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Education Issue



The Future of the Profession - Is It Really Very Different From the Past? By Elli Morris

John A. Gupton Student Essays by Andrea Snow & Samantha Poiner

Jefferson State Community College Student Essays by Debra Cochran, LaKeitha Seroyer and Jason Barrow

Embracing Hospice: Benefits of Optimizing Palliative Care by: Hannah M. Burns

ClearPoint Federal Bank & Trust Celebrates 25th Anniversary: Company Marks Milestone with a Pledge to Education

John A. Gupton College Alumni Reunion Summary + Photos Mortuary College Listings

Batesville Starts New Chapter of Growth with LongRange Capital, Chris Trainor Named CEO of Batesville

Reflections by Duey Formally Launched: Themed Lifestyle Murals Add Unique Personalization to Any Funeral Service

Strategic Funeral Resources Introduces Social Media Programs, Company Announces Four Packages That Deliver Personalization at a Low Price Point

Remembering Glenn McMillen, Past NFDA President

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“Develop success from failures. Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success.” —Dale Carnegie



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Southern Funeral Director Magazine[®]

P.O. Box 768152
 Roswell, GA 30076



John W. Yopp
 Publisher/Editor
 404-312-6640
 johnyopp3@aol.com



Joe Weigel
 Associate Editor
 joseph.weigel@gmail.com



Kathy A. Guillory
 Graphics/Art Director
 kathyakopov@gmail.com

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Education in 2023

by John Yopp

“Education” is our feature for this special issue of Southern Funeral Directors Magazine. The funeral profession already has a shortage of licensed funeral directors and embalmers and the much discussed national exam only has a 58%-60% pass rate. Yet, our profession is needed now, more than ever, to minister to the families during these post pandemic and rising homicide and suicide rates.

Special thanks to SFD’s Elli Morris for her in-depth article, “The Future of the Profession - Is It Really Very Different From the Past?” Elli addresses some of the core issues we face everyday as well as the multiple number of questions we have that seem to have very little answers. 2023 will bring more changes, but will these changes be more positive or negative to our industry? Only time will tell! SFD always welcomes and supports all Mortuary Colleges and are delighted to

have John A. Gupton send us a couple of “Student Essays” from Andrea Snow and Samantha Poiner.

Also, Jefferson State Community College was gracious enough to have additional “Student Essays” from Debra Cochran, who at the age of 67, is retired, was a school teacher, wife of 48 years, mom of 3 sons, assistant in their funeral home and active grand mother, and now full time mortuary college student. Plus, additional thanks to Jefferson State’s, LaKeitha Seroyer and Jason Barrow, for their time and effort in submitting their view of the funeral profession from a student’s point of view.

We also appreciate Hannah Burns, sharing her passion for the profession and writing an article “Embracing Hospice - Benefits of Optimizing Palliative Care”

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The Future of the Profession - Is It Really Very Different From the Past?

By Elli Morris

The funeral profession has been around, in a variety of fashions, since time immemorial. What's the best route to ensure this essential service remains a thriving business into the future? Do nothing? Simply let the profession reflect culture as it always has? Proactively address the recent downward passing trends in mortuary schools? Set aside individual differences, needs, egos, and state politics to establish healthy long-term goals for sustainable businesses? Or, since this article attempts a brief undertaking of mortuary school concerns, is the answer D, all of the above?

Does the funeral profession perceive problems?

Option one: The funeral profession always has been a reflection of society. The funeral profession is not going to hell in a handbasket.

Option two: If the grades are not up to par, if the students are not passing the exams, if people are not going into the business, that's a reflection of serious problems.

What are the key issues?

1) There is a shortage of people going into the funeral profession.

More students are enrolled in mortuary school than in the past but there remains a shortage of funeral home employees. Even though last year might be the highest enrollment ever, the profession is still lacking people taking positions in the field. Why? Is the funeral profession suffering from the same ails as other fields? Homes used to find good employees, grow them in the field, then send them to school. But that route takes time. Plus, nowadays, people are not beholden to one job or location. They look for more money at other homes. The corporations just want arrangers and someone to work, they do not need to grow someone into a management position. Job-hopping is going on in every profession. Nowadays, people change jobs frequently. The lack of employees is not new - the profession always suffered from a lack of employees. In

addition, funeral service has never been considered an attractive line of work.

Or, is there a deeper issue to be examined? It used to be that students had experience, they had worked in a home or grew up working in a family home. That experience meant they knew something about the profession. That has changed. Now, some students do not know about funeral service at all. They take classes thinking it would be a good career without any real foundational knowledge of the job. They have expectations of fewer hours, even a 9-5 job they can leave, but that's not how funeral service works. Often, it is low pay. It comes with stressful hours and directors have to be on call a couple of nights a week. It is very difficult to compare a career in the funeral profession with anything else on earth. The subject matter is so specialized and the subject of death is so disconcerting for so many people. The issue of death anxiety has become more acute as time has gone by, and the culture has not gotten more mature.

Alternatively, some say young people that come to the profession are not looking at employability but following an inner calling. They have a mission, a universal commitment to ethically care for the dead and compassionately care for the living. Even so, it's difficult for schools to prepare students for the day-to-day reality of funeral service work. This leads to disenchantment with the prospect of using their degree.

Additionally, those who did grow up in the profession don't want the life they saw their parents' lead. They may not want to miss their kids' school plays or recitals or athletic games as their parents did. The next generation is intentionally choosing to not go into the field.

2) National exam passage rates have been falling for the last decade.

Most states require passing the exam to practice in the



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field. Passage rates have gone down steadily for years. People in the profession are complaining that the test is keeping students from going into the profession. Last year, 2021, there were 1269 first-time takers for the arts exam (the exam is broken into arts and science.) The national passage rate was 68%. For science, there were 1267 takers and the passage was 57%. That's terrible! In 2020, the arts passage rate was 73%, science 64%, which is still not good. In 2008, the arts rate was 80%, and science was 79.8%. It's not a good trend. Those statistics alone should let us know that something is wrong.

The American Board comes up with what has to be taught; The Conference states what will be tested; and funeral homes are saying here's what we want. Lots of egos are involved in the "way it should be" and it gets all tangled up. Ultimately, it's a volatile situation but graduation simply gives one a learner's permit, not keys to the kingdom. A license is not synonymous with success at all.

There are numerous potential reasons for the low rates. Blame is going all around.

College accreditation used to be connected to student examination passage rates. Schools currently have high enrollment numbers but how many are graduating? And how many are passing the required exams to get licensed for work? In the past, some schools wouldn't certify students if they knew they wouldn't be able to pass the national exam. That potentially kept their accreditation rates artificially high.

Some people say that schools are not teaching the right material. Alternatively, people say the national board is not asking questions about the material being taught. But the test writers have the textbooks the school programs use, the approved textbooks, and the curriculum from the American Board which sets the science programs. There's a lot of effort, oversight, time, and money that goes into developing the exam. The test writers have to prove the material being assessed is in the textbook and show it is in the curriculum. But they aren't funeral directors, they are just test-confirmers. The test writers are trying to be more transparent but the question is "about what?" The students say the questions are not worded in a way that makes sense. The exam questions have become more and more scenario-oriented. The problem with that approach is it gets into judgment calls and not necessarily facts.

