions like eSign by eFuneral—the ability to send and sign unique documents to finalize a sale—giving them more time to support families when they're needed the most.

Our primary focus is, and has always been, on how we can help funeral providers help more families in their community by tapping into an audience who may feel more comfortable starting—and many times, completing—the funeral arrangement process online.

Online shopping has become a necessity in the era of COVID-19, forcing every generation to adapt to technology. Every relevant report on online shopping behaviors tells us there is a certain expectation consumers have toward brands regarding accessibility and availability no matter what industry you're in or service you provide. If you can provide them with the relevant information when and where they want, it helps build their confidence in the process, and they will trust you and purchase from you without hesitation. We continue to be a leading sales

tool for online arrangements and are continuously developing new tools for funeral homes to leverage preneed sales onsite as well.

The past year and half proved our solutions help funeral homes generate more sales, as we went from \$1.1 million in total funeral sales in 2019 to \$13.1 million sold through October 2021. The biggest thing we've found is that the eFuneral platform helps our partners capture sales they otherwise wouldn't have. We see these results in our \$250 million in funerals quoted—our platform, when combined with our trusted funeral home partners, gauges where a consumer is at in the buying cycle and educates them on the arrangement process. Even if a customer doesn't finish their online arrangement, the eFuneral tool still allows them to review their options and come into the funeral home more prepared.

As we grow and develop new solutions, we always keep an eye on the data and create everything with our funeral home partners in mind: driving sales for their funeral home and freeing their staff to do what they do best—serve their families.

---

*Luke Friberg is President of eFuneral. Dubbed "the Face of the Digital Consumer" in the funeral profession by KB Publications, Luke has spent almost two decades specializing in digital transformation by helping companies of all sizes leverage proven digital solutions to reach their customers. For the last five years, Luke and his team at eFuneral have been focused on providing best-in-class solutions for their funeral providers to connect with the families through a truly innovative, full-service e-commerce platform, helping more than 70,000 families since the beginning of 2020.*

## BILL WILLIAMS, FSI



Our product is different because our platform will begin with service selections and end with a choice of final disposition. The platforms we have seen start with a series of questions that begin with, "Do you want burial or cremation?" or something along those lines. Our product begins with questions that lead the customer to the various service options that are available no matter what type of final disposition will ultimately occur.

We are constantly listening to our clients to see exactly what it is they want. Our clients have seen the upward trend in people shopping for and buying funerals online. Of course, the pandemic drove customers to the Internet because face-to-face funeral arrangements were not possible. Now, as consumers are more comfortable with e-commerce, they are more likely to shop for funeral services from their homes. We want to meet those consumers where they are and offer them more options than just direct cremation.

There is an assumption that consumers only want to buy direct cremations online because those packages require little in the way of choices to make; thus, their sale is easy. But our research shows that the same consumers will choose cremation **along**

*with* many other services when the service choices are offered effectively.

What we're building for our clients is a platform on which the consumer can be educated about the types of services available, no matter the choice of final disposition. And, once educated, the client can make the preneed arrangements on the platform—which includes properly funding the trust pursuant to state law.

To date, the most effective online sellers sell direct cremation services. Face-to-face, those same sellers sell services and cremations. The reason: online offerings are limited, face-to-face offerings are not.

We want to change that. It is our goal to enable sellers to offer their customers well packaged and presented service options that will increase their per call sale. Online sales don't have to be just the least expensive sales. 

*Bill Williams is president and CEO of Funeral Services Inc. (FSI) and serves on FSI's Board of Directors as vice chair. He joined FSI in 2001 as vice president. He was named president in 2003. Under his leadership, FSI has expanded to offer services in more than two dozen states. Williams has experience in every aspect of the funeral service profession, including ownership and management of funeral homes and cemeteries. He began his career in the deathcare industry when he became a licensed funeral director in 1980. He is a graduate of Gupton-Jones College of Mortuary Science in Atlanta, Georgia.*

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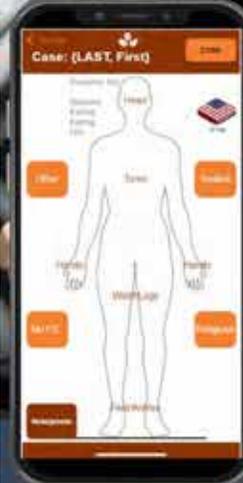
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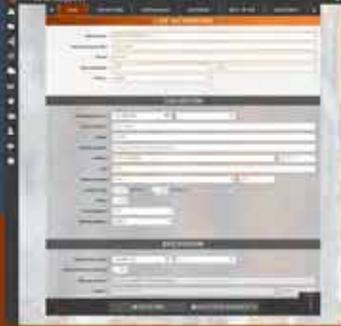
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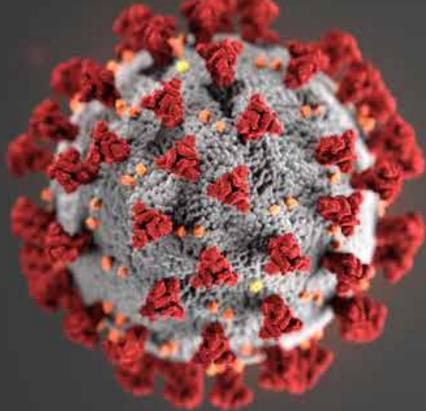
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# Cremation & Coronavirus

By Joe Weigel

Think back to when you realized that the desire for cremation by families was not a fad and going away soon, but rather a consumer trend that would only increase in the future. In his best-selling book, *The Tipping Point*, journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell claims that for any idea or social behavior to cross the threshold of becoming a trend, it must have the “stickiness factor.” According to Gladwell, the stickiness factor is “the quality that compels people to pay close, sustained attention to a concept, or idea.” Additionally, trends can achieve “critical mass” once someone of influence in the industry helps drive the trend by “lending their clout”.

