

FUNERAL BUSINESS ADVISOR MAGAZINE™

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Hundreds of Funeral Care Businesses trust Chosen Payments to process their credit cards- find out why!

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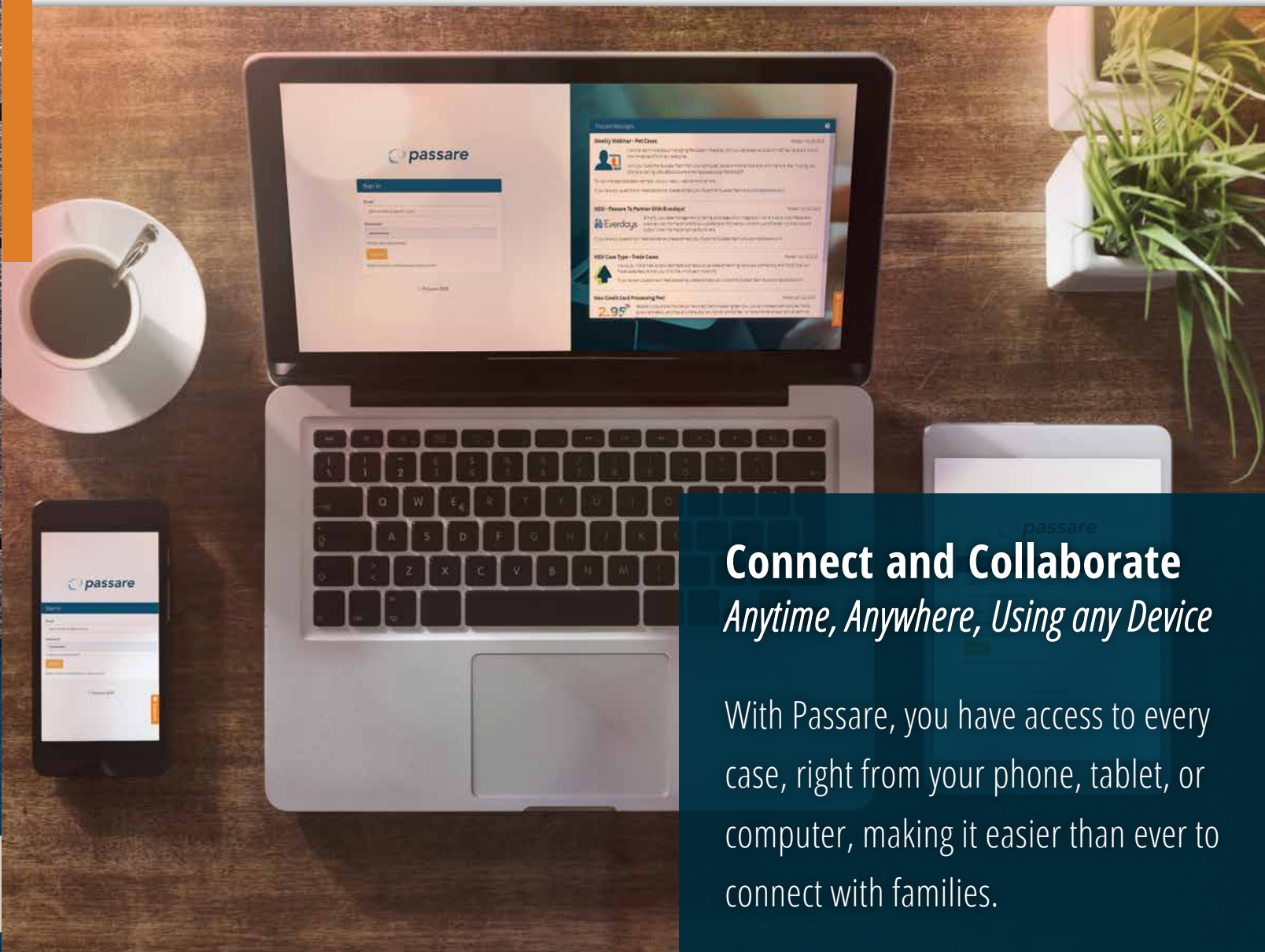


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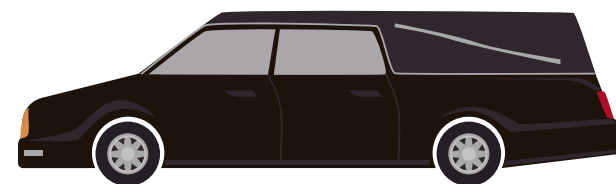
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4.8

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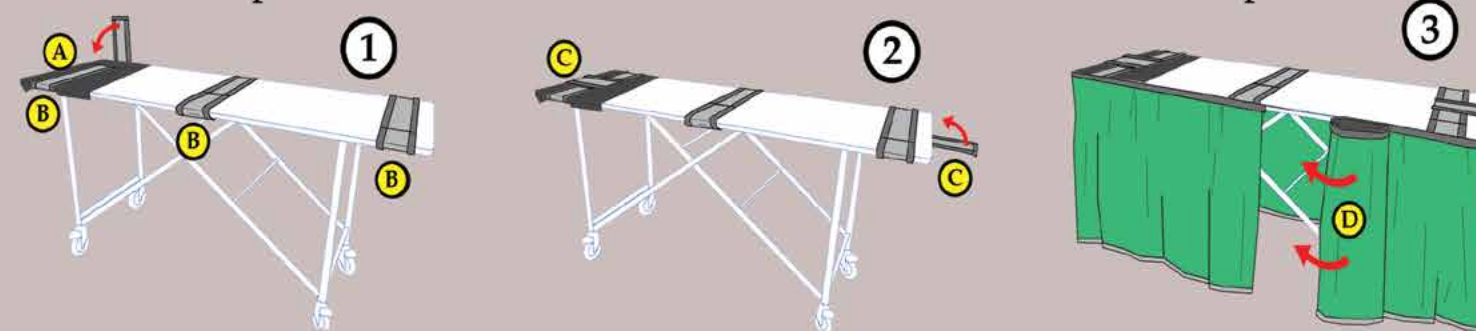
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Funeral Industry CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NFDA EMBALMING AND RESTORATIVE ART SEMINAR
May 14-15, 2020

Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science | Pittsburgh, PA
events.nfda.org

NEW! NFDA YANKEE STADIUM BUCKET LIST ADVENTURE
June 5, 2020

Yankee Stadium | The Bronx, NY
events.nfda.org

SELECTED EUROPEAN CONFERENCE 2020
June 10-14, 2020

The Grand Hotel | York, England
www.selectedfuneralhomes.org

NFDA LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
August 2-5, 2020

Belmond Charleston Place | Charleston, SC
events.nfda.org

NEW! RYDER CUP BUCKET LIST ADVENTURE
September 21-23, 2020

Whistling Straits | Sheboygan, WI
events.nfda.org

SELECTED'S 2020 ANNUAL MEETING
September 30-October 3, 2020

Le Westin Montreal | Montreal, QB, Canada
www.selectedfuneralhomes.org

NFDA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION & EXPO
October 18-21, 2020

New Orleans, LA
www.nfda.org

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Ken Moore is Senior Vice President-Sales & Marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services where he has guided sales and marketing strategies for over twelve years. He has also led the dynamic sales growth of The Wilbert Group's Signet Supply casket division since its inception in 2009. Ken has over 34 years of experience in sales, marketing, operations, executive leadership and strategy across various industries. To connect with Ken, call him at 913-732-9063 or at KMoore@wilbert.com.



Scott Weisenbach is the National Sales Director for Sich Casket Company. Sich is the top-selling manufacturer of premium quality wood and metal caskets from China and distributed by a carefully-selected network of independent distributors throughout North America. Information is available by visiting www.sichcasket.com, emailing info@SichCasket.com or calling (888) 317-1929.



Kathy Shirey currently serves as the Sales and Marketing Support Specialist for Thacker Caskets. Kathy will provide Thacker valued support in leading all marketing activities including designing printed marketing materials, leading collaborative efforts with industry publications, social media delivery and more! Kathy will also be directly involved in providing critical support to Thacker's growing outside sales team. Connect with Kathy by email kathy.shirey@thackercaskets.com.



Jon Lefrandt is the CEO and co-founder of Domanicare, an innovative and award-winning text-messaging based aftercare program. Jon created Domanicare after experiencing crippling grief first-hand. After that experience, he decided to do something about the gap that has existed between funeral homes and aftercare families for years. To connect with Jon, call him at 385-203-0199 or you may email jon@thedomanigroup.com.



Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing (FuneralHomeProfits.com), which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. Reach Welton by email at info@ringringmarketing.com or call toll-free at 888.383-2848.