But, again are the low passage rates simply a reflection of the culture? When students who cannot read attend school, that's not the mortuary school's doing. When they get a student who's not mature enough to see that not everything is fair, that isn't on the mortuary school. Decades ago, people were failing the exam and they may have had to take the exam six times before they pass. Failure rate and determination are consistent issues with the national exam.

A separate issue with the low passage rates has resulted in desperate measures - cheating. Schools have been caught harvesting questions - they gave the answers to the next round of exam takers. As a result, the American Academy (???) discredited students for 2 years even though some of the students were already licensed. Lots of funeral homes around the New York school had employees that had been licensed but suddenly their employees no longer were. But, wasn't it the school that should have been discredited? The school didn't lose accreditation.

3) No national standard for licensed funeral directors
There is a national board exam, not a national license, but some states do not accept the national exam. Now, in the 21st century, it begs the question of why? After all, people don't die that differently in Utah than in Florida. For decades, there have been communication breaches, territorial boundaries, and egos wrapped up in this idea of licensing. Are the problems better or worse than they used to be? Or, rather than say it's better than how bad it was back in the "good ole boy days", wouldn't it be better to ask, "how good can the profession become?"

One response to the low passage rates is states are saying they will have their own exam, just like they offer a state lawyers exam. This attitude has two potentially major problems: 1) The Conference spends thousands of dollars on the national exam to ensure the accuracy and legitimacy of the test; States do not have that kind of money. 2) If a licensed professional decides to move to a different state, they would no longer be licensed to work. Depending on the state where they move to, they might have to go back to get an associate degree, complete an additional apprenticeship, and they might have to become an embalmer.

Would they return to school to learn the new state requirements? Or are they effectively trapped working

in the state where they passed the state exam? The disparity between states can be great. For example, to be a funeral director in South Carolina, one only needs an associate degree and time as an apprenticeship, with no exam of any kind. In Kentucky, one only needs to be a high school graduate. In Georgia, one has to have both the embalmer license and funeral license to be a funeral director. The employee shortage is driving the discussion that says you don't need to be an embalmer, but that negates the education requirement, so are they really saying employees don't need the education? Schools need to be sure they tell students their license only works in that state.

It's like a stool with three legs – the schools are educating ever more students, the conference test passage is down, and funeral directors are saying, 'I just need someone out here.' So that's why states are developing their own exams. They're saying, 'Let's find a good person who can talk to people for the funeral director and we can find someone else to do the embalming.' But if we want to be professional we have to have some standards. We can't back up to the way it used to be, when people worked one year then they were licensed.

That approach cheapens what all the licensed directors have – they went to school, did apprenticeships, passed the exam, and got the license. Essentially, the states are saying let's lower the standards.

More importantly, by simply making it easier to get a license, we are not addressing the root causes. One major cause is the stool's three legs are not communicating, which is what's needed to get all three in better shape. This takes us back to the problem of egos.

The burden of multiple state licensing protocols does not simply fall on the licensed professional. States themselves can suffer the fallout. This "unlikely" scenario played out during the height of COVID-19. Recall the crisis in New York City with unprecedented rates of mortality - and a resulting lack of capacity to handle the crisis. New York City funeral directors were begging for help and out-of-state embalmers were eager to step in. But, only New York-licensed embalmers were allowed to work in New York. National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) went to Congress to request a federal injunction to relieve the exhausted New York embalmers. It took a literal act of Congress for a



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cohesive national approach to mortuary needs. How is the current state-by-state approach harming its directors and the families they aim to serve?

Key Questions, No Answers

Perhaps the most effective way to get a deeper, more engaged conversation happening is to toss out some questions in hopes that those in the profession can create a path moving forward. Here's a short list: Who needs to be involved? What actions does the funeral profession need to take? Are there serious concerns for funeral homeowners? What attitudes can be shifted and adjusted? What are the next steps forward? What can the profession look like in the future?

Ultimately, the number of people involved will be how many answers there are. But a combination of approaches would probably help the profession directly confront the concerns. A wise place to start is to get the major players in a room with a facilitator so all parties feel like they are giving more and taking less. Proactive decisions can be made only by becoming aware of the problems. It isn't simply a matter of throwing our hands up and saying, "Whatever will be will be" but

it is important to fully incorporate external influences such as the culture. By incorporating those into the next steps, the profession is more likely to be of assistance to the students entering the profession and also set the funeral service on a healthy track for the future. Whatever the approach, it must be worked through; there is no magic dust.

Elli Morris would like to thank Patty Hutcheson and Todd Van Beck for contributing their expertise to this article.

If you pulled phrases out of a hat that describe Elli Morris' life, you might draw: environmental filmmaker, world traveler, professional photographer, whitewater kayak instructor, dancing with movie stars, public speaker, journalist, Queen of Mardi Gras, award-winning book author, whitewater Stand Up Paddleboarder, USFS Wilderness Ranger, Sustainability Coordinator, and Master of Forestry from NAU class of 2022. She continues her interest in journalism through contributions to Southern Funeral Director.



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John A. Gupton Student Essays

Student Essay by Andrea Snow

It took me a little longer in my life until I understood what my purpose in life was. In the age of 55 I finally understood my purpose is to serve bereaved families and to be able to prepare the deceased for their last journey here on earth. And that is what I was meant to do.

I have learned that a funeral director's professionalism and standards will always be the highest in any industry. I was able to witness a service during covid, only 8 members of the closest family were able to attend. For friends and the more distant family a life stream was offered.

The daughters of the deceased had a tight budget but the funeral home would work with them to create a beautiful and respectful service. The deceased was disabled and received benefits and had a small insurance that would help paying for the costs.

They chose a casket, even though the final disposal would have been a cremation. There has been only a small flower arrangement with the favorite flowers of the deceased. Most of the forms about personal things of the deceased were available to complete online.

Their deceased mom was not embalmed, and no official visitation was set up, but the daughters were able to visit their mom before the casket was closed for the service. This would help to get closure. They put Roses in her hand and handwritten letters with last words and promises for their mom. They prayed and cried at their mother's open casket.

A minister would lead the service with prayers and the family would have the opportunity to share their beautiful memories of the deceased. Then the funeral home played the deceased's favorite songs. After the last song was played, a velvet curtain would close in front of the casket, and the casket was transported out to the building to the crematory while the family stayed and prayed.

The funeral home worked with the daughters and arranged a very memorable service. Even though the budget was small, the service, planned with the help of the funeral director and her staff, was beautiful, respectful, and memorable.

But there are people out there who think that the profession of funeral directing is something everybody can do. I witnessed another funeral where the deceased person was a great Christian person and Jesus was the center of her life.

She also was so very loved and many people would have loved to say their farewell. The surviving spouse was not able to decide regarding the funeral services. The grandchild took it upon herself to do the planning. Her first decision was to get her grandmother directly cremated without the possibility of the family saying their goodbyes. The cremation took place 2 days after the deceased was brought to the funeral home. But no one would come to visit her or to dress her. She was wrapped in sheets only. The family did not even show up for the cremation.