For cremation – some folks, including myself – believe this happened once Batesville Casket launched Options by Batesville twenty-five years ago. At that time, I was the Options’ first marketing director for this endeavor. This fact has afforded me a bird’s eye view to follow the cremation trend.

In my view, funeral service has worked hard over the years to “crawl out of the hole” caused by cremation societies and their promotion of simple, direct cremations. People smarter than me have offered up best practices and proven methodologies to help move families from direct cremation to cremation with meaningful services. And while cremation as the final means of disposition continues to grow, funeral professionals have been adapting their businesses to a world where more families chose cremation over burial for their loved ones. Here in 2022, things were looking up. The profession would not face death by cremation!

But then, two years ago, we came face to face with COVID-19 and many things changed in funeral service – with some of them related to cremation. As we now begin to emerge from the pandemic, should we now sound the death knell? I think not if we take steps

to adapt to new consumer wants and needs that have been brought about by the coronavirus.

First, let’s take a look at what happened as a result of the pandemic. For example, funeral service has seen over the last two years:

- an explosion in live streaming for funerals
- the start of drive-by visitation services
- a return to direct burials (and increase in direct cremations)
- a surge in remote/online funeral arrangements
- a growing interest in pre-need planning
- a renewed desire for online funeral pricing

With these facts in hand, what should we do moving forward? What steps can we take to meet the needs of families in the face of the “new norm”?

## Live Streaming

Have you thought about how you could use your live streaming capabilities for families who choose cremation? If you have an on-site crematory, perhaps the families would like to have the “ceremony” for their loved one live-streamed. And what about live streaming the memorial service for those who cannot attend in person?

## Direct Burials and Direct Cremations

As a result of the pandemic, direct dispositions rose. In many cases, these actions were driven by government mandates on public gatherings and not consumer desires. As these restrictions are relaxed, these families need to be re-contacted. Consider sending a nice letter to the family that suggests a memorial service. In many cases, this option may have been discussed during the arrangement and this letter can serve as a reminder to contact your firm to schedule the event. And let them know you can live stream the service for

those who cannot be there in person.

### **Remote Funeral Arrangements**

In the coming months, families choosing cremation (and burial) may appreciate the fact that they can now make the funeral arrangements remotely. Research has long indicated that one of the factors in choosing cremation over burial is simplicity. The ability to plan a funeral online will appeal to this desire for simplicity by “cremation” families and also appreciated by “burial” families, given the fact that those making the arrangement may be scattered all over the globe. Now is the time to ensure your website and overall operations are best equipped to handle remote arrangements.

### **Pre Need Planning**

As we emerge from sheltering at home, folks will take stock of what they learned over the past six months. Many will hear of the challenges their families and friends faced when dealing with the death of a loved one during the pandemic. COVID-19 may be the tipping point for consumers now to make their funeral plans. A personal letter to those you have served or a series of social media posts can remind families of the benefits of pre-arranging a funeral. And your funeral home can allow this to happen from the comfort of their home thanks to your updated website with remote arrangement capabilities.

### **On-Line Funeral Pricing**

When planning a funeral – either at-need or preneed – or making any online transaction, a consumer needs to know the prices of what they are selecting. If you haven’t already, now is the time to seriously consider posting your prices on your website. But be sure to describe what the product or service is and what role it plays in the funeral process.

As you ponder the above five topics, consider how this should impact your website. For example, does your website have an entire section devoted to facilities? Not that this is no longer important, but if a growing number of your families start making arrangements online and the use of live streaming increases, just how important is all that information on your arrangement offices, your lounge, and your parking lot that offers more than 100 parking spaces? I would make sure that the website showcases your staff and the state-of-the-art technology platforms and services you offer in addition to your facilities.

Now is the time to reach out to your families to educate them on all of these different services you offer. If you are hesitant, that’s certainly understandable. Another of my clients who provides marketing analytics in the utility sector had the same reluctance on communicating with their customers.

What my client did was field a research survey with consumers regarding communications during and after a pandemic. What they found is that consumers want to hear about services that are beneficial and impact them and their loved ones. And it didn’t matter when this messaging occur – during or after a pandemic.

The pandemic has been a stimulus that thrust our profession ahead by more than a decade overnight. No one could have seen the instant transformation of the funeral profession coming so quickly, but it’s here. What was once the norm to have a family sit in your arrangement office for hours going over the specific details of every detail of the arrangement has been replaced with

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As the COVID-19 passes, the need for technology is here to stay. It never can--nor should--replace the relationships you have with your families. But technology can be a connection, joining you when physical contact is impossible, helping to make sure that you can continue providing comfort and peace of mind no matter what the future holds, and helping you grow your business.