We may be the largest insurance assignment company in the funeral profession, but that doesn't mean we've lost touch with our roots. Here in Rainbow City, our priorities still come down to a welcoming smile and a handshake that says we keep our promises. With all the tools and technologies that assures blazingly fast turnaround, what really matters is much more old school: personal responsibility, integrity, relationships and the pride that comes from hearing yet another client say, "You came through for us when it mattered."

Here in Rainbow City, AL, a handshake and a contract mean the same thing.



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INDUSTRY ALERTS



ESSENTIAL

Adjective: absolutely necessary; indispensable



WILBERT SIMPLIFIES BURIAL VAULT PRESENTATIONS FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING

Overland Park, KS – With the challenges faced by Funeral Professionals in making arrangements with families remotely or consistent with social distancing procedures, The Wilbert Group has built a solution allowing a remote presentation of outer burial containers (OBCs) to families.

Utilizing Wilbert's simpliFi® program – which simplifies the OBC presentation with a straightforward yet vivid graphic combined with a short informational video – two different remote presentation approaches have been developed for Funeral Professionals to choose from:

- Version 1 takes the family completely through the simpliFi® burial vault presentation from beginning to end in a 3-minute video, after which the Funeral Professional steps in to answer questions, provide options, and address pricing. This version resides at www.wilbert.com/burial/simplifi-presentation

- Version 2 allows the Funeral Professional to guide the family through the burial vault selection process by using the "Funeral Professional Guide" that is a part of the simpliFi® presentation program. Following the guide along with showing the family the "Outer Burial Container Choices" graphic and the educational video, the Funeral Professional



can interact more with the family as they learn about OBC options and make their selection. The graphic and video for this version resides at www.wilbert.com/burial/simplifi

"We invite Funeral Professionals to test both of these versions to see which one best suits their needs for remote presentations," said Ken Moore, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing. "Either version provides a simple way to inform families quickly, thoroughly and interactively about the choices they have pertaining to burial vaults – including personalization of the vault which has been proven to elevate the service experience for the family."

For more information about the remote presentation approaches or about Wilbert's simpliFi® program in general, please contact your local Wilbert Representative or call 913.345.2120.

To all of the Funeral Directors, Morticians, Embalmers, and Crematory Operators; we are here working hard to make sure you have the essential products you need. Thank you for your support!

#InThisTogether



SRS UNVEILS NEW, PROPRIETARY E-SIGNATURE PRODUCT



SRS COMPUTING

Wexford, PA – SRS Computing has released a brand-new e-signature tool that is built directly into their SRS software, eliminating the need for any third-party electronic signature tool such as DocuSign.

“Our team very quickly saw the need for funeral homes to be able to get signatures from families without being able to meet face-to-face to get them during this COVID-19 pandemic” says Kim Simons, VP of SRS Computing. “In less than 2 weeks, we were able to develop a brand-new electronic signature tool that we knew had to be miles ahead of what is currently available for funeral homes. We didn’t just want something that communicated with third-party signing tools like what is currently available on the market, we wanted SRS clients to have something fully integrated for that streamlined experience they are used to with us.” adds Kim.

The SRS E-Signature tools gives funeral homes the ability to send unlimited forms and get unlimited signatures from families. There are no-per user fees and it is designed to replace any need for 3rd party e-signature tools like DocuSign at a fraction of the cost.

“In just under three weeks, nearly two-hundred SRS customers have started using the fully integrated E-Signature tool and the feedback has been incredible. One funeral home said this will save them so much time with it being all integrated into their day-to-day software. They also said it will save them money by eliminating the need for DocuSign” says Kim. “It was definitely a need that funeral homes had as a result of the pandemic, but something we know they will continue to use for years to come as part of their new normal” concludes Kim.

The new E-Signature tool from SRS is very easy to use. A funeral director can login to their SRS software and send any form to one or more family members to sign electronically. Families can then sign the form from anywhere and on any device and send it back to the funeral home in one-click, which also uploads directly into the funeral home’s SRS software.

To learn more about the SRS E-Signature tool, visit www.srscomputing.com/e-signature.

SRS Computing prides itself on giving funeral homes the software and tools they need to grow their business, strengthen their community image and impress families. As a leader in funeral home management software for twenty-one years, SRS offers complete management software solutions for funeral homes, cemeteries, crematories and pet death care providers. To learn more about SRS Computing visit their website at www.srscomputing.com or contact the SRS team at 1-800-797-4861.

KEEPER LAUNCHES DIRECT EMAIL MARKETING PLATFORM, KEEPER DIRECT



Toronto, Ontario – Digital memorialization solution, Keeper, has launched a new addition to its cloud-based software suite, Keeper Direct. Keeper Direct is an email marketing tool enabling funeral homes and cemeteries to design and send email communication to their families and entire community, directly from Keeper.

Keeper Direct includes professionally designed email templates that can be modified or completely customized with text, images, videos, web links and more. No technical experience or coding is required as the email building tool is simple to use with its drag and drop functionality.

Keeper Direct stands out from other email marketing tools on the market because it automatically captures emails with every interaction on a Keeper Memorial page. Every time a funeral home or cemetery website visitor leaves a tribute message, shares an image, or interacts with an obituary page, their email address is captured and stored in Keeper Direct. This contact information can then be used to drive pre-need sales, send aftercare messages to families, sell merchandise and flowers, send holiday greetings, share special pricing, and more.

“One of the biggest challenges in digital marketing is growing your audience,” asserts Mandy Benoualid, CEO at Keeper. “Funeral homes and cemeteries already receive a lot of website traffic from obituary pages, service listings and cemetery records search. We decided to take this activity and capture visitor information automatically. Other systems on the market like MailChimp and Constant Contact require plugins and integrations to capture email addresses, whereas Keeper clients do not need to lift a finger, let alone pay for another system, for even better results.”

The goal of Keeper Direct is to boost sales but also improve customer satisfaction by improving communication. Keeper Direct enables clients to send unlimited, large batches of emails using secure servers so that messages do not end up in junkmail.

Keeper Direct will be widely available by April 15th, 2020. Funeral homes and cemeteries requesting more information about the platform are directed to contact info@mykeeper.com or call 1-844-970-7900. Keeper is a digital memorialization solution for funeral professionals and cemeterians. Empower families to contribute to their loved one’s online memorial, add images, videos, tributes, guestbook, genealogy and more, directly on your business website. Keeper’s suite includes online memorials, interactive kiosks, website integration, walk-to-grave mobile app, email marketing, genealogy and more. For more information, visit www.mykeeper.com.

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LEGACY.COM'S FUNERAL HOME SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Legacy is here to help with emergency obit updates and remote funeral participation.

Legacy Chicago, IL – Funeral homes across the country are already feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic. Legacy.com stands ready to help any funeral home with obituary publication and to support remote funeral participation.

Emergency Obituary Posting & Updates All our resources are available to the funeral home community. Any funeral home staff member can reach out to our dedicated funeral home support team 7 days a week for help with obituary updates: Contact: fhsupport@legacy.com; 888-397-9494, press 0, then option 2. Hours: Email: 5:30am – 10pm Central Time, daily. Phones: 8am – 6pm CST, daily. Response time: Emails typically receive a response within one hour, often less.

Families can also reach out to our customer support team directly for assistance at info@legacy.com or 888-397-9494, option 0.

Online Funeral Video Services Legacy and Tukios are working together to help funeral homes offer remote video services to support social distancing.

Starting today, any funeral home can use Tukios's system to upload video of a funeral service for any family, so those unable to attend can watch the service once it has concluded. Tukios will host the video, create the URL, and then work with Legacy to get that video link added to an online Legacy obituary. To get started, contact Tukios at support@tukios.com or 801-682-4391.

If a funeral home already has a video online, and wants to add it to a Legacy obituary, they can send us an email at fhsupport@legacy.com and we'll add that link to the obituary text New, Guides and Resources During the weeks ahead, we will be providing regular updates, resources, and advice on funeral planning during the epidemic. Our first – a guide to help funeral directors and families decide on safe service arrangements – is available here: Coronavirus Services FAQ for Funeral Directors.

We welcome anyone to sign up for our newsletter or visit new.legacy.com/coronavirus-information/ to keep up to date on our coverage. Legacy.com is the global leader in online obituaries with over 40 million visitors each month. The company provides support and obituary-related services to more than 1,500 newspapers and 3,500 funeral homes in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K., to help people express condolences and share remembrances of loved ones. Legacy.com partners benefit from unparalleled scale and expertise that delivers industry-leading products, innovative e-commerce solutions, and award-winning customer service. Legacy.com is headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Visit Legacy.com for more information.