The grandchild then told the funeral director, that she would not need their service any longer and took over. She thought that the profession of a funeral director does not require any skills, and anybody can do it. I noticed that the memorial service was the opposite of the deceased's reflection of her life. It was not even a celebration of her life.

Even though the deceased was a very religious person, her grandchild didn't want a minister or clergy to lead through the service. There have been no prayers offered as well.

Unfortunately, the deceased's grandchild is not the only one who thinks that funeral director and embalmer do not need any special skills.

But these two funerals, the first with the help of a funeral directors respectful and carefully planning, and the second funeral without the help of the funeral home shows a great difference and proves the skills of the fu-

neral director and the passion to serve makes a service memorable, respectful and loving.

Some people do not realize that our professionalism and standards will always be the highest in any industry.

In our current economy cremation can be challenging, since funeral directors are still expected to deliver a \$10,000 worth service for a cremation worth \$2500.

Our economy has been very challenging in the past few years. First, we had to cope with Covid, which has changed the funeral service extremely.

During the Pandemic in 2020 funeral directors had to plan funerals respecting the rules of social distancing. Which meant that only a small number of mourners were allowed to attend the funeral at one time the service, which had to be private and only immediate family members could be present.

Friends and members of the community virtually attended the ceremony from their computer or phone using the option of web casting and livestreaming.

This method became popular and in the time of the


pandemic a necessity.

Funerals required new considerations since the virus. Funeral directors are doing their best to help families to celebrate a loved one's life with the dignity and respect the person deserves even during the pandemic.

The pandemic changed the funeral industry has changed because of the virus. Even now after Covid has slowed down, there are still online guest books and life stream or web casts available. Funeral directors are still facing challenges by being expected to deliver high profile services for less expenses.


It is important to educate families on how the body disposal method of cremation can be successfully merged with the emotional closure and the chance to bid the deceased farewell; afforded by a funeral service

The customization of service packages is based on an understanding of what families want. Communication of the value of services to families of the deceased. They need to understand the service offered and how it serves to pay homage and celebrate the life of the deceased. Communication of value through a web-



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site; especially for clients that do not walk through the doors inquiring about their services.

Cremations are less expensive than funerals, which is an important aspect of the economy for most people. Even an inexpensive direct cremation can have a beautiful ceremony to celebrate the deceased's life. That day of his or her celebration of life should be only about them in the most respectful and loving way.

The first and most important thing for a funeral director is to respectfully plan the service according to the deceased and the family's wishes. That is more important than the money consideration. The funeral director's role can't be understated. First and foremost, their role is one of providing compassionate support and advice on all aspects of arranging a funeral while ensuring everything is managed on the bereaved family's behalf to the highest professional standards.

A good funeral director needs to have great listening and communication skills, knowledge of traditions and costumes, creativity, and counseling skills in order to provide service of the highest standard and to help the families to get closure. A funeral director should be willing to serve in the most compassionate, loving, and respectful way.

I feel I have been called to be a funeral director and embalmer. As an embalmer, I will have the honor to prepare the deceased for their last journey here on earth and to allow the bereaved family to get closure by being able to see their loved one a last time before their final disposal. This last time seeing will help to understand that death had occurred, and they can now say their farewells and be able to have a healthy mourning phase.

As a funeral director, I will have the privilege to work with the bereaved families, to help create a memorable service in the most ethical and respectful way. I also will be able to help with anything they need, for example completing forms, advising if they are not sure what are their options, offer or directing them where to get counseling.

Funeral directors will meet bereaved families in the most painful time of their lives. Their emotions will be raw and real. We need to listen to them more than we talk to serve them, the most efficient way to create

a memorable service according to the wishes of the deceased and their families.

To be a funeral director will make me feel like being able to hold someone's hand and usher them through the funeral process. It will create a feeling like making a difference in the world. And to be able to care for their deceased loved one is a true privilege that not many people get to have in their lives.

Andrea Snow - Bio

I was born and raised in a little historical town in Germany, called Eschwege. I worked as a Tailor for about 30 years in Germany and later in Scotland, where I lived for about 15 years. In 2007, I met my husband, who is from New York, got married and became a US Citizen in February 2019. I love to travel and saw almost all countries in Europe, but my favorite Journey was my travel to Egypt. I love the Egyptian History especially the art, knowledge and technique of the ancient Egyptian priests to preserve bodies, which has always fascinated me. I worked in Security and for almost 10 years I have been a Special Response Officer.



We also have 2 beautiful German Shepherds, Atlas R and Aurora R, who are family to us. They keep us occupied since our 5 daughters moved out and have their own families. I have only 1 younger sister who still lives in Scotland. She works with mentally disabled patients by going into their houses and takes care of them. She also took care of our mom until mom passed away. My sister's strength and her unconditional love for family and friends are very inspirational and remind me to never give up. My beautiful sister is my hero.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of John A. Gupton College is to provide a basic liberal arts education as well as a professional curriculum in funeral arts and sciences. The course of study leads to the Associate of Arts Degree, the Associate of Applied Science Degree or a Funeral Director Certificate. The liberal arts component is equally designed to serve as the foundation for the pursuit of other degrees.



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John A. Gupton Student Essays

Essay by Samantha Poiner

Jason Momoa once said, “If you are in a small town somewhere and you can go and visit Paris, you can go to the top of Everest, that is just cool. It is worth it because you become more educated in something.” That is exactly what it felt like for me when I found out I was accepted to John A. Gupton College. Being born into a small town was one of the biggest blessings in my life for many reasons, but it also presented some challenges. The main one was education opportunities. Almost no one from Martin ever left, and if you did leave, you never went far, and it was typically to pursue a better nursing school. No one ever talked about mortuary school, and it was especially never advertised. If anyone ever mentioned the idea of mortuary school, you were immediately an outcast. The only logical reason for anyone in the area wanting to attend mortuary school was to follow in the family’s footsteps. Rightfully so, when I announced to my mother and grandmother that I had decided to pursue this profession, they were shocked.

It was unheard of for a young woman from the middle of nowhere to move to the city and get involved with something so “grotesque and morbid.” Lucky for me, I had an incredibly supportive family and soon begin to seek opportunities for an apprenticeship position. In the county there were only three funeral homes, none of them would even consider hiring a young woman. I met Marc on a fluke, and he opened the door for me. He offered to take me under his wing and be my mentor. He and the rest of the staff at Karnes and Son never made me question if I was in the right place. During my interview with Marc and his wife Angela, he asked me what I felt to be the most important question of all, “Why? Why did you choose this profession? Why is this where you want to be? Everyone has a reason, what is yours?” There are many reasons why one might choose funeral service, and usually it can fall into two categories, you have a personal pull, or you are simply curious. I began to recount to him that when I was twelve years old, my grandfather passed away very suddenly, he was everything to all of us. I remember how kind the funeral directors were when

they arrived at our home, and during the entire process. When we arrived at the funeral home to see him for the first time, he looked like he was asleep. It was almost magic. He went from being in his pajamas to having a suit and tie on, his hands were resting on his chest, and he looked so peaceful. They gave him back to us, and because of what they did, we were able to have peace. I want to do that; I want to give that back. During the entire process of attempting to find an apprentice position, no one had ever taken the time to ask what Marc did. No one cared about the end goal of becoming a licensed funeral professional. I had an older director tell me one time that even if I were to obtain my license, no one would ever take me seriously, solely due to the fact that I am a woman. It should not be this difficult. I was lucky enough to find someone who was willing to teach me, mentor me, and encourage me as a professional. It will be wonderful when the day finally comes that a woman can walk into a “man’s world” and genuinely care about the future of funeral service, not just the here and now.