Cremation – and for that matter coronavirus – will not be the death of funeral service. Like so many other professions, failing to meet the needs of consumers will bring about its demise.

Joe Weigel is the owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing, a marketing firm that delivers expertise and results across three interrelated disciplines: strategy, branding, and communications. You can visit his website at [weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com](http://weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com). He can be reached by phone at 317-608-8914 or by email at [weigelstrategicmarketing@gmail.com](mailto:weigelstrategicmarketing@gmail.com).

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# Three Steps to Create a Website That Markets Your Cremation Business

by Jenny Goldade

To find client families for your cremation business, you need to invest in your online presence, starting with your website. Your website is an extension of your funeral home that can market your products and services 24/7.

Follow these three steps to create an enticing website that brings more families through your doors.

## 1. Showcase Your Offerings and What Makes You Unique

To show families what you have to offer and how you stand out from the rest, add this information to your website.

### **Mention Your Cremation Products and Services**

Share what service types you offer, such as direct cremation, traditional funeral services, and celebrations of life. For each type, write a brief description so families better understand them. Also include information about your cremation products, such as urns and jewelry.

### **Include Your General Price List (GPL)**

Being open about the costs builds trust. If the prices aren't definite, let them know you're willing to work with them. The GPL can at least give them a starting point. You may also want to link to your funeral payment options, such as crowdfunding or life insurance assignments.

### **Share Educational Resources About Cremation**

Sharing educational resources establishes your firm as a reliable resource. These are a few resources that you can start with.

1. Regularly update your website's blog. A few topic ideas are cremation funeral planning, tips for attending a funeral, and advice for grief and memorialization.
2. Build an FAQ hub by asking your employees what questions they hear the most. By including those in your hub, you save your staff time while still educating your families.
3. Explain in basic terms how cremation works and the reasons why someone may choose it. This gives people



valuable insight to decide if cremation is the right disposition option for them.

4. Have a resources page with downloadable resources about cremation funeral planning, such as a how-to guide to plan and personalize a cremation funeral and a preplanning checklist.

5. Ask for testimonials to showcase families who chose cremation and had a positive experience working with you. You also should have a form for people to submit their own testimonials.

### **Describe What Makes You Unique**

Your firm's unique offerings could be an innovative product or service, a special way you personalize each service, your knowledgeable employees, or anything else your families can't find elsewhere. If you're not sure what your unique selling point is, research your competition. Visit their websites to gain a better understanding of their brand. Then, you can better determine what makes your firm unique.

### **Don't Forget About Calls-to-Action (CTAs)**

To easily track interest coming from your website, write

clear CTAs paired with contact forms. CTA stands for “call to action.” A typical CTA looks like a clickable button on your website with a snippet of text on it, like “Learn More” or “Start Now” or “Contact Us.” For example, your cremation-related blog post could have a “Download Now” CTA on it offering a how-to guide on planning a service after a cremation. Your webpages about cremation funeral planning could have CTAs for beginning preneed or at-need funeral planning with your firm.

## 2. Don't Forget About Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

After updating your website content, you're not done yet. To make sure your website is found by more families, you need to optimize it for the web. By following SEO best practices, your website is more likely to show up higher on search engine results pages (SERPs).

Remember that many people researching funeral homes in your area are from out of town. If they don't live in the same city as the deceased, they're going to take to the internet to find what they need. That's why it's so important to have an effective SEO strategy in place.

It's best to work with an SEO expert to develop a personalized plan for your firm. In the meantime, these are a few SEO basics that you can start with.

### Have a Responsive Design

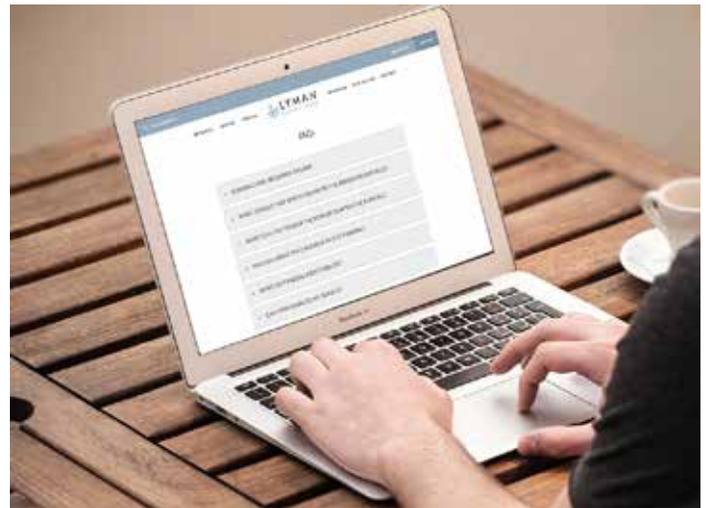
Responsive design simply means your website adapts to whatever device the visitor is using, such as a laptop, phone, or tablet. Search engines like Google prefer websites with user-friendly designs and responsiveness is a key ingredient in user-friendliness. If your website isn't optimized for the mobile experience, this can hurt your SEO.

### Regularly Update Your Content

Regularly publishing and updating content can boost your SEO. Your blog is a good place to start. For blog topics, ask your staff for common questions they hear families ask. These topics can make great blogs. Several people should proofread your blog posts, since spelling and grammar errors can damage your SEO. Also remove spam comments that can hurt your SEO and credibility.