FRONTRUNNER OFFERS TO SETUP ANY FUNERAL HOME'S FACEBOOK PAGE WITH FACEBOOK LIVE FOR FREE

Kingston, Ontario – FrontRunner today announced an industry-wide offer to help any funeral home set up their Facebook page and share a free step-by-step guide outlining how to use Facebook Live to broadcast funeral services. This offer is available to any funeral home, regardless of being a FrontRunner client or not.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many funeral homes to think differently about how they will host funeral services and continue to offer support for the community. FrontRunner heard this loud and clear from many clients over just a few days and knew they could offer something more valuable than anything else – their time to help all funeral homes.

"This week I have talked to so many funeral directors who are exhausted, confused and need help when it comes to moving their face-to-face interactions to a virtual space" says Jules Green, CEO of FrontRunner Professional. "I wrote my team literally one hour before saying this and said we can help these guys, let's do it. We will figure out the workload that comes in as a team – they need us right now," adds Green.

The FrontRunner team has rallied together to do something that doesn't cost the funeral home anything. They will set



up any firm's Facebook page if they don't currently have one and give them a PDF they can follow with equipment recommendations so they can still support the families and their community using Facebook Live.

"There will be no questions asked. We've added a form to our website for any funeral home to fill out and request the help. From there we will get their page built and send them the PDF. If they need further help, we will be there" adds Jules. "We can help, so we will. Period," concludes Green.

The FrontRunner team will work through all requests as quickly as possible, including over the weekend. Simply fill out the form to have them set up your Facebook page and guide you to offer Facebook Live funeral services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

REQUEST YOUR FREE FACEBOOK PAGE SETUP & FACEBOOK LIVE PDF BY VISITING: <https://www.frontrunnerpro.com/free-facebook-page>

If you have questions, contact Jules Green directly at jgreen@frontrunner360.com.

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CRÄKN OFFERS SERVICES & TOOLS FREE OF CHARGE IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

North American Funeral Homes Can Take Advantage of Free Case Management Tools to Continue Serving Client Families While Protecting Themselves.

Cincinnati, OH – Due to the COVID-19 national emergency, CRÄKN has announced it will eliminate case fees for its case management tool to help funeral professionals continue to serve client families while protecting themselves.

The offer is for funeral homes and cemeteries across North America.

“We know that funeral professionals are facing one of the greatest challenges in their careers. We have an unprecedented pandemic and great uncertainty, and we want to help,” said CRÄKN CEO/Founder Scott Mindrum.

“As a result, we will offer this emergency support for the duration of our COVID-19 national emergency. This means that you and your team can protect your client families and yourselves without losing a step in your collaboration, coordination or communication.”

CRÄKN's offer includes use of the digital, real-time whiteboard; the dashboard; scheduler and calendar; state and local forms; reports and data; and automation for funeral director's duplicate, manual and administrative tasks.



Funeral directors can use these tools remotely—from the safety of their own home—by phone, tablet or computer. As always, CRÄKN's efficiency tools are mobile and can be used on any device, said Mindrum.

“This emergency support is available to firms regardless of whether they serve one family or 1,000 families, or if they have two employees or 200 employees,” added Mindrum. “We're anticipating a large response.”

Funeral homes that sign up for the offer will only have to pay a deeply discounted, one-time onboarding fee of \$295. They will have unlimited access to the features of the case management tool.

Funeral homes located in North America interested in taking advantage of the offer can call 844-382-7256 or visit www.crakn.net to sign up immediately. CRÄKN is a cloud-based solution that provides efficiency tools and an up-to-date, real-time, digital whiteboard. Much more than a case management tool, CRÄKN allows you to access and update all your important information—anywhere, anytime, and from any device. Stay safe and secure and easily collaborate and communicate through CRÄKN! To learn more, call 844-382-7256 or visit www.crakn.net.

PASSARE TO OFFER FREE ONLINE COLLABORATION CENTER FOR 90 DAYS



Abilene, TX – With the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak being felt across the nation, many funeral directors are concerned about being able to meet with families in person to make arrangements. To assist funeral directors during this time, Passare, Inc., is offering its online Collaboration Center free for 90 days to funeral homes who wish to offer online arrangements to the families they serve.

“We understand the pressure that funeral professionals are feeling right now, and this is one way we can help,” said Josh McQueen, VP of Product. “The Collaboration Center is an online arrangement platform where you can interact with the families you serve, gather biographical information, share documents and photos, and much more. We realize there is a huge need for this type of technology right now, and we wanted to be able to do our part to help the funeral profession by offering our software to anyone who needs it.” Passare invites funeral professionals to sign up for free access to the Collaboration Center by going to <https://www.passare.com/together/>. In addition, Passare will be offering free training webinars and resources to assist funeral homes in getting up and running with the collaboration software as soon as possible.

“We want to do what was best for the profession,” added Josh McQueen. “As funeral homes remain committed to serving their communities and protecting at-risk populations, we want to provide tools and resources to support their mission and heart of service. It's truly an honor to be able to offer this free resource to the profession at a time like this.”

To learn more about Passare's cloud-based funeral home management software with built-in family collaboration tools, go to www.passare.com. To learn more about Passare and request a free demo, please visit www.passare.com.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOUNDATION LAUNCHES COVID-19 CRISIS RESPONSE FUND



Brookfield, WI – The Funeral Service Foundation today announces the launch of its COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund, which will help funeral service professionals and organizations working throughout the country who are disproportionately impacted by the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Gifts at every level can be made at FuneralServiceFoundation.org.

The COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund has two pillars of support: emergency assistance and grief support. Designed to be flexible, the fund will provide grants for immediate needs within funeral service including emergency response to significant loss of life; grants to organizations providing services and resources to families with unresolved and complicated grief due to loss during this crisis; and grants for other important needs as funeral service continues to serve families during this rapidly evolving crisis.

“Matthews is proud to do anything we can to support the funeral service profession during this unprecedented time,” said Steve Gackenbach, Group President, Memorialization at Matthews International and a Foundation Trustee. “Our donation helps ensure that funeral service professionals will have the resources and support they need to assist families who can't say goodbye in ways they wish, which may result in unresolved and complicated grief.”

The Foundation is counting on the funeral service community to respond generously and help at this unprecedented time of need and uncertainty. One-time or monthly gifts to the Funeral Service Foundation's COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund can be made online at FuneralServiceFoundation.org. Those interested in supporting may also send checks, made payable to the Funeral Service Foundation to the FSF COVID-19 Crisis Response Fund, 13625 Bishop's Drive, Brookfield, WI 53005, or call 1-877-402-5900 to make a gift by phone.

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Chuck & Almika Pryor MAKING FAMILIES THEIR FIRST PRYORITY



Almika & Chuck Pryor pictured with their son, Elijah Pryor.

a family, we want to have exceeded their expectations and provide a loving tribute that they remember for years to come. Our goal is to become the go to family funeral director for each family we serve, every single time. Our goal is to provide such a high level of service, that our families can't imagine using anyone else for their future needs," he adds.

"It was always a dream of mine to own my own funeral business and we knew together we could make it happen. Our funeral business is definitely unconventional. We aim to push the boundaries of what a funeral home is expected to be and for that reason we don't even refer to ourselves as a funeral home but are instead known as the Pryority Funeral Experience," explains Almika.

The Pryority slogan is Your Family is Our Family – which is something Chuck and Almika genuinely believe in. They treat each and every person that walks through their doors like family throughout the entire process and after. Chuck and Almika value the connections and relationships they form with their families very deeply and take aftercare very seriously. Additionally, many of the staff members at Pryority Funeral Experience are couples or related in some way, so the family atmosphere is sprinkled throughout the business.

"Our families know we care. In order to help us stay in touch with our families in the most consistent way possible, we use Aftercare.com. It is so incredibly easy to set up, the cost is very fair, and as a funeral home you do not have to do anything. Aftercare.com gives us peace of mind and takes a little off our plate on the aftercare side of things so we can focus on the service

we provide. I cannot recommend them enough," Chuck states.

The Texas funeral business thrives on making connections and helping families. Their success lies in their passion for the work they do. This is more than a career for the Texas duo, it is an undeniable calling.

"Working with the families is the best part of this business for us. We love to form lasting relationships with those in our community and help them celebrate their loved ones with unique and dignified services," elaborates Chuck.

For both Chuck and Almika, they know they are exactly where they are meant to be and that is serving their community and helping families find peace.

"I have always loved makeup. It has been a passion of mine for years. One of the most rewarding things about working in this industry is when a family comes up to me after a service to thank me for making their loved ones look so beautiful and at peace. It gives me such joy to be able to help families find peace in any way I can after a loss," Almika says humbly.

The passion that Chuck and Almika have for the families they serve is nearly palpable. Their deep roots in the industry and decades of experience make them an unstoppable force. Their dedicated and knowledgeable team, attention to detail, and years of experience make them a top choice for the families in the Houston area. Their kind hearts and warm care make families feel a little lighter in heavy times, and for that reason they will surely be successful for years to come. **FBA**

Located in Houston, Texas, Pryority Funeral Experience has been serving families and exceeding their expectations since 2015. Owned by funeral directors Chuck and Almika Pryor, this family owned business has roots that run deep in the industry with over 35 years of experience.