I have only been working in funeral service for about three years and I am by no means a veteran in the field, but even in those short three years, there have been several changes. The world is so fast paced, and the world of funeral service is no different. It seems as if now, in most cases, it is almost a competition to see how fast people can get things done. Technology has helped in that way, but as a society we are becoming dependent on it. In some funeral homes a computer screen tells you when you have permission to embalm or dress a deceased.

Computers formulate obituaries and some arrangements are made solely online, and no face-to-face communication is done until the day of the service. In some circumstances that is a wonderful thing, it makes things so much easier, but in most, it takes the creativity out of designing a funeral service. How long until we have computers telling us what embalming fluid to use or step-by-step instructions for restorative art and cosmetics? Families choose which funeral home they want to use based on the trust they have in the staff. How long until the staff turn into robots? Funerals, like

any other event, hardly ever go exactly according to plan. If the funeral director depends on a computer to manage everything for him or her, what happens when the family changes their mind, or something goes wrong? Computers have no compassion; they cannot love. Is that not the basis of our profession? It is alarming to think that there may be a day when the funeral profession becomes so entangled with the advancement of technology and how fast the computer can operate, we are not focused on the family anymore. People turn into numbers in a software program instead of people. One thing I appreciate about the small town is that typically we are behind the advancements of the city. Around 95% of the time, at least part of the funeral home staff knows either the deceased or their family. They are more than just a number; they are a name. They have an identification number, but their name is just as important. Technology can be efficient in aiding with printing memorial folders and producing memorial videos, but when it is relied on for most of the funeral, which is just asking for trouble. Funeral service is considered an art. Art is defined as being creative, using your mind to develop something, and is remarkably diverse. One quality that is especially important


for a funeral service professional is the ability to think on one's feet. What happens when the florist does not send enough boutonnières, or the pall does not get delivered? Would you have to wait for the funeral home software to give you instructions on how to fix it, or would you use your creativity and find a way to make the situation better?

Funeral service is ever changing. Prices are elevated, funeral professionals are dressing more casually, and the "traditional funeral" is almost nonexistent. We are seeing way more cremations and drastically less visitation time. When my grandfather died ten years ago, if you chose not to have a night's worth of visitation, it was because you could not afford it. Cremation was only for traumatic accidents or because someone did not have much family left. There are so many more options with cremation and memorial services now. Celebrations of life are held more commonly now. As a child, I never remember a graveside service being announced, they were unheard of. Gender roles are beginning to change. The ratio of male to female mortuary students has completely changed. We are not where we should be with this, but progress is slowly being



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made and I am so thankful for that. I am so thankful that there are mentors like Marc that can look at me and see the desire to learn and grow and not just that I am a woman. Technology has changed the way we direct services. It is so much easier to make memorial folders and tribute videos, and services are even being broadcast and live streamed. But there is a fine line between too much and just enough. The humanity that is within a funeral director is like no other profession. We help people through the worst time of their lives. We do everything in our power to aid them in honoring their loved one in the way they see fit. In my opinion, the basis of funeral service should always be compassion. We should always embrace the families we serve with open arms; after all, they did hand select us. They should all be treated with the same love and kindness no matter the situation they are in or the situation their loved one was in. That is more than just our job, it is our duty and should be our desire. I am so thankful for the opportunities I have been presented with during the brief time I have been in funeral service, and I look forward to dedicating my life to this extraordinary profession. Being fortunate enough to collaborate with wonderful people like Marc, Angela, Jennifer, Jason,

and Roger will go down as a highlight of my life.



Samantha Poiner is from Martin, Tennessee and is getting ready to begin her second semester at John A. Gupton College. She was raised by her mother, Tammy and is attached at the hip to her grandmother, Ada. Everything she does in life is to honor her “PawPaw” Jerry who died in 2012. Samantha is a graduate of the Westview High School Class of 2018. She proudly served her apprenticeship at Karnes and Son Funeral Home in Gibson County, Tennessee under the direction of Marc Sims. When she is not at the funeral home, she loves to watch football with her mom and cheer for the Tennessee Vols and the Pittsburgh Steelers. She is a fur mom to Prince and Gypsy and loves to spend time with her “little sister” Ella. She also loves to travel and spend time with her family. Being raised by a single mother has guided every aspect of her life. Her mom has always taught her to be strong and independent, and she uses her mom and grandmother as her greatest motivation.



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CELEBRATING TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF INNOVATION *with a fresh look from the second generation of Walstons*

Even in high school, **Daniel Walston**, now 30, contemplated his forthcoming career. Bright and highly-creative, he was interested in several diverse subjects – psychology, languages, business, emerging technology – a vast menu of options, many requiring lengthy study to carve out a successful career. Yet after graduating from the University of Georgia in 2019 with a plethora of possibilities, he chose to follow in his dad's footsteps to expand his vision of himself as an asset to the family business. After much self-examination, Daniel realized the potential of running a small business. Certainly, with any family business there were hurdles to overcome with transitional leadership, but Scott and Daniel have come to respect each other's strengths which complement the business goals.

Yet, it has always been about family. From a young age, Daniel assisted his dad, **Scott Walston**, founder of Collegiate Memorials™, the first funeral service business to officially license college and university logos/insignia to personalize caskets and cremation urns. Scott's innovative company was met with wide enthusiasm by the funeral industry, but it was an arduous endeavor to pull off, with years of extensive planning and groundwork laid before the first licenses were acquired from the University of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1998-99.

This year, Collegiate Memorials™ celebrates its 25th Anniversary with Scott Walston's vision fully and successfully realized. His creative company has inspired and opened wide the death care industry and consumers to individualized personal expression upon death. CM has also spawned several other memorialization business models, but remains the largest and most reputable business of its kind in the \$20 billion funeral industry, with official licensing rights granted by 31 major colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

In 2018, having purchased and begun the renovations of a local funeral home, Scott was inspired to offer Daniel an opportunity to manage Collegiate Memorials under his tutelage. Never envisioning himself working in the family business, Daniel recognized a way to contribute to the family company and to begin leaving his imprint on a burgeoning entity in a re-emerging market.

With Daniel Walston now general manager of CM, his father's company continues to grow with a millennial's fresh vision. Since taking the helm, Daniel has introduced new technology, concepts for greater efficiency and stronger brand imaging. There is much more to come.

"I've learned so much about innovation and entrepreneurship from my dad," said Daniel. "There is always something new to grasp, and I am continually inspired to grow the company brand with new ideas and plans."