### Add Links

Add external and internal links to your website content. Internal links go to pages within your website,



while external links go to other relevant websites. Before linking to a website, make sure it's reliable and secure. Also make sure to regularly update any broken links.

### Use an SSL Certificate

SSL certificates keep your data safe, but they also boost your SEO. Search engines prefer websites with secure connections, because they don't want to direct people to unsafe websites. Many search engines include padlock symbols that clearly show if a website is secure or not.

### Optimize Your Meta Data

Meta data describes the content on a webpage. A few examples of meta data are meta titles and descriptions and keywords. Your meta titles and descriptions are what appear on SERPs, so you want to make sure it accurately describes the page content and includes keywords.

Your keywords should be related to cremation and your products and services. Along with your meta titles and descriptions, include them in your webpage headings and body copy, but don't overstuff them. Instead, use variations of your keywords rather than repeating the same keywords multiple times.

## 3. Link Back to Your Website in Your Marketing Materials

To get more traffic to your website, you should link to it in your marketing materials and other reputable sources. This way, you're taking your potential client families to your website where they can explore your products, services, and educational content. These are just a few ways to get people back to your website.

## Post on Social Media

Include links back to your funeral home's website in your social media posts. For example, you could share the link to your latest blog post and write a brief description that makes people curious to click and read it to learn more. Don't forget to update your social media pages' about sections with your website link as well.

## Send Newsletters and Email Series

To get people to your website, utilize your newsletter to share your blog posts, guides, and other educational resources. You also can send email series tailored to topics like preplanning. For example, after someone downloads your guide, that could automatically trigger an email series with related resources. The last email could link to your preplanning form to get started.

## Publish Online Ads

Online advertising is another way to get more website visits. For example, you could showcase your cremation-related resources, products, and services. One place to start with is Facebook. For just a few dollars a day, you can boost your posts on your Facebook Page's timeline to reach more people, or you can create ads that allow for even more customization.

## Put Links in Your Educational Resources

Before you publish your blog posts, make sure to include some internal links. These could be links to other blog posts or pages on your website. Your how-to guides, checklists, and any other downloadable resources should have internal links as well. This keeps people clicking through your website and exploring what you have to offer.

## Write Guest Articles

Writing guest articles is an easy way to get links back to your website from reputable sources. Reach out to funeral professionals and local businesses to see if they'd be open to publishing a guest blog post from you on their website. A few people and places to start with are grief counselors, funeral profession influencers, funeral technology providers, and mortuary schools.

## Let Your Website Find Cremation Leads for You

By following these three steps, your website can act like an additional employee for your funeral home and find more cremation leads for you. First, include website content that showcases your services and what makes you unique. Next, optimize that content for

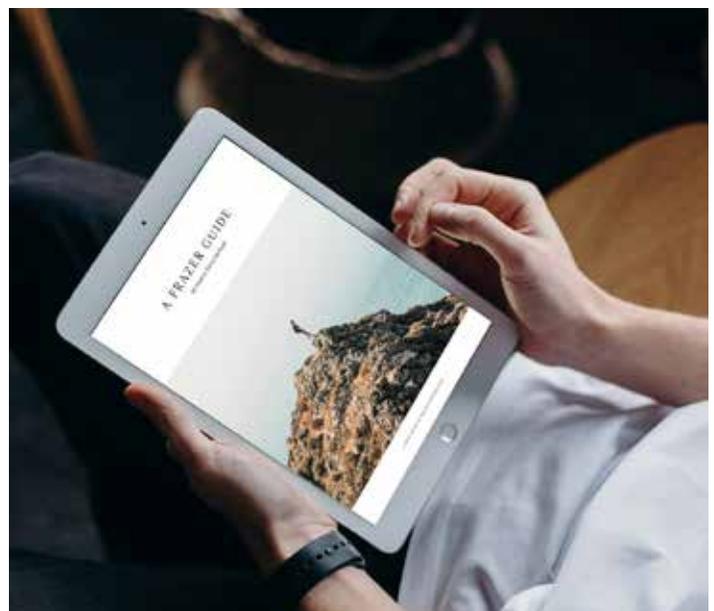


SEO. Finally, incorporate your website links into your marketing to bring more people to your website.

## About the Author

For the past five years, Jenny Goldade has been writing and learning about the funeral profession as the Senior Content Specialist at Frazer Consultants, a funeral technology company that specializes in website design, personalization software, and more. She writes articles, guides, and other resources to give funeral directors the tools they need to be successful.

When Jenny is not writing, she spends time with her family, has board game nights with friends, and takes her family's dog Rosie for walks. She also enjoys reading mystery novels, making crafts, and baking all kinds of cookies.



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# With Cremation It's Always Best to Anticipate!

by Larry Stuart, Jr.

When I tackle a project, no matter what it is, I always try to remember to anticipate problems that could occur in the hopes of avoiding them. “Anticipate” is sort of a mantra for me. Those of you who know me personally know I can be a bit obsessive at times. But being obsessive with performing cremations can avoid a litany of issues. Performing a pre-operation checklist before each and every case is a sure-fire way to anticipate any potential hiccups in the process and correct them before it's too late.