"If you have ever seen the movie My Girl, that's Almika. This business is where she grew up, its ingrained in her, and it's who she is," begins Chuck Pryor. "Her roots began in this industry alongside her parents and her experience is a big part of our success. When I was in high school, I began working at a funeral home with my older brother and I was able to help people when they needed it most. The work I did with my brother really resonated with me and I knew this industry was where I was meant to be," he continues.

The funeral industry has always been a big part of Almika's life. It is where she grew up and it's a big part of who she is. Growing up in a family that was in the

funeral business has made her a natural at taking care of families and their loved ones.

"I always knew that at some point, I would officially join the family business. After Chuck and I got married, we decided to fulfill our dream and start our own funeral home," recalls Almika Pryor.

Pryority Funeral Experience gives families peace of mind knowing that not a single detail will be missed. Chuck and Almika love what they do, and they cannot imagine doing anything else. They work hard to get to know each family in order to create meaningful life celebrations. They have a compassionate and knowledgeable team that works perfectly alongside them in order to help families get through difficult times.

"We make it an experience. When families walk into our space, right away they feel comfortable and at home. We worked hard to create a space that is truly inviting and feels like home," describes Chuck. "When we serve



SPOTLIGHT ON: CASKETS & BURIAL VAULTS

The continued rise in cremation along with additional widespread consumer trends such as increased social media use certainly affects the way funeral homes conduct business today. Paired with the unfamiliar market brought on by a pandemic, and just like that the world we know has changed quickly and dramatically. As funeral professionals continue to navigate this new way of life and business and consumer trends continue to evolve, the industry must learn to adapt and embrace change. However, what has not changed is their duty to honor and remember the lives of loved ones with meaningful services and tributes.

“Family preferences continue to drive changes in funeral service, including the trend away from ‘traditional’ funerals. Much has been written on this topic, including the move away from religious services towards more secular services. One of the by-products of this movement has been less of an emphasis placed on casket selection by funeral directors, thereby reducing the inherent value of this product in the eyes of families,” begins Sirius Chan, President of Sich Casket. “As a result, successful casket manufacturers and distributors have responded by offering caskets at lower price points, providing caskets for special needs (i.e. oversize), and manufacturing caskets that can also be used for cremation – while also ensuring caskets are readily available for prompt delivery to the funeral home. Regardless of trends, one thing that has not changed is the fact that for many families, the casket is the centerpiece of the funeral service. It is the last thing that a family buys for their loved one; it will frame their ‘memory picture’ of their loved one for years to come,” Sirius expresses.

The traditional market is no longer so traditional as we have seen a huge shift to cremation, or direct cremation with no formal service. Families are continuing to find new and unique ways to say their final goodbyes. With the decline of

traditional burial, the growth of consumer-direct caskets via the web and warehouse retailers, and the vast amount of information available to all consumers through the internet, the game is changing rapidly. Funeral homes will need to look at offering more favorable casket pricing both to stay competitive and to re-establish value in traditional funerals. But it is also up to the funeral home to shift their messaging to the changing audience, to educate them and demonstrate the range of options available, and the emotional downsides of do-it-yourself funerals.

“We find that most families are simply wanting something that looks nice, at a reasonable price and has the ability to be personalized. Families no longer care about value features such as gauge or swing bars – they look for appealing colors, casket themes that represent the life lived and the ability to ‘tweak’ things on the casket such as the interior,” explains Danielle Thacker, Vice President of Thacker Caskets.

Now more than ever, we are seeing an increasing demand for more environmentally friendly options – and without the green surcharge we saw in the past. There are a lot of innovations in designs and styles and customization happening in today’s market.

The rise of cremation has been a big change for the funeral profession. It is not heading the other way anytime soon. So, casket manufacturers need to look at their complete product offering and reevaluate the depth and breadth of their line to make sure it is in keeping with what consumers and funeral homes want, while adapting to the future.

Traditional burial services are decreasing year after year and for most funeral homes, this has translated to both decreased revenue and profit on the service side of things.

Now more than ever, it is important to become very cost conscious, seeking a casket that provides a high visual value and can maintain (or even boost) the funeral home’s profit levels. This needs to happen along with the casket being sold at a reasonable retail price to families. Funeral home owners used to be very loyal to their preferred vendor no matter the cost, this scenario is slowly dissipating. They are having to be very mindful of overspending on caskets to preserve profits and by in large, they are seeking out alternative sources of casket suppliers other than the legacy suppliers.

Like caskets, burial vaults are also a vital component of the overall revenue stream for every funeral home. In terms of revenue contribution, burial vaults fall in just behind the service charge and casket sale. With the increase in cremation, vault sales are still critically important to every funeral home’s overall success.

“A burial vault with its protective inner liner helps safeguard the casket against the intrusion of groundwater or other elements, as well as meeting cemetery requirements to prevent the gravesite from settling. Funeral homes simply need to tell families why a burial vault is better than an unlined concrete box in that it provides protection and peace of mind that the contents will not be compromised. In addition, many burial vaults can be personalized for the committal service to offer a meaningful opportunity to honor a loved one,” describes Ken Moore, Senior Vice President of Sales & Marketing with The Wilbert Group.

Burial vaults are also one of the greatest opportunities for the funeral professional to explain an often-misunderstood product to the family. By explaining the differences between outer burial containers and burial vaults, the funeral professional can share their expertise and at the

same time build trust and confidence with the family. When a funeral professional spends extra time to help a family thoroughly understand outer burial containers and the options available, the family gets exactly what they want, which regularly includes the addition of personalization. Added personalization translates to a unique family experience at the graveside that often becomes a lasting memory for the family and the funeral professional.

“Cremation presents both challenges and opportunities for any company in our industry. It is our responsibility to find new and creative ways to promote traditional products such as burial vaults, while also searching for new products to meet consumer needs. We know that the end consumer wants personalization options, so we continue to meet that demand using tools like custom Appliqués and unique color options to create the value the consumer is looking for. We also spend a lot of time educating funeral directors and consumers about the importance of services and permanent resting places in regard to cremation,” states Ethan Darby, Marketing Director with Trigard. “We have recently started tracking more data, and we have helped our partners increase their revenue using wall graphics and digital displays. When we take the time to really listen to consumers and watch trends, these types of point of purchase displays are much more impactful than traditional miniature vault samples. The numbers are hard to argue,” Ethan emphasizes. **FBA**

Continue on to learn more about the importance of caskets and burial vaults despite the rapidly changing needs of today’s families. Receive advice, explore options, and get helpful information from the industry’s top companies in this feature editorial.



What challenges do you see and/or predict in the future with regards to casket manufacturing, distribution and costs to the consumer?

On the manufacturing side, as the number of casketed funerals decrease, manufacturers will continue to look for ways to drive costs out of the product while continuing to look for ways to make the casket more relevant for families. At some point, there will be no more costs to remove.

On the distribution side, funeral directors will continue to reduce their casket inventory. They will do more with presenting caskets digitally, while putting the burden for timely delivery on distributors.

On the cost side, our fate is tied to funeral directors and how well they promote the value of the casket and the value of funeral services. No doubt the costs of funerals will continue to increase. The days of expecting the sale of the casket to deliver most of the profitability are long gone. Funeral directors must price their services properly and not at a loss. Positioning the price of the casket and funeral services properly will be important to the future well-being of the funeral profession.

What products or services do you offer for traditional burial and casketed services? Do you offer any green burial products and/or alternative products?

Sich has a complete line of traditional wood and metal burial caskets. Additionally, Sich has a line of cremation caskets including several models that have eco-friendly features that offer a responsible balance between natural and traditional design.

What sets your company apart from the competition?

Several attributes differentiate Sich from other casket companies:

- As a measure of security, each Sich casket is covered by a \$5 million product liability insurance policy
- Enduring commitment to traditional craftsmanship with innovative, production & distribution methods
- Sourcing of materials globally to provide the best quality and value at every price point
- Sold through a carefully-selected network of distributors so there's no need to order a container load

Quite simply – we manufacture flawless, world-class caskets that are built to meet or exceed U.S. standards in design, features, and quality and cost far less than comparable caskets from other manufacturers.

Answers submitted by
Sirius Chan, President of Sich Casket



What challenges do you see and/or predict in the future with regards to casket manufacturing, distribution and costs to the consumer?

The challenges that we see forthcoming for a funeral home is a continued shrinking supply chain (number of distributors who sell caskets). Many smaller, independent casket companies have either closed doors or have been acquired in the last 10-15 years. Thacker remains committed to its vision of being the most trusted funeral supplier and steadfast in its approach in serving the industry. We feel it is important to continue a high level of service and commitment which includes face to face sales interaction, a consultative approach in working with our funeral homes and next day delivery service.