Scott at sixty-six has no plans to slow down in business and anticipates with enthusiasm Daniel's continued contribution to the family's plans for expansion.



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Jefferson State Community College Student Essays

Student Essay by Debra Cochran

Why Am I Doing This? At 67 years old, I've raised three sons, retired from teaching school, have been a wife for over 48 years, and even helped in our family's funeral home service. I was ready to enjoy my retirement. I wanted to enjoy my home, work on hobbies, and spend time with my mother and grandkids. I wanted to relax. It all sounded so nice. I had put in my share of hard work. I had done my duty on all fronts and was finally going to have time for myself! Little did I know, I was about to begin a whole new career. After being a teacher for 30 years, I was about to become a student all over again.

Since 1981, when my husband purchased his first funeral home I have been exposed to and involved with almost every aspect of funeral service. As my husband's funeral business grew, I found it took our whole family to support his funeral establishment. Everything had to revolve around the business. I spent many days working visitations and funerals, going on removals, assisting in the prep room, and meeting with families. All of this was in addition to being a full-time educator and mother of three boys. As time went on, our family went from one funeral home to five funeral homes, and a cremation service. For me, this was just my life and something I did to help my husband in his passion for funeral service. I didn't realize how much I had learned along the way and how my day job as a teacher and a mom related to this field of service.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic changed our business, and life as we all know it. As the COVID scare grew, we had some employees seek other work, and some opted to take retirement. This left us with multiple funeral homes short-staffed. Some of those that left were licensed funeral directors and embalmers. With this many facilities licensed personnel is vital. These licensed professionals are hard to come by in today's world. I could see the stress this was causing my husband and our overall work environment. This forced me to ask myself, "How can I help"? We needed licensed people.

We interviewed many people for positions, but none were licensed. We hired wonderful, talented people for our team and decided to choose a funeral college to help get them licensed. My husband decided to send some of our employees to Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama. I didn't know he wanted me to go too! At first, I wasn't sure about this, I'm 67 years old! What about retirement? But then, I began thinking about the families I've helped over the years through teaching and my life in and around our funeral business. In my 30s, I managed to graduate with honors from Brenau University while raising our family, but I was younger then. I knew this wasn't going to be easy, but having other people I work with attending, I decided to go for it. We chose Jefferson State Community College because online courses were offered, which made it possible for us to keep working at the funeral home where we were needed. The college only requires us to attend the campus in person twice each semester for midterms and finals. As a former teacher, I feel the instructors are very knowledgeable and are there to help students succeed. The instructors are always available by email and/or phone if students have any questions or concerns. In my experience, they have been quick to respond and assist me. Our online classes have been thorough and very informative. With engaging instructors, detailed classes, and co-workers as classmates, I believe I will be prepared for, and successful when The National Board test is administered.

So, why am I doing this? Retired or not, God has tasked my life with a purpose. As I look back, my purpose has been to educate and enlighten others and to provide care. I plan to continue my path in funeral service. With a great need for licensed directors, I want to use my experience from my teaching career, our family business, and my education at Jefferson State to continue my purpose in caring for others. I thought I was too "over the hill" to tackle being a student again. But I realize now that we're never too old to learn, grow, & serve others & other communities.



Student Essay by LaKeitha Seroyer

Growing up as an FDK, “Funeral Director’s Kid,” I have always had an interest in funeral service. As owners of Silmon-Seroyer Funeral Home, I watched my dad and granddaddy, whom I affectionately called Bigdaddy, selflessly serve others during one of the most difficult times of their lives. As I got older, I realized just how much commitment, dedication, sacrifice, and love for people it took to do their jobs, and knew that I wanted to serve in that capacity as well one day. However, my family never pressured me to go into the business and always encouraged me to follow my dreams.

In the Fall of 2012, I moved to Birmingham, AL to pursue my bachelor’s degree at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). I received a Bachelor of Science in Community Health and Human Services with a minor in Health Sciences in the Spring of 2017. I decided that I would work for a while before pursuing my second degree. In the Summer of 2019, I received a Master of Public Health in Health Behavior, also from UAB. I also received a certification in health education that year. Throughout my educational journey, funeral service was still on my mind.

Just as I was preparing to begin pursuing mortuary school, our world was flipped upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic, on May 25, 2020, I lost my Bigdaddy, my role model, and best friend. It was such a tough loss for my family and me and all who adored him. It was then that I began to question whether I still wanted to pursue funeral service. I felt like I was too late and could not imagine doing it without my Bigdaddy by my side. We always talked about it, and I knew that it meant the world to him. I decided that I needed to focus on healing for a bit and would possibly revisit the topic later.

After much prayer, consideration, and support from my family, in 2022, I started the process of applying to the Funeral Service Education Program at Jefferson State Community College. In addition to Jeff State being nearby, it is also in the area where my Bigdaddy served on the board of the Alabama Board of Funeral Service. When I was accepted to begin the program in the Fall of 2022, I had so many emotions. After years of desiring to go into funeral service, the time had finally come. During orientation, I was so overwhelmed with joy to be informed that my professors knew my

Bigdaddy and spoke so highly of him. It was the confirmation that I needed to know that I was in the right place at the right time. Although my Bigdaddy is not physically by my side, I know that his spirit is with me and that he is so proud.

All my life I have been asked about going into the business or taking over my family’s business one day. My response would be a smile and shrug, leaving the question unanswered. However, for me, it was never if I would pursue funeral service, but rather when. This decision is so much bigger than me. It is for my Bigdaddy, it is for my entire family. I am excited to carry the torch someday and follow in the great footsteps of the men who mean so much to me.



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Student Essay by Jason Barrow

I am pursuing a degree in mortuary science from Jefferson State Community College. For many years, I have had a passion to work in the funeral services field. I have previous years of experience in the field and left it to pursue a nursing degree. After working in nursing for nearly twenty years, I was led back to my passion, funeral directing and mortuary science.

After being employed by Foreman Funeral Home of Andalusia this past year, I chose to attend Jefferson State Community College. As a Jefferson State student, I have the ability to attend classes online and continue working at the funeral home as an apprentice. Jefferson State Community College not only offers the convenience of online studies and the ability to continue working while attending school, but also an excellent funeral services faculty to guide students to a successful career in funeral directing and mortuary science. In addition, this degree is obtainable in less than two years, promoting convenience for those looking to get started working in the field immediately. My passion to work in this field relates directly to my desire to help families in such a great time of need. I am originally from Andalusia, Alabama but currently reside in Opp, Alabama. I graduated from Andalusia High School in 1995 and earned my Associate of Arts Degree from

Lurleen B. Wallace Community College following high school. I later earned my Licensed Practical Nursing Degree and Registered Nursing Degree from LBWCC in Opp. I am married to Stephanie Barrow, and we have one daughter and two sons.