Even before you start the process of retrieving the decedent and checking paperwork, open the loading door to your cremator and make sure there is no one still in there. Yes, it sounds inane but I've heard stories of operators that have left a cremation to complete overnight and the morning shift operator, the next morning, inserts a new case before removing the cremated remains from the night before. Not only is this co-mingling of remains illegal, but it is also something that should be disclosed to the families of the deceased. You do not want to be the persona that has to have that conversation.

Also always make sure there is a cremated remains tray in place before you begin a cremation. There is nothing dignified or respectful in sweeping someone onto the floor after a cremation. This happens more often than you would think.

There is also value in taking a few seconds to inspect the general condition of the refractory materials prior to beginning a new cremation. Many things could have happened during the previous case that caused damage to the refractory. It is always better to check than to discover halfway through the next case that a wall or other structure has collapsed. Now you will have to interrupt the cycle and remove a half cremated body along with bricks. Yes, this is possibly a worst-case scenario, but it has happened. A quick look can avoid a potential disaster.

It's now time to retrieve the next case and begin the

actual cremation process. The most important thing to keep in mind here is to make sure you are cremating the correct body. Identification is just as much the responsibility of the crematory operator as it is the funeral director. The operator is the last line of defense and the last chance to get it right. Remember, cremation is irreversible and if you cremate the wrong body, you could be committing an error that could affect the grieving family adversely for years. Not to mention you will likely lose your job and even get up close and intimate with a bevy of high-priced lawyers.

Obviously, the crematory operator is not likely to know what the decedents are supposed to look like or be able to tell the difference between similar cases, but if the paperwork states the decedent is one Gladys R. Jones, Caucasian, 98 years old, 105 pounds, that died of natural causes and you have a very old, thin white lady in the container, you can be as confident as you can be. But if something does not match, you must stop and confirm. (note that if it is not allowed at your facility or by law in your area for you to open the container to inspect the remains for cremation, you must follow the rules) If everything matches scrutinize the container for any items that can't be cremated, remove them, and proceed with the next step, purge.

A purge cycle is built into all modern equipment manufactured in the last 30+ years or so. This cycle simply re-circulates the air in the interior chambers of the cremator with fresh outside air to assure that there is no residual gas present before you or the system ignites the secondary burner. This cycle runs approximately 3 minutes (and while waiting for it to finish can seem like 3 hours!) but it is important not to bypass it. We all know what happens when we take too long to light the gas grille with the gas building up. Multiply that by thousands and you get the idea. This feature may seem redundant with all of the safety features built-in with the modern cremator design, but nothing is foolproof. Three minutes is not that long to wait to assure your safety.

After the purge cycle is completed the system will allow you to ignite the secondary burner (or the system will ignite it automatically depending on your control system). Preheating the secondary chamber before igniting the case in the main chamber is necessary for pollution control. The secondary chamber will, through heat and combustion, destroy the pollution produced in the main chamber. (Think smoke, flame, and odor) This re-combustion and destruction cannot happen without the proper temperature in the secondary chamber and the result will be smoke and pollution exiting the stack of the unit. As you can guess, the secondary chamber is where all of the magic happens in modern cremation equipment to assure clean emissions.

These “pre cremation” steps, when completed prior to every cremation, can reduce the chance of something bad happening. Thankfully, the chances are small to begin with but a responsible cremationist always goes one step further to anticipate and mitigate risks to personal safety, the environment, and the dignity of the deceased in their care.

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## INDUSTRY NEWS

### Cremation Strategies & Consulting Expands and Changes Name

Tulsa, OK (March 21, 2022) – In this climate of ever-changing consumer demand for, and expectations of funeral service professionals, Cremation Strategies & Consulting is expanding its professional service offerings to better fulfill its mission of helping funeral service professionals serve more families, better. Also, to change the perception that the consultancy is only for cremation professionals, Cremation Strategies will be also be known as Raven Plume Consulting.

By sharing knowledge, expertise, and revolutionary approaches to marketing, Raven Plume is Changing the Way People Think of Funeral Service. The Age of Cremation doesn't mean the Age of Cremation Only and through outreach and transparency, we are working to educate our professional peers, our clients, and the public about funeral service, its indispensability, its history, cultural significance, and best practices.

Raven Plume Consulting is staffed with experts within and outside of the funeral profession and will now offer the professional consulting services of an advertising graphic designer, a certified automated marketing expert, a seasoned human resources executive, three licensed funeral directors, a funeral service author and educator, and an embalming and reconstructive expert. Raven Plume has also strategically allied with key organizations within the profession to facilitate delivering valuable assistance in areas that most funeral service professionals find challenging,

Larry Stuart, Jr., Founder, and Principal at Raven Plume states, "More than a few of Cremation Strategies & Consulting clients wanted guidance beyond my competencies so it was an easy decision to scale. Not only did I bring in outside talent where needed, I even broadened my own skill set by enrolling in and successfully completing a digital marketing certification. Our profession has not taken advantage of innovative and available strategies, and we intend to change that." About Raven Plume Consulting

Raven Plume Consulting provides customized solutions to increase client satisfaction, call volume, employee retention, operational efficiency, environmental



responsibility, risk mitigation, and public perception of funeral service and its value to society.

Because of its black plumage, its eerie croaking call, and the fact that it prefers to eat the decaying flesh of already dead animals, the raven is often associated with death and bad luck. However, its symbolism is complex. As a talking bird, the raven also represents prophecy and insight.