When speaking to a prospective client, what are some frequently asked questions that you receive about your products and/or services?

Most funeral homes want to learn more about our company as many have heard of us, but do not know much about Thacker. Thacker is the 3rd largest casket company in the United States serving over 17 states through its direct distribution network. Thacker resonates with many of its customers as it is also a family owned and operated business.

What is your company's value proposition?

The funeral industry is one of the few industries where family owned and operated businesses command over 90% of total businesses in the industry. Thacker is just like it's funeral homes – family owned and operated. Also, similar to the funeral homes it serves, Thacker does not have other "diversification" strategies that include outside industries. We are solely focused on bringing successful ideas and strategies to the table for our funeral homes. If we can continue to make our customers successful, we will in turn earn their trust and become successful ourselves.

What sets your company apart from your competition?

Thacker continues to grow despite the traditional headwinds that the industry faces. The company has always been committed to finding creative solutions to the issues commonly faced within the industry. For example, when funeral directors continued to ask for the ability to interchange interiors, Thacker delivered Tailored Designs – the ability to change an interior of a casket for at-need delivery! We continue to look at our customers requests for the next big thing at Thacker!

Answers submitted by
Danielle Thacker, Vice President of Thacker Caskets

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Has the increase in cremation created opportunities for companies to reposition their existing products and/or develop new products?

Cremation presents both challenges and opportunities for any company in our industry. It is our responsibility to find new and creative ways to promote traditional products such as burial vaults, while also searching for new products to meet consumer needs. We know that the end consumer wants personalization options, so we continue to meet that demand using tools like custom Appliqués and unique color options to create the value the consumer is looking for. We also spend a lot of time educating funeral directors and consumers about the importance of services and permanent resting places in regards to cremation.

What information should funeral directors and/or funeral home owners know about burial vaults that they should relate to their clients?

Be introspective, ask yourself "is my vault presentation simple and understandable?" Be prepared to explain the difference between an outer burial container and a lined and sealed vault. We believe that client families with the proper information will select a lined and sealed burial vault over an inexpensive concrete box or grave liner.

What vault products and services do you provide to funeral homes?

We provide a diverse line of burial products that includes burial vaults, urn vaults, infant casket vaults, and pet casket-vaults. We provide other products such as mausoleum trays, patient transport boards, flower carts, and bouquet tray backseaters, and bronze memorials.

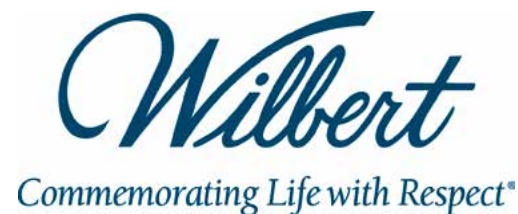
What is your company's value proposition?

We strive to be the supplier of choice simply by partnering with our customers to help them succeed. If they are successful, so are we. We pride ourselves on great customer service and being easy to work with.

What sets your company apart from your competition?

Our family-owned and operated business is diverse. We own a cemetery and funeral homes in Illinois, Indiana, and Arizona. We understand the challenges our customers face because we face them every day in our business. This unique perspective allows us to provide products and support we know is valuable.

Answers submitted by
Ethan Darby, Marketing Director with Trigard



What information should funeral directors and/or funeral home owners know about burial vaults that they should relate to their clients?

Only a burial vault provides protection of the casket and the loved one; a concrete box does not. For little or no additional cost, depending on the vault provider and the funeral home, a family can create a treasured tribute to their loved one through personalization of the carapace with photos, images, sayings and other commemorations of their loved one's life.

What sets your company apart from your competition?

- Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc. has the largest network of licensed locations to locally serve funeral professionals throughout the United States and Canada. We have nearly 300 locations in the US and Canada. This makes transfer services between locations seamless for the funeral professional.

- We have the most rigorous quality inspection program of any company in our industry. Every Wilbert burial vault provider is held to strict standards of performance, covering over 300 components from fabrication practices to graveside setup.

- Our diversified offering of products and services under The Wilbert Group of organizations provides a one-stop source for funeral homes and cemeteries. Products include burial vaults, cremation urns, mementos, jewelry and urn vaults, caskets, columbarium, private mausoleums, benches, urn pedestals, statuary, glass-front niches, crematory supplies, embalming fluid and prep room equipment, memorial books, and more; services include cemetery design, cemetery construction, open and close services and graveside setup.

- Under the brand Pierce Mortuary Colleges, we operate three of the nation's finest mortuary schools to teach and educate the future leaders of our industry with the skills and specialization of the mortuary business. Our schools are: Dallas Institute of Funeral Service, Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Service, and Mid-America College of Funeral Service.

- In 2012 we created the Commemorating First Responders program to provide first responders (law enforcement, firefighters, and EMTs) killed in the line of duty with a Stainless Steel Triune® burial vault or a Stainless Steel Triune urn vault plus cremation urn. While we are honored to help, it is sad to report that to-date over 950 families have been served by our program.

Answers submitted by
Ken Moore, Senior Vice President of Sales & Marketing
of The Wilbert Group

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A CHECKLIST FOR BUYING CASKETS

A Review of the Factors to Consider When Selecting a Casket Partner

BY SCOTT WEISENBACH

According to the Casket & Funeral Supply Association of America (CFSAA), casket manufacturing developed as a distinct business in the late 19th century. On the other hand, imported caskets have only been around since the start of the 21st century. When they first arrived, these imported caskets received a mixed reception from funeral service. Sure, you were getting a great price, but what were you sacrificing to purchase these offshore caskets? Much like the way the funeral profession has embraced cremation; funeral service is following a similar adoption curve with more and more firms now buying imported caskets. Have funeral home owners given up objecting to offshore caskets, or is it that they have come to realize the financial benefits are increasingly more necessary with their cost containment of products?

Having worked for several casket companies (both family-owned and publicly-traded) over the years, I have sold both domestically-produced and globally-sourced caskets. While this in no way suggests that I am an expert on caskets, this background has provided me with a unique perspective on buying and selling caskets.

In my travels, I have heard a number of issues that have been raised over time, related to the purchase or non-purchase of imported caskets. People have asked me what factors funeral directors with whom I have spoken evaluate when selecting a casket company with which to partner, and how have they changed over the years. It may seem elementary to many, but these factors have not only changed over time, the importance of several key factors has also shifted. Therefore, I have created the following checklist.

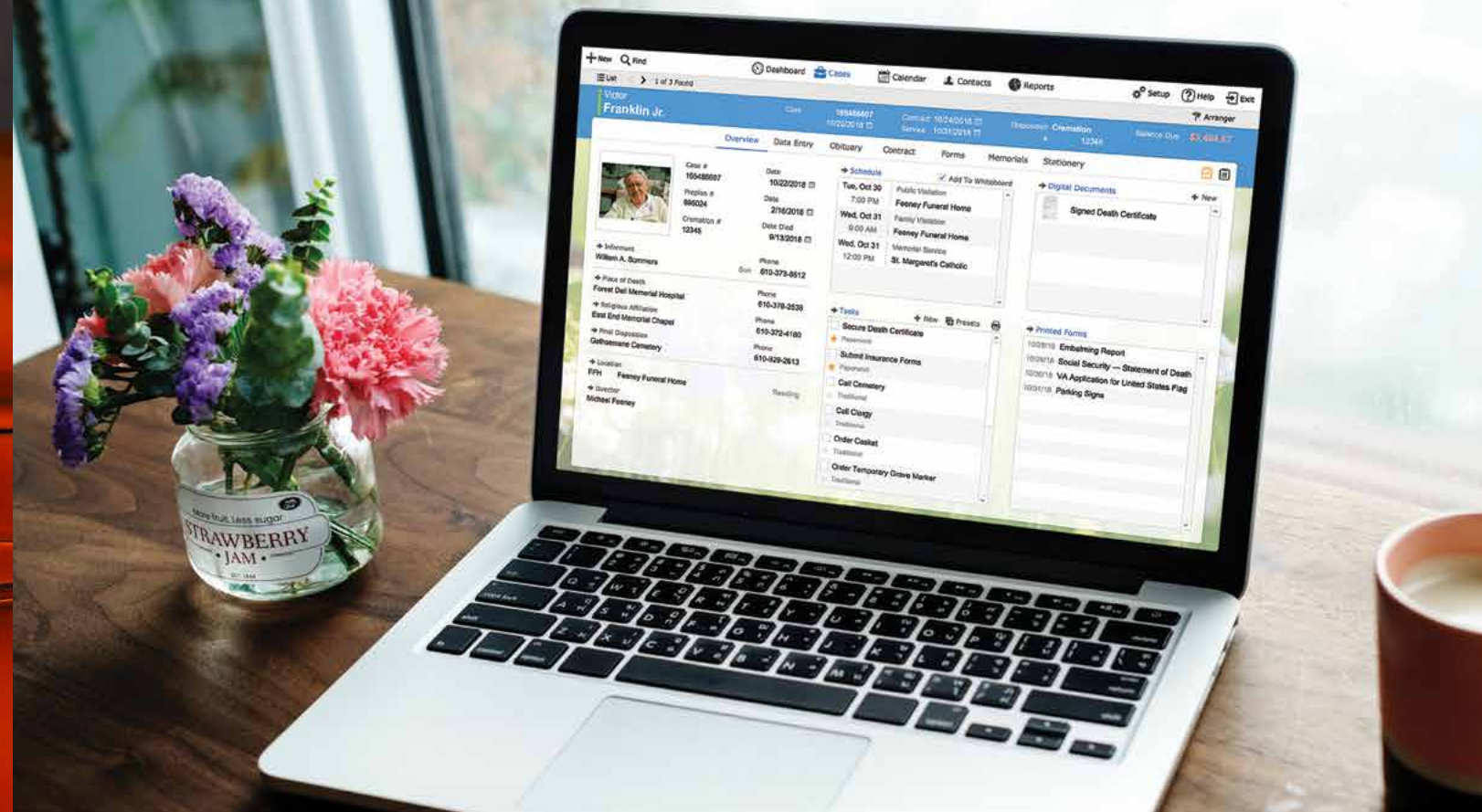
Product Quality – For every product used in funeral service, it all begins and ends with quality; for that matter, quality has