My passion for funeral directing and mortuary science is about being there for families and strangers in their time of need after they have experienced a death, either expected or unexpected. It is about listening to someone share about the life that person had before and showing empathy. It is about treating the deceased with dignity and respect as we prepare the body for burial. It is about staying calm and focused as we are surrounded by various degrees of human emotions. It is about directing people where to go and what to do in an orderly fashion. We are the first to be there and the last to leave. A funeral only happens once and there is no room for error. The faculty at Jefferson State go above and beyond to teach this in the classroom and we experience this while working as an apprentice. We are in the funeral industry to be role models for others in the community as we are the last ones to take care of your loved one. I consider it a privilege to work in the funeral home as an apprentice as I learn what it takes to be the best I can be.



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INDUSTRY NEWS

In Memory of Glenn G. McMillen, Past President of NFDA and Pennsylvania FDA

Glenn G. McMillen, of The Woodlands, TX, passed away on December 22, 2022, at the age of 80. He was born in DuBois, PA, to Glenn O. and Rebecca Hartman McMillen. Glenn had an incredibly rich and varied life, always ready for the next challenge and adventure.

He is survived by his loving wife of 58 years, Margaret (Peggy) J. Learn, his two children, Heather M. (Kelly) Blevins and Christian L. (Melissa) McMillen, two grandchildren, Alexandra R. Blevins and Hayden T. Blevins, two step-grandchildren, Chloe Wolf and Sophie Wolf, two sisters, Maxine McGee, wife of the deceased Jack, and Jan Harrold, wife of Douglas.

Glenn was a graduate of Punxsutawney High School, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science. During his more than 55 years in Funeral Service, Glenn served in various senior executive positions with various companies and professional organizations. He served as President of the Pennsylvania Funeral Directors Association and later served as President of the National

Funeral Directors Association. He was the Vice-President of the Fred F. Groff Funeral Home in Lancaster, PA before joining Service Corporation International and becoming Senior Vice-President of Operations and served as Chairman and CEO of SCI Australia. Glenn was also instrumental in the development of the American Funeral Service Museum in Houston, TX, and served as its first President.



Glenn never considered himself retired, but was constantly thinking of new ventures, leading when he could and mentoring many funeral service personnel who sought out his counsel. His contributions to Funeral Service are many and varied. He will be remembered and greatly missed.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Batesville Starts New Chapter of Growth with LongRange Capital, Chris Trainor Named CEO of Batesville

February 1, 2023 – LongRange Capital (“LongRange”), a private investment firm focused on building and growing middle market businesses over the long term, has completed its acquisition of Batesville Services (“Batesville”), one of North America’s leading providers of high quality burial and cremation products, merchandising and memorialization offerings and innovative technology solutions, from Hillenbrand, Inc. (NYSE:HI). Chris Trainor was named CEO of Batesville (Batesville Services, LLC), having served as president since 2015, and will be supported by the company’s experienced leadership team.

“Today marks an important milestone for our company as we begin operating as a private, standalone business with the support of an exceptional partner in LongRange, who shares our passion for innovation and excellence and is committed to building and delivering solutions that drive greater value for funeral professionals,” said Chris Trainor, CEO of Batesville. “Batesville has built and delivered high quality products to licensed funeral directors for more than a century and I am honored to continue leading the company through this next chapter of growth.”

“Batesville is an established leader with a great reputation for quality, innovation and service and we are excited to help carry that forward into the future,” said Bob Berlin, Managing Partner at LongRange. “We look forward to partnering with Chris and supporting him and the rest of the Batesville team in taking the business to a new level by investing in people, products, facilities, capabilities, and services to support and grow the business for the next generation of funeral professionals and consumers.”

Founded in 1884, Batesville has continued to elevate and expand its products to address the changing needs of funeral directors and consumers. But while its products and services have changed over time, Batesville’s mission of helping families honor the lives of those they love® remains the same.

From the first line of oversize products to “dual dis-

position” wood caskets that are suitable for burial or cremation, and an expansive line of unique personalization and memorialization offerings, Batesville has remained at the forefront of innovation. Launched in 2022, Batesville Connect™ provides digital access to the information and processes funeral directors use every day to manage their business and delivers unprecedented levels of convenience, confidence and control. “LongRange has significant expertise in using data, analytics and technology to improve operations, and ultimately, to deliver better service to customers, which will be extremely valuable as we identify and invest in new opportunities for sustainable growth,” said Trainor.

There are no planned changes to the overall structure, or in where or how Batesville operates, including the location of its headquarters, manufacturing plants, distribution networks, or field operations.

About Batesville

Batesville (www.batesville.com) is a recognized leader in the North American death care industry, offering a comprehensive portfolio of burial and cremation products, memorialization options and innovative technology solutions. For more than a century, Batesville has supported licensed funeral professionals in helping families honor the lives of those they love.® A history of manufacturing excellence, product innovation, superior customer service and reliable delivery helped Batesville become – and remain – an industry leader.

About LongRange Capital

Founded in 2019, LongRange Capital was formed to take a longer-term approach to investing and building middle market businesses through a company-focused and customer-first philosophy. The firm’s investment professionals have a long track record of demonstrated success and collectively bring 50+ years of investing experience. LongRange is currently investing a highly flexible, committed capital pool backed by long-term institutional holders. For more information, please visit www.longrangepartners.com.



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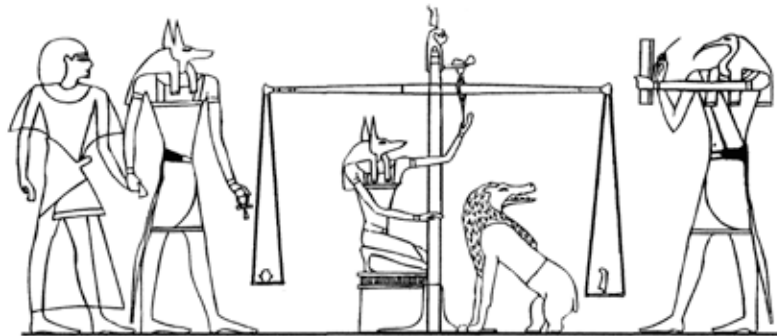


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Linda Yarbrough, Office Manager
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Embracing Hospice: Benefits of Optimizing Palliative Care

by: Hannah M. Burns

I have no idea what compels someone to become a funeral director, but I simply haven't dreamt of being anything else. I choose every day to comfort the brokenhearted, to see others at their weakest and most vulnerable. I see the absolute worst life has to offer. A front row seat to the most horrible of all horrible, and for me, I feel indebted to those who sit before me. I see children, innocents, disease, accidents, heartache, fathers, mothers, and those so alone no one comes to cry for them. Yet, I'm not hardened like expected of me, I'm not cold, I'm not angry. In fact, my heart continues to grow in ways I never knew it could have. It is an honor to serve these families.

Only a few things in life are guaranteed. One is that we are born into this earth, and the other is that we must die. Since a young age I have been fascinated and curious in regards to what happens when we die. Although I won't ever get an answer, it has been my goal to share with others about my journey in death care. Some aren't given enough time and that is the sadness in death, but optimizing your resources if you are able to plan at the end of life, whether for yourself or a loved one, is truly as beautiful as welcoming a new life.