Throughout folklore, ravens often act as spirit guides of souls from the living world to the realm of the dead. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss offered the theory that suggests the raven obtained mythic status because it was a mediator animal between life and death.

A plume of smoke, dust, fire, or water is a large quantity of it that rises into the air in a column. Although an undesirable event in our profession, especially with respect to cremation, we include it not to normalize it, but to remind us of the ever-present risk inherent with the lack of strong policies, procedures, and operational best practices.

A plume is also a large, soft bird's feather. In most mythologies and folklores, the feather is associated with the purity of the heart and soul.

Larry Stuart, Jr.  
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# The History, Value, and Benefit of Funeral Flowers

Part I of a II Part Series

By Todd W. Van Beck

## I. Introduction:

Most of us in the funeral profession have been there—the headache of funeral flowers. Not to be negative, but I used to get very frustrated with the responsibility of handling funeral flowers. The routine always seemed the same. I would have on a new suit and when transporting flowers, I always damaged my suit either with water, that green mushy stuff they position the flowers in, the flower pollen stains or from my own blood when my fingers got stuck by the sharp wire mesh to which they hook the flowers.

Then, of course, there was the flower pedal challenge: flower pedals in the garage, in the funeral coach, in the station wagon, in the visitation room, in the chapel, on the steps of the church, down the aisle of the church, all around the church, along the route to the grave and all around the grave. I spend a tremendous amount of my time as a funeral director picking up flower pedals and hiding them in my suit pockets. The dry cleaner always knew my suits because my pockets overflowed with dried up flower pedals!

There were flower pedals everywhere on funerals. It seemed to me as if the great big mums had a secret explosive device in them—planted by angry, vengeful florists—that would detonate simply by a funeral director looking at them. Wham, boom – 10,000 mum pedals on the floor and two minutes before the service was to begin to boot!

Of course, this attitude was one of immaturity and limited vision on my part, for I was unaware and ignorant of the importance of funeral flowers. I was ignorant of the history, development and benefit of flowers. This article was written to help correct my deficiencies concerning this subject. The hope is that this information will help other funeral professionals.

## II. The Oldest Activity:

The oldest tribute, the oldest form of memorialization, the oldest act of mourning is the arrangement and placement of flowers around the dead. This ancient ac-



tivity was well documented by Dr. Ralph Solecki in his famous excavation in the Shandiar Cave in Northern Iraq.

In 1951 Dr. Solecki discovered several burial sites in the Shandiar Cave. Eventually his discovery would gain entrance into the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest form of religious activity in human burial. In any event, during Solecki's archeological dig, he submitted soil samples from each grave to Mme. Arlette Leroi-Gourhan, a paleobotanist from Paris, France, for pollen analysis. Under her microscope, she found pollen and flower fragments from at least 8 species of flowers. These flowers represented mainly small, brightly-colored wildflowers. She recognized relatives of the grape hyacinth, bachelor's-button, hollyhock and a yellow-flowering groundsel. Mme. Leroi-Gourhan declared that the burials took place 62,000 B.C. and that it was no accident of nature that the pollen was deposited so deep in the cave. Neither birds nor animals could have carried flowers in such a manner in the first place and, in the second place, they could not possibly have deposited them directly on a burial site. Therefore, she concluded that someone 62,000 years ago had roamed the mountainside in the mournful task of collecting flowers for a funeral tribute.

## III. In a Flower Garden

Throughout the ages, humankind has equated death with sleep and this repose, or sleep, was usually in a garden full of flowers. "May God receive all our souls

among his holy flowers,” Turpin (“Song of Roland”) asks God over the bodies of his barons. Similarly the ancient figure of Roland prays that “He will let them lie in holy flowers.” This ancient verse contains both aspects of the condition that followed death, namely lying down or the sleep without sensation, and holy flowers or the garden in bloom. The garden of flowers equated into visions of paradise in olden times, the images of “cool meadows” of Virgil’s “Elysium, “watered by steams” or from the garden that the Koran promised to believers.

If paradise was full of flowers and meadows, in ancient thought Hell was the opposite. In Homer’s Hades there was neither garden nor flowers. Hades—at least the Hades of “Book XI” of the Odyssey—also makes quite clear the absence of floral or any pastoral comforts.

The Prayer Book of Serapion, the Greco-Egyptian liturgical text from the middle of the 4th century, contains this prayer for the dead, “May his spirit rest in a green and tranquil place.”