always been king. It's no secret that when import caskets first made their appearance twenty years ago, there were stories – fact or fiction – about the quality of these caskets.

Times have definitely changed and improvements followed after many years of manufacturing caskets by import casket companies. Import casket companies today have become laser-focused on quality in all areas of manufacturing. They have instituted process improvements and they have quality control departments set-up in the plants. The result is that now some folks in our profession say the quality of caskets from some import casket companies is on par, if not superior, to domestic manufacturers. Plants in the U.S. no longer hold a monopoly on producing premium quality caskets. Perhaps that is why most casket companies headquartered in the U.S. now have plants outside the U.S.

Distribution – If premium quality is #1, then dependable distribution runs a close second. As more and more funeral homes reduce (or eliminate) caskets from their selection room, the need for reliable casket delivery becomes even more paramount. Funeral homes want a company that will be able to readily deliver a casket, especially when a situation comes up on short notice. Funeral homes also appreciate when they do not have to pay extra to have a casket expedited in the case of an emergency.

Nowadays, more and more independent casket distributors in North America have decided to partner with overseas casket manufacturers to carry and inventory their products. With many independent casket distributors stocking import caskets, this has greatly increased the footprint and daily coverage area to supply funeral homes import caskets. The distributor also provides an extra level of quality control since



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they conduct and inspect every casket they take delivery. Distributors will also check the casket again prior to delivery to the funeral home to ensure funeral home satisfaction.

Fair and Transparent Pricing – In the past, sometimes it took an accountant to figure out the actual price of caskets. With casket companies offering upfront discounts and year-end rebates, determining the true price of caskets was a real chore. Not to mention other items that could be thrown in the mix: marketing allowances, selection room representation, “freebies”, etc. to justify their casket pricing structure. And sometimes to get these discounts, you had to sign a multi-year contract – just like cable TV or wireless phone companies.

Nowadays, some of the larger casket companies are going to a more simplified pricing company – although most independent casket distributors have always preferred a very fair and transparent pricing structure for all their accounts. This ensures a funeral home knows they are getting a distributor’s best price from the beginning without haggling, threatening to leave, or signing a contract.

Insurance – Although rare, there are situations where there is an issue with a casket during the service. Who stands to lose when there is a legal action brought by the family related to the casket? After all, it’s the funeral home from whom the family purchased the casket.

Much like the domestic manufacturers, the major import casket manufacturers have arranged for product liability insurance to protect the company and the funeral home from legal issues with a family. Obviously, for all concerned, the hope is that it is never needed, but certainly, a comfort to know that it’s there.

Wide Product Line – Import manufacturers realize it is important to offer both metal and wood caskets in a broad product line whose designs can easily be substituted for all the popular models that are in the line of most casket manufacturers today.

Given the way casket prices have risen over the years, funeral directors need to be in a position to cost-effectively provide families with a casket that fits the financial situation of a family, and also a casket the family is proud to display their loved one.

Import caskets have also allowed in certain instances an opportunity for a funeral home to offer a suitable casket substitution to a family in cases where a preneed contact has not kept up with the rising prices of funeral service.

Sales Representation – Unfortunately today some funeral directors look to their casket representative as an order taker. A good casket representative, from a manufacturer or a distributor, can be a valuable resource for a funeral home – offering merchandising support and other business advice.

An Understanding of the Funeral Profession – The formula for viewing products as a commodity had worked well for

smartphones, microwaves, and TVs manufactured overseas, so why not for caskets? Simply, funeral service is different from the retail marketplace. Most funeral directors had a much different view of pricing caskets and as a result, viewed the casket as something more than merely a commodity.

Over time, a few import manufacturers began to better understand the funeral homes and their pricing structure and as a result, improved care and attention. A handful is giving back by supporting the profession through sponsorships at conventions and donations to organizations in the funeral profession.

Made in America – Some funeral directors love to wave this flag and have every right to do so. “Buy American” has served our country well over the years. But we live in a global marketplace where similar industries such as furniture, textiles and automotive have all transitioned to embrace the cost-saving advantages in global manufacturing.

Interestingly, most domestically-produced caskets source parts like hardware and interiors from overseas in the assembly of their caskets. Conversely, many import casket manufacturers obtain most of the woods for their hardwood caskets from the US and use American paints for their metal caskets.

Regardless, some funeral homes want to be supportive of domestic companies. They still can do this by working with a local casket distributor. Their local distributor employs not only themselves but many other local workers and families.

Recognizable Name – While no casket company – domestic or overseas – can claim they have brand awareness and recognition with the general public, it can be comforting for funeral professionals to deal with a casket company that has some name recognition in the profession. At present, there are but a handful of casket manufacturers that have brand awareness with funeral directors.

To some, it’s a show of confidence when a company chooses to advertise and put their name behind the product. The most recognizable product at a funeral service is the casket. It only stands to reason that companies are proud of the products they manufacture would advertise.

A Final Thought

At the end of the day, selecting the company from whom you want to purchase a casket is a business decision to be made by each funeral home. My intent with this article is merely to bring to light factors that go into this business decision; not to start a debate about domestically-produced v. global-sourced or big v. small. If I caused you to think differently about how you purchase caskets, then I have helped. Thank you. FBA

Scott Weisenbach is the National Sales Director for Sich Casket Company. Sich is the top-selling manufacturer of premium quality wood and metal caskets from China and distributed by a carefully-selected network of independent distributors throughout North America. Information is available by visiting www.sichcasket.com, emailing info@SichCasket.com or calling (888) 317-1929

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Who is Sich Casket and what products and services do they provide?

Sich Casket Company is a top-selling manufacturer of premium quality caskets. Sich has a complete line of traditional wood and metal burial caskets. Additionally, Sich has a line of cremation caskets including several models that have eco-friendly features that offer a responsible balance between natural and traditional design. These products are distributed through a network of exclusive, independent distributors in North America.

How did Sich Casket get involved in the funeral industry?

Sich had its earliest beginnings as a furniture manufacturer. After researching the funeral industry, Sirius Chan decided that Sich would change its core product from furniture to high-quality wood caskets. In 2004 Sich began manufacturing wood caskets and a few years later, Sich expanded its factory and began producing a comprehensive line of metal caskets.

What makes Sich Casket special?

Several factors make a Sich casket unique:

- Sich Casket combines an enduring commitment to traditional craftsmanship with innovative production methods to offer caskets at an excellent price.
- The company sources its materials globally to provide the best quality and value at every price point.
- Sich caskets are sold through a carefully-selected network of independent distributors that share our value proposition and an unwavering dedication to the funeral profession.

- The local distributors are Sich Casket's "eyes and ears" in the local markets and as such keep the company apprised of local market conditions which allows Sich to be responsive to the needs of these distributors and the funeral homes they serve.
- Our distribution network consists of 63 distributor warehouses strategically located throughout North America.

In summary – Sich manufactures impeccable, world-class caskets that are built to meet or exceed U.S. standards in design, features, and quality that are sold through a network of independent distributors and Sich caskets cost far less than comparable caskets from other manufacturers.

What are the benefits of funeral homes using Sich Casket?

Sich works very closely with each of its distributors to develop caskets that represent the unique tastes, cultures and religious customs of the region. With the help of its progressive distributors, caskets are created and offered to funeral homes to help a family tell the endearing story of their loved one.