The stigma around the word, "hospice", makes some people turn away. For me, it does the opposite. I love sharing the journey I had with them, their compassion and wholehearted love and care, and expressing the utmost gratitude for those who serve hospice patients. Hospice can be anywhere; now at home, at a facility, in a nursing home, even in hospitals. The past few years, I've established and maintained relationships with many local palliative care organizations. I've learned the complexity and beauty in the services that they provide to those patients experiencing that last stage of life and those loved ones who are by their side during this transition. I have also unfortunately had to work with palliative care services for two of my own family members, all within six months. The effect that they had on not only myself and my loved one, but the family left behind is remarkable. I never thought I would be sitting on the opposing side of the arrangement table so soon. I wanted to analyze and encompass data

from families who use palliative care and the benefits it provides not only their loved one but those who are bereaved.

In all studies I analyzed, families provide the most significant relationships, whether these be parent-child in the family of origin, or between spouses or siblings in nuclear families. The deeper the bonds of attachment are both beneficial to the family and the patient, and generally the more heartfelt are the emotions of grief. The process of sharing these emotions among family members initiates the potential for adaptive coping via mutual support. Active sharing of family grief is the norm during bereavement work. The construction of new meaning, fresh roles, and varied relations is sought. The number of sessions provided was not predetermined in this study, and averaged close to four per family. Participating family members completed measures of distress and family functioning at the baselines assessment and then subsequently at six months to one year post-loss. As it neared completion, promising trends showing prevention of distress in bereavement emerged in preliminary analyses. It was evident for individuals receiving therapy, compared to the families receiving standard, basic palliative care.

Finally, families were asked to report on the level of communication perceived following each family session. Although perceptions of family functioning remain unchanged, Family Focused Grief Therapy was associated with a significant reduction in individual members' distress after one year of bereavement. Much like anything else, there were trials that did face some issues. Therapists become involved with families at the end of life, when caregiving burden increases and patients are less ambulatory, keeping engagement in therapy can be challenging. Family Focused Grief Therapy has since evolved into a model of support that can be delivered in the outpatient setting, at the hospital bedside, or in the home. Although some therapists struggle to clarify and maintain the structure of therapy when it occurs outside of the consulting room.

Family Focused Grief Therapy prioritizes the family

as the natural context to individuals' distress due to illness and loss is expressed. Research on families in palliative care over the last two decades has provided a strong basis signaling us to intervene and act early to accommodate these families. More importantly, working with the family as a whole is not only beneficial to the patient receiving care, but setting the family up for success after a loss occurs. The continuity of care prior to and following the adverse life event is a unique aspect of this therapy and presents an opportunity for families to change the course of how they adapt. I thought the research contributed significantly to defining the benefits of optimizing palliative care.

From integrating traditions, rituals, or culture; I realized that is a very important piece, and truly worthwhile, to some families as their loved one is entering this last stage of life. In studying those coping methods and bereavement mechanisms used by those who have experienced a loss and continue to move forward, I have truthfully learned so much more about how I can better serve the families who come before me. Although there are thousands of ways to cope and grieve, and I will never know to the extent of which one brings

one more comfort than the next. Taking note in my knowledge has not only made me a better person, but a better funeral service professional. To me, hospice care is about more than helping people die with dignity, but to live out the rest of their life with love.

In Memory of: Michael G. Myers & Charles Henry Regnier

I am a college student at Mid-America College of Funeral Service. I am halfway through my educational journey and just at the beginning of my career in funeral service. In October, I obtained my apprentice license in my home state of Maryland, where I work full time at Bounds Funeral Home (Dignity Memorial) alongside my sponsor. Each family that comes before me makes me realize why I am in this field, I love what I do. It can be so easy to lose yourself in the service of others, so in my free time I enjoy spending time with my family and my rescue dog, Tannah. Over the past year, I have lost two very special people in my life. Without hospice and optimizing palliative care options, I don't know where we would be. I have worked collectively the past few months with a research journey on understanding that hospice is more about quality of life, rather than quality of death. Thank you for this opportunity to share this with you.





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John A. Gupton College Alumni Reunion Summary

John A. Gupton College, Nashville, TN, celebrated their 76th Anniversary with the Annual Alumni Reunion at the Lowe's Vanderbilt Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee.

The event began Friday evening with a reception and heavy hors d'oeuvres at the Lowe's Hotel and enjoyed by a large crowd of alumni (young and old), staff, students, spouses and guests. It was an enjoyable evening and special thanks to Danny Hurt and Wilbert Vault for sponsoring the beverages and food.

The following morning was a sponsored breakfast for all attendees provided by Batesville Casket Company and Matthews-Aurora Funeral Solutions. Afterwards all alumni gathered at the John A. Gupton College for the annual business meeting.

The meeting consisted of the annual Memorial Service to honor all alumni, spouses and family that had passed away during the previous year, as well as a financial report, board of directors update, and President Spann's address on the "State of the College Report."

The business meeting concluded with the 2022-23 election of officers which included: Chris Jefferson, President succeeding Bobby Cook, Past President; Brandon Yarbrough, 1st vice president; Michael Illobre, 2nd vice president; Tim Bond, Secretary and Keith Stapleton, Treasurer.

"Save the Date" for the 77th Annual Alumni Reunion to be held August 4-5, 2023, in Nashville, TN!



College President Steve Spann presenting 25-Year Pin to Darren Dautreull



College President Steve Spann presenting 25-Year Pin to Janie Green Daugherty



Steve Spann presenting plaque to outgoing Alumni President, Bobby Cook, for his service as President during 2021-2022 term



JAG Alumni Association 2022-23 Officers Brandon Yarbrough, 1st V.P.; College President, Steve Spann and Tim Bond, Secretary. Not pictured include Chris Jefferson, President; Michael Illobre, 2nd V.P., and Keith Stapleton, Treasurer and Bobby Cook, Immediate Past President



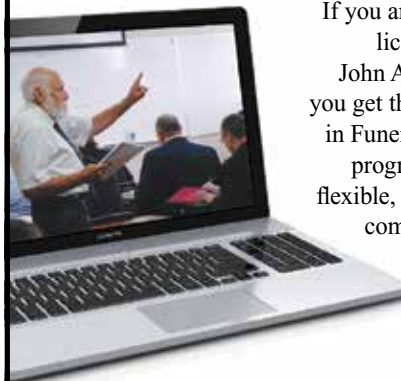
JAG Alumni 40-Year Anniversary Class of 1982 (L-R) Robert Helms, Ronnie Gandy and Steve Spann



Class of 1982 JAG Alumni and past Board Member, Steve Tidwell, trying to connect with his fellow 40-Year Anniversary classmates at the Reunion



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For information concerning cost and program call 615-327-3927, go to our website at guptoncollege.edu or email admissions@guptoncollege.edu.



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INDUSTRY NEWS

Reflections by Duey Formally Launched: Themed Lifestyle Murals Add Unique Personalization to Any Funeral Service

Duane “Duey” Williams has announced the national release of his Reflections by Duey displays. These high-resolution backdrop murals are designed to be placed behind the casket or cremation urn in the funeral home during visitations and memorial services to help personalize the event. Duey is no stranger to funeral service, having graduated from the mortuary studies program at the University of Minnesota more than forty years ago. After working as a licensed funeral director, he joined Batesville Casket. Following a twenty-year sales career at Batesville, Duey purchased a trade show display business in 2000. Reflections by Duey combines his passion for funeral service with his expertise in the display business.