Thus the words designating paradise are all related to one central concept: the cool garden with an abun-

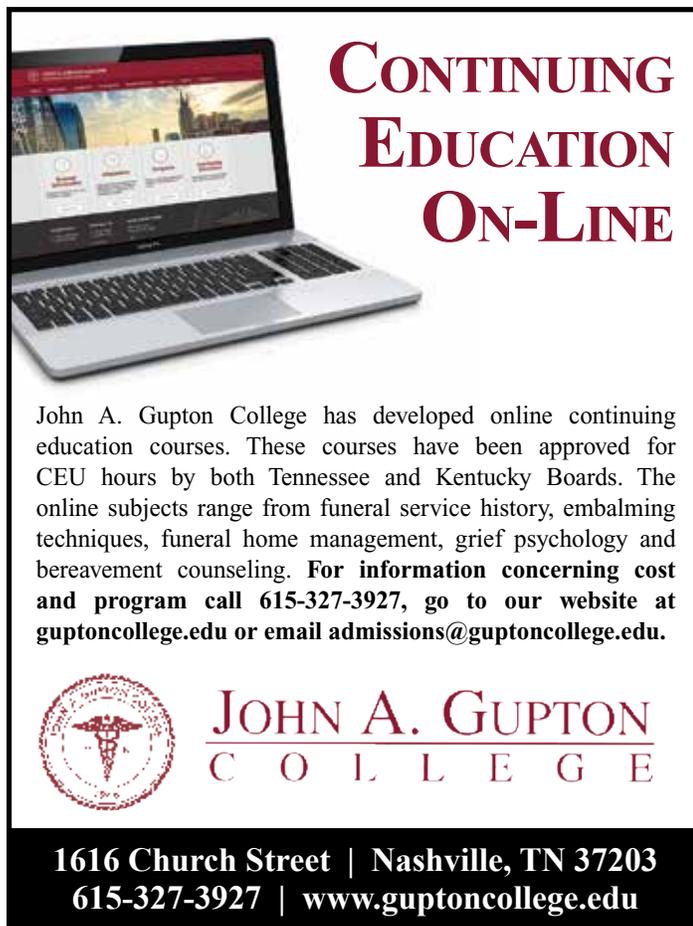
dance of flowers. As we will see shortly, the funeral pro-fession of the early and mid-20th century identified closely with this floral imagery.

Nowhere in the influential thinking of Western Civilization was the ideal of linking paradise with the garden more prevalent than in the burial of Jesus Christ. Jesus was entombed in a garden, pure and simple. Our cemeteries today often resemble a garden concept like the one where Jesus was entombed. Today people value the floral concept of the pastoral scenes of death in contrast to the mass burials that were witnessed in Nazi Germany. The power of the idea of death being linked to flowers is still easily identifiable.

#### IV. Symbolism and Flowers

Through history, flowers have been used to symbolize almost every aspect of the life cycle, from birth through death. In death, flowers are used to symbolize how the beauty of creation is temporary and, as sure as the flower must be cut from the stem, so it is with life—we all, too, must have our life cut from the stem, so to speak.

Flowers also have a particular aesthetic value in the



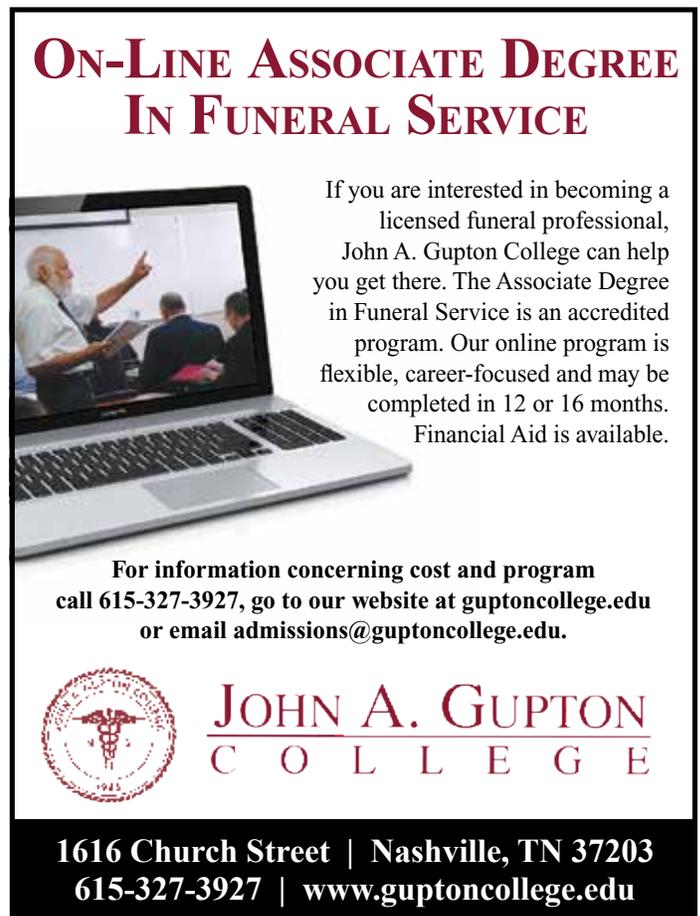
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face of death, for the beauty of the flower helps balance our emotional response to the sharp contrast of the perceived ugliness of death. Flowers help soften the raw data imagery that death leaves with survivors.

The fragility of life is also symbolized by a flower. Flowers, to be healthy, require the proper condition to grow and expand – just like human beings.

And finally, the color of flowers has a specific symbolism, particularly in religious thought.

A. A purple flower is a symbol of penitence and royalty. This floral color is used during the preparatory and penitential seasons of Advent and Lent.

B. A white flower is the symbol of joyous and celebrative color of light. This floral color is used during the festive seasons of Christmas and Easter, and on high days during ordinary times.

C. A green flower is the symbol of nature in the freshness of growth – hence our green cemeteries. This floral color is used, except on high days, during ordinary times, the seasons after Epiphany Pentecost.