What solution does Sich Casket provide for funeral homes?

For many families, the casket remains the centerpiece at the funeral service. It is the last thing that a family buys for their loved one; it will frame their "memory picture" for years to come. Sich Casket and its distributors offer families the opportunity to purchase a high-quality casket at a fair price – a casket of "affordable luxury".

How would a funeral home contact Sich Casket for more information on its products?

For more information, visit www.SichCasket.com, email info@SichCasket.com or call (888) 794-1744.



Sich Rustic Oak - H2404



Sirius Chan, president of Sich Casket, credits the efforts of their network of progressive independent distributors for much of the company's success.

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 NOT ONCE, NOT TWICE, BUT THREE TIMES**

When you offer families the new Rustic Oak from Sich, chances are you'll have three times the likelihood to satisfy their need for a casket that resonates with the lifestyle of their loved one.



That's because this solid wood casket has three interior options that complement the exterior's unique barn wood finish - Duck Cloth, Burlap and Camouflage. Don't miss out on this opportunity from Sich.

Rustic Oak shown with Camouflage Interior.

For your nearest Sich distributor, call 888-794-1744 or visit sichcasket.com.



CHOSEN STAFF ASSISTING ROBERT PEREZ WITH CONTACTLESS PAYMENTS

Doing business with an industry expert has its perks.

When Chosen Payments launched in 2008, founder and CEO, Jeff Brodsky had a vision to build a credit card processing company that was unique and hold relationships with clients that were much different than anything he had experienced before. While working for other processors, Brodsky saw a void between merchants and their credit card processors. “There were no true relationships”, says Brodsky. Merchants think of their credit card processor as a utility rather than a business partner. Likewise, most processors treat their merchants as a merchant ID number. Brodsky wanted to create a two-way partnership model and quickly coined the company’s slogan, Your Partner in Success. That partnership concept led Chosen Payments to create mutually beneficial relationships with many state funeral associations, ICCFA members, NFDA members and Funeral Business Advisor Magazine. The vision included bringing deep discounts to the industry as well as providing valuable education to the industry. Working in partnership with Chosen Payments, association members receive an exclusive pricing benefit and access to a team of industry trained professionals to help every step of the way-increasing profits, adding security and improving efficiencies.

In order to complete the vision, Brodsky knew that Chosen Payments could not be all things to all people. Instead, he chose a handful of niche markets to serve so that he could learn an industry inside and out, speak the lingo, understand the pain-points and improve how business is transacted in the specialized space. By focusing on the funeral industry as one of those vertical markets, Brodsky was able to develop a dedicated team of professionals that truly understands how the industry operates, the sensitivity of death as well as recognizing industry trends as they begin to develop. One such trend was arranging

services at a family’s home instead of in the funeral home. To address that issue, Chosen Payments created a mobile app that allows directors and planners to accept credit cards in the field using their smartphone. The app allows users to check for batch deposits, chargebacks, refunds processed or just about any other credit card processing concern. Holding true to its industry dedication, Chosen Payments began offering the app to funeral directors for free during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, Chosen Payments began rebating some of the fees associated with accepting credit cards for services to help ease the financial burden that some in the industry are currently facing due to the pandemic. Chosen Payments has always held a goal of protecting their merchants in good times and bad. Jeff expresses, “If we have to rebate some of our profit back to our funeral homes during this uncertain time, that’s what we will do to be a good business partner”.

Brodsky’s vision of a partnership extends well beyond providing fee rebates, sponsorships and revenue sharing. Members of the Chosen Payments funeral industry team participate in FDA board meetings and serve on committees such as the California Funeral Directors Association’s convention, PR and legislative committees in the past. They help organize fundraisers and take active roles with associations whom they partner with. They provide educational sessions during association meetings that teach funeral professionals how to reduce the costs associated with accepting a credit card for funeral arrangements. They also share information about reading your monthly statement and which fees are negotiable with a processor. In a sample analysis at one educational session, a funeral home found they had paid nearly \$2000 in credit card fees for a case when they could have

paid \$1100 if they had the information shared during a training session. This education quickly grew popular in the industry as Chosen being the trusted source for credit card processing.

Chosen Payments was quick to react to the COVID-19 pandemic and began offering special pricing and rebates for funeral homes who found themselves financially fragile. “We understand that we are in a very trying time during this pandemic and we want you to know that we are all in this together,” states Brodsky. This isn’t the first time that Chosen Payments has stepped up during a crisis. When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, Jeff quickly organized a fundraiser to help merchants who had been impacted by the storm. Noe Lopez II, owner of Saxton Funeral Home in Corpus Christi, a client of Chosen Payments was very grateful to be a recipient of Brodsky’s efforts. The funeral home had their roof ripped off during the storm and Chosen Payments sent a check to provide some relief. Jeff’s philosophy has always been, “We are all in this together”. Brodsky feels the importance of that even more now that we are in an unprecedented national emergency. “We need each other more than any time before. Let’s try to help each other and stand together united”. Other processors don’t offer this ‘family touch’ but Chosen prides itself on such.

It is extraordinary efforts like these that endear clients like Robert Perez, a funeral director in Ventura County, California. Perez owns a total of five funeral homes between Perez Family Funeral Home and Devine Funeral and Cremation. “Chosen Payments has redefined the standards of what a credit card processor should look like by consistently going above to support the funeral care industry through good times and bad”, says Perez. The expense of accepting credit cards is one that is often overlooked according to Perez who says most directors just don’t have the time to review the expense. “Once we sat down and reviewed the rates we were paying, we realized we were getting gouged. As of day one with Chosen Payments I have been so pleased saving money and it is super easy for

families to pay” says Perez who went on to say, “People were trying to charge me \$300 a month, and with Chosen its free, for accepting credit cards outside the funeral home”. Perez elaborated how easy Chosen Payments makes it to handle the arrangement agreement and payment all online and that service has been extremely valuable during the pandemic. He added that he gets paid much faster through Chosen Payments. Perez states “I see them (Chosen Payments) as family that is supporting my industry. They are family for life!” -Ironically Perez and Brodsky grew up in the same small town of Moorpark, Ca and through the funeral industry they reconnected 20+ years later and quickly determined they can do business together. Supporting a company that is mutually invested in the industry is a belief both firms’ practice, thus taking advantage of Chosen’s great offers was a no brainer for Perez.

When Chosen Payments entered the funeral care industry in 2015 it was a tough road as funeral homes tend to be passed from one generation to another and change is hard to invoke. However, during the past year at least 75 percent of new funeral industry clients arrived at Chosen Payments after being referred by a colleague. “That speaks volumes about the trust we have gained in the industry”, says Brodsky. “Our goal is to help our clients grow in ways they did not know they could, while also giving the old school personal touch of service the business world lacks today’ says Brodsky.

Chosen Payments corporate office is based in Moorpark, Calif., and maintains regional offices in Atlanta, Salt Lake City and Phoenix along with satellite offices in Nashville, Santa Ana and Grand Rapids. Any business involved in the funeral care industry has a massive advantage when doing business with Chosen Payments. The guarantee to save you money, COVID relief program, security and technology offerings, chargeback assistance and ‘White Glove Service’ is superior to others and they look forward to helping any and all in this industry. **FBA**

Chosen and Perez staff gather to show what a social distancing service looks like.



Chosen Payments is the exclusive credit card processor for Funeral Business Advisor Magazine as well as being a dominant vendor in the industry serving 1000+ funeral professionals. You will find the Chosen Payments team at national and regional funeral industry trade shows and events. They participate as a sponsor and exhibitor as well as leading educational sessions that help improve profitability.

For more information please contact Sarah McKee - sarah.mckee@chosenpayments.com or visit www.chosenpayments.com.



COMPANY SPOTLIGHT
United Midwest Savings Bank

Who is United Midwest Savings Bank and what product and/or service do they provide?

United Midwest is one of the 15 largest Small Business Administration (SBA) Lenders in the country, and lending to the death care industry has been a significant reason for this accomplishment. Since 1889, United Midwest Savings Bank has offered a range of financial services to our communities and businesses. Over time, the bank has evolved and today focuses its services into four main categories: Business Lending, Consumer Lending, Residential Loans, and Deposit Services. While United Midwest's products, services, and expertise have the feel of a small community bank, our reach is of a national brand, especially with our business lending. For a bank our size, our top 15 ranking shows our dedication to providing business with SBA funding and the level of expertise we provide to our clients.

How did United Midwest get involved in the funeral industry?

Over 15 years ago, Chad Fondriest, our top death care industry lender, was introduced to the funeral industry through a mutual contact. As Chad began providing SBA loans for funeral home acquisitions, expansions and refinancing, he learned the intricacies of the business. Chad believes it takes someone special to be in the funeral business- a level of compassion and a desire to help others through one of the most difficult times in life. The funeral business is not just another small business; it's a unique profession that a few are called to do.