“As human beings, we select the ideal venue for our weddings, birthdays, or other life celebrations; therefore, the final event of our loved one’s life should echo who they were, what they treasured, and what they will leave behind as a remembrance,” stated Duey. “Creating the picture-perfect setting with a themed lifestyle mural creates a special touch to any funeral service – whether burial or cremation. These murals also make a great personalization element to any funeral home’s service packages.”

Reflections by Duey offers 15 different backdrop designs, with themes that include sports, hobbies, patriotism, and other special interests. Each picturesque mural is 8’ x 10’ and is completely portable for easy set-up and storage. Funeral homes can easily add \$75 - \$100 per call through the use of these murals. Given the affordable purchase price to own the displays, the murals can pay for themselves in a very short time!

Duey created his first display murals for funeral homes in the Midwest, shortly after he purchased his display business. However, the demands of running the display company took precedence over the further development of the funeral murals. At the urging of funeral directors, the timing appears right to now expand the Reflections by Duey program. “Being able to customize the experience for families is what separates the truly innovative firms from all the rest,” stated Brad Speaks,

President and CEO of Speaks Chapels in Kansas City, MO. “We have used these murals for approximately 20 years and feel that our families are very well-served by them. With multiple scenes to choose from, we can find something that fits almost any family.”

“My heart and soul have always had a soft spot for families and the funeral profession,” added Duey. “I look forward to renewing my many relationships in funeral service and helping funeral directors to grow their firms’ revenue and family satisfaction through the use of Reflections by Duey murals to personalize funeral services.”

Visit reflectionsbyduey.com for more information or call Duey at 913.707.2210.

The Reflections by Duey backdrop murals offer funeral homes a cost-effective method of growing revenues while at the same time increasing family satisfaction. Funeral homes can easily add \$75 -



\$100 per call through the use of these displays. Given the affordable purchase price to own, the murals can pay for themselves in a very short time.

The Reflections by Duey displays are designed to be placed behind the casket or cremation urn during visitations and memorial services to help personalize the event. Each mural is 8’ x 10’ and is fully portable for easy set-up and storage. These displays are available in 15 different designs, with themes that include sports, hobbies, patriotism, and other special interests.



INDUSTRY NEWS

ClearPoint Federal Bank & Trust Celebrates 25th Anniversary: Company Marks Milestone with a Pledge to Education

Batesville, IN – January 15, 2023 - ClearPoint Federal Bank & Trust, a federally chartered savings bank that has been providing trust and recordkeeping services to the funeral and cemetery industry since 1998, celebrates 25 years of success in serving funeral and cemetery professionals nationwide. To mark this milestone, ClearPoint pledges to make donations to several key organizations who provide education and training to funeral and cemetery professionals.

Company President, Ashlee Theising remarked: “At ClearPoint, we are passionate about ensuring the future success of the deathcare industry. A commitment to education is one of the keys to success which is why we have decided to focus our attention in 2023 on education for both our team members and industry professionals. To mark this milestone in our company’s history we are making a pledge to provide financial support to the Funeral Service Foundation and the ICCFA Educational Foundation by donating a total of \$25,000.”

ClearPoint was established in 1998 as Forethought Federal Savings Bank operating in six states with only a handful of customers. Today ClearPoint serves more

than 2,400 funeral homes and cemetery locations in 44 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Since its inception, ClearPoint has expanded its team and product offerings, but its foundational purpose has not changed, and it remains dedicated solely to the funeral and cemetery industry. The experienced, diverse team offers both financial expertise, and an unwavering passion for serving funeral and cemetery professionals. ClearPoint is proud to provide clients with a team of talented and proactive professionals who are always ready to serve. <https://clearpointfederal.com/clearpoint-25th-anniversary/>

ClearPoint Federal Bank & Trust is a federally chartered savings bank based in Batesville, Indiana. ClearPoint is dedicated solely to the funeral and cemetery industry.

Independently owned and operated, ClearPoint has provided customized funeral home and cemetery trust and related services since 1998, which are now available in over 44 states and the District of Columbia. Visit www.clearpointfederal.com to learn more.




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INDUSTRY NEWS

Strategic Funeral Resources Introduces Social Media Programs, Company Announces Four Packages That Deliver Personalization at a Low Price Point

Barrie, ON - Strategic Funeral Resources, the consulting company that helps funeral homes innovate and transform, has recently introduced its reasonably-priced social media advertising programs that start at under \$100 per month. Each program is available in one of two (standard and preferred) packages, and many offer exceptional customization features. It's personalized social media at prices every funeral home can afford.

“We have long recognized the ongoing revenue challenges for our clients and developed a range of social media marketing options that allow funeral homes to spend significantly less on basic content and spend more on digital advertising to grow their market share,” commented Curt Fitzsimmons, president of Strategic Funeral Resources. “Spending more on delivering your tailored message to a wider audience versus spending significant dollars on generic posts four or five times a week only makes good business sense. Imagine having high quality, personalized content at ultra-competitive prices that leave you enough cash to actually then promote your funeral home brand.”

The packages also integrate Strategic Funeral Resources' proprietary Automated Virtual Arranger (AVA) artificial intelligence software into the packages. By personalizing the funeral home owner or staff member, the AVA process takes the best types of human interactions – engaging, warm and emotional connections – and combines them with revolutionary Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to create a lifelike content viewing experience for your target audience.

“We have found that as demand for video content continues to surge, consumers who watch video ads are more likely to engage with that product or service. Based on our experience so far, our original, customized content allows funeral homes to engage directly with families and differentiate themselves from firms that are posting generic content,” commented Fitzsimmons. “Telling their story on pre-need, pricing, services, cremation, burial, memorialization, etc. is a major step in branding and communicating what the firm

stands for and now they can do so for a lot less.” SFR's social media programs offer different types of customized videos, not just generic content postings. Posting generic content four or five times a week may not build the client relationships funeral homes desire as there is very little engagement with those posts. Additionally, receiving a generic post from a funeral home four or five times a week can become annoying.

“The messaging in a number of our posts will focus on different aspects of life (senior activities, eating well, family relationships), not just pre-need, caskets, urns, etc.,” added Fitzsimmons. “Research has shown that seniors 55+ prefer to engage with companies who promote health and well-being and while funeral homes typically don't do that today, we are planning on making that part of our message.”

Packages start at \$99 per month without an annual contract for most packages. Packages include a minimum of one social media post per week as well as an annual online strategy session, free Facebook design, content updates, branded Holiday messaging, comment monitoring, and much more.


To learn more about these affordably-priced social media advertising packages, please visit Strategic Funeral Resources at strategicfuneralresources.com.



Using the AVA artificial intelligence software allows funeral home owners to create original personalized video content for their social media accounts that engages families on many end-of-life topics as well as important community events with which they are involved, thereby differentiating their funeral home from those firms posting generic content.


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