D. A red flower is the symbol of fire and blood, and is used on the Day of Pentecost and on other special occasions when the work of the Holy Spirit or the blood of Christ or of martyrs is being commemorated.

E. A black flower is the symbol used for Good Friday, though red flowers are also sometimes used.

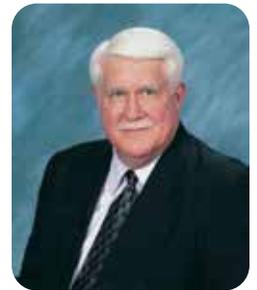
Flowers, as we have just discussed, help the person think in symbolic terms, which is the way that much of the information concerning death is communicated

### V. Practical Use of Flowers

From time immemorial, flowers were used to control the offensiveness and obnoxiousness of body decomposition. No doubt this was part of the reason that flowers were used in the Shandiar Cave burials so many centuries ago.

One of the most famous funerals where flowers were used to mask the odor of decomposition occurred in 1874 when President Andrew Johnson was buried. His body was not embalmed, and by the day of the funeral, his body was in such a foul condition that undertaker Lazarus C. Shepard closed the casket and heaped loads of fragrant flowers on top and around the burial receptacle. The fragrance of the flowers hid the odor long enough for the funeral to take place.

*Todd lives in Nashville, TN with his wife, Georgia. He is the Dean of the College of Funeral Management at the University of Memphis. He is a Certified Funeral Service Practitioner and a member of the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice, a Certified Embalmer, the author of 4 books, 400 professional articles. He is associated with John A. Gupton College.*



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## INDUSTRY NEWS

### New Family Texting Solution Set to Transform Funeral Home Communication

ASD's NEXT STEP Text™ allows funeral homes to immediately provide important resources to families via text message.

Media, PA—ASD – Answering Service for Directors recently launched a new feature to help facilitate communication between funeral professionals and at-need families. When handling a new first call from a family member, ASD will now offer to send the caller a text message from the funeral home that includes the next steps families can expect in the funeral planning process. This new solution, known as the NEXT STEP Text™, will allow funeral homes to position themselves as a resource to families from their very first call.

Building a connection with families begins at the first moment of contact. Frequently, family members will have many questions and concerns on their mind while they are waiting for a return call. ASD created its NEXT STEP Text™ solution to provide families with a valuable resource they can focus on while waiting to speak to a funeral director. The text can be customized to include a link to any page on the funeral home website.

“The time that occurs between ASD handling a death call and the on-call funeral director returning their call may be of a short duration, but a lot can happen in those few minutes. Having the ability to immediately send a text message with valuable information to that family demonstrates a higher level of customer care,” says ASD Vice President and Family-Member Owner, Kevin Czachor. “The great thing about our NEXT STEP Text™ is funeral directors don't have to do a thing on their end. It is built into our telephone systems and completely effortless for the funeral home. ASD is the only answering service in operation that has the training and technology in place to be able to offer this service.”

In addition to immediately providing families with helpful information, the NEXT STEP Text™ also opens a new channel of communication for the funeral



home. By initiating contact via text, this feature reinforces the funeral home's commitment to customer service by giving families multiple ways to interact with the firm. In addition, ASD's complementary MobileFH Texting® feature makes it possible for funeral professionals to send and receive text messages on their cell phone using the funeral home's main phone number. This means that any replies from the family to the NEXT STEP Text™ will be logged within the ASD Mobile app and sent directly to the on-call funeral director.

ASD is providing its NEXT STEP Text™ feature at no cost to help funeral professionals better serve families and their communities. The company is also in the process of developing several complementary features to

its new NEXT STEP Text™ solution. ASD aims to work closely with funeral homes who are interested in this service to help them to create a text message strategy that works for their firm. There are numerous ways this technology can be utilized such as texting the funeral home's GPL to callers who need prices or sending a link to the FAQ page when family members have general questions. In the future, ASD also hopes to develop a solution for texting the funeral home's preneed literature to callers who express an interest in prearrangements.

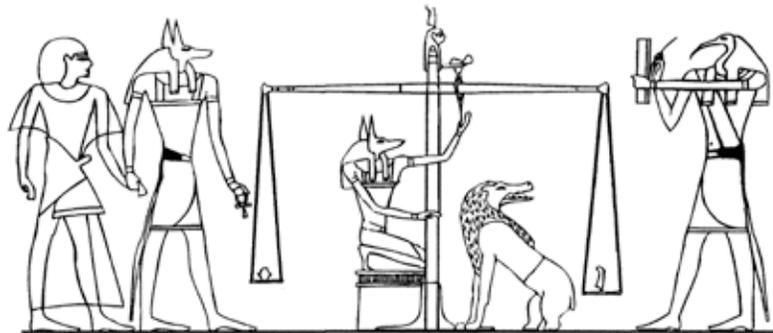
#### About ASD

ASD – Answering Service for Directors has created a new class of answering service for the funeral profession. Family owned and operated since 1972, ASD blends state-of-the-art technology with an extensive, 6-month training program focusing on compassionate care. The company's custom-built communication systems and sophisticated mobile tools were designed solely to meet the needs of funeral professionals. By offering funeral directors unmatched protection for their calls, ASD has redefined the role of an answering service for funeral homes. For more information, visit [www.myASD.com](http://www.myASD.com) or call 1-800-868-9950.

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