Chad brought this belief and his lending experience with the death care industry with him when he joined United Midwest in 2016. Here he has built a team, including lender Blessing Wilhelmsen, that can effectively and efficiently guide a funeral home or other death care industry owner through the loan process from start to finish.

What makes United Midwest unique?

United Midwest exclusively provides SBA loans to businesses for variety of purposes. We concentrate on several key industries, death care being one of them. United Midwest has gathered some of the most experienced and successful people in the industry to help us grow our business and the businesses we help. Our team is personable, reliable, and available to help a funeral home or other death care business owners through every step of the loan process. While we are

small bank, we also are a Preferred Lender Program (PLP) SBA lender which gives us the authority to approve loans in house and close loans faster. Add this to the expertise of a death care industry lending team, and you have a hands-on financing experience with approvals in a matter of days, not weeks, and closed in under 30 days. After the loan closes, United Midwest is also the loan servicer throughout the life of the loan, so anytime a borrower has a question or concern, they simply call us.

What are the benefits to funeral homes using United Midwest?/ How does United Midwest provide a solution for Funeral Homes?

A SBA loan from United Midwest is a great way to fund larger business investments such as acquisitions, refinancing, new-equipment purchases, and expansions. SBA loans provide the flexibility and terms that many other types of business loans do not. Owners can acquire a business for just 10% down, up to 25-year repayment terms, and interest rates similar to other commercial financing, allowing the business to grow while lessening financial burden. As a PLP SBA lender, United Midwest has the authority to approve and close loans on behalf of the SBA, saving valuable time and making the process easier. However, the most important benefit to funeral homes is United Midwest's team of lenders, processors and closers. Our team consists of some of the most experienced and personable people in the SBA lending business; we're with our clients every step of the way.

How would a funeral home contact United Midwest for more information on your products?

For more information about United Midwest' SBA loans for funeral businesses, please contact:



Chad Fondriest
cfondriest@umwsb.com



Blessing Wilhelmsen
bwilhelmsen@umwsb.com

Or visit, www.umwsb.com/about/experience/funeral_homes/.



As experts in lending we help you through the unknown.

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United Midwest is dedicated to our customer's success. Here's what makes us different:

» We're specialists

Few lenders understand the details and costs associated with the death care industry as well as we do. We're more than willing to spend time discussing your financing options and help you find the best solution.

» We understand the funeral industry

Traditional banks often want assets or real estate as collateral and do not take into consideration the underlying value of your cash flow. United Midwest's SBA loan can be a great solution for funeral directors who are looking to acquire, refinance or expand their business and there is little tangible collateral.

» We're a top-ranked lender

United Midwest Savings Bank is ranked as one of the top 30 Small Business Administration (SBA) lenders nationally in both dollar volume and number of loans. We continue to grow by focusing on one customer at a time.

CONTACT US TODAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FINANCING OPTIONS FOR YOUR FUNERAL HOME BUSINESS:

Chad Fondriest 614-205-7600 cfondriest@umwsb.com

www.umwsb.com

Rates, terms and conditions subject to change. All loans subject to SBA lending guidelines, credit review, underwriting guidelines, verification of identity, and approval.





Funeral Business Advisor sat down with Kyle Struempf, funeral director and COO of Davis-Struempff Funeral Home & Crematory in Austell, Georgia to learn more about his career, experience in the funeral industry, and what he's looking forward to in the future.

Did you always want to be a funeral director? How did you get into the industry?

No. When I was 10, I wanted to play in the NBA. By 16, I realized that it was a long shot and I should probably focus on something else as a career. My grandfather, Roy O. Davis, was in the funeral business for over 60 years beginning in 1930 and until he died in 1992. I was his shadow whenever I was around him, as I truly adored and admired him. I learned from the best how to serve the community with compassion, humility, and even humor, when appropriate. He was the most generous and giving person that I have ever known and I hope that I can continue his huge legacy. My mother, Debbie, and uncle, Jim, also received their compassion from him and followed in his footsteps to the funeral business. So, you could say that I grew up in the industry.

What is your favorite part about working in this industry?

My favorite part about the industry is helping people through one of the toughest times in their lives. It is not always easy, but it makes it well worth it when their family members or friends let us know how much it meant to them.

Tell us a little bit about your funeral home. What makes it stand apart from others?

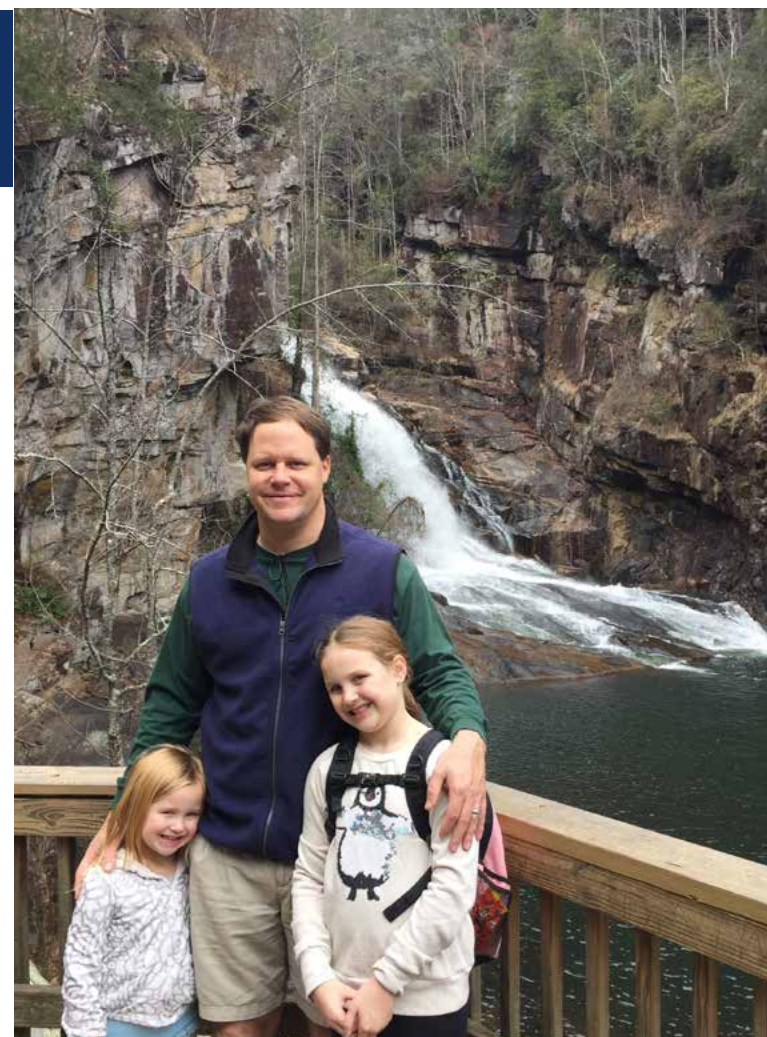
Davis-Struempff Funeral Home & Crematory, being family-owned, is very family-oriented. We have many years of experience, vast knowledge, but most importantly, we have compassion. We truly care for the families that we serve. We try to go above and beyond to make our families transition as smooth as possible. We realize that everyone grieves differently so we do our best to accommodate each individual's needs.

What does excellent customer service mean to you?

Excellent customer service to me means to listen to the family's needs and make every effort to meet or exceed those expectations.

What are some of the ways that you and your firm handled the Covid-19 crisis as if effected the funeral industry?

We have tried to adapt our services to keep everyone, our staff and our families & friends included, safe as well as honor and celebrate their loved ones. Some of the adjustments





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

that we have made are to implement a "Message of Comfort" service for those in our community who are not able to attend a funeral. When they email us a message of support, our team will handwrite their words onto a heart to display in the chapel so the family can read those heartfelt messages and know that many others are supporting them in spirit. My wife, Kortney, is also making hundreds of masks for our funeral home and many healthcare professionals that need them. We have a free mask display in the entrance for anyone that needs one. And of course, we are live streaming/recording the services in our chapel and at the gravesite. We are offering complimentary livestreaming and the option of a future memorial service when the shelter in place/10-person gathering restrictions are lifted. We understand that it is an especially tough time for families to lose a loved one and have their support system limited by the virus, so we are doing our best to make them feel as loved as possible.



Looking forward to the future, what are you most excited about? Do you have any concerns?

In the future, I am most excited about technology. Friends and family that are unable to attend are now able to be a part of the service through webcasting. As technology continues to improve, it will create new ways to honor loved ones and make the process more convenient and accessible.

The concern I have is that convenience may begin to outweigh the importance of a funeral service. I believe that a service is important to the survivor's grieving process and helps greatly with closure.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job or what have you personally gained by being a funeral director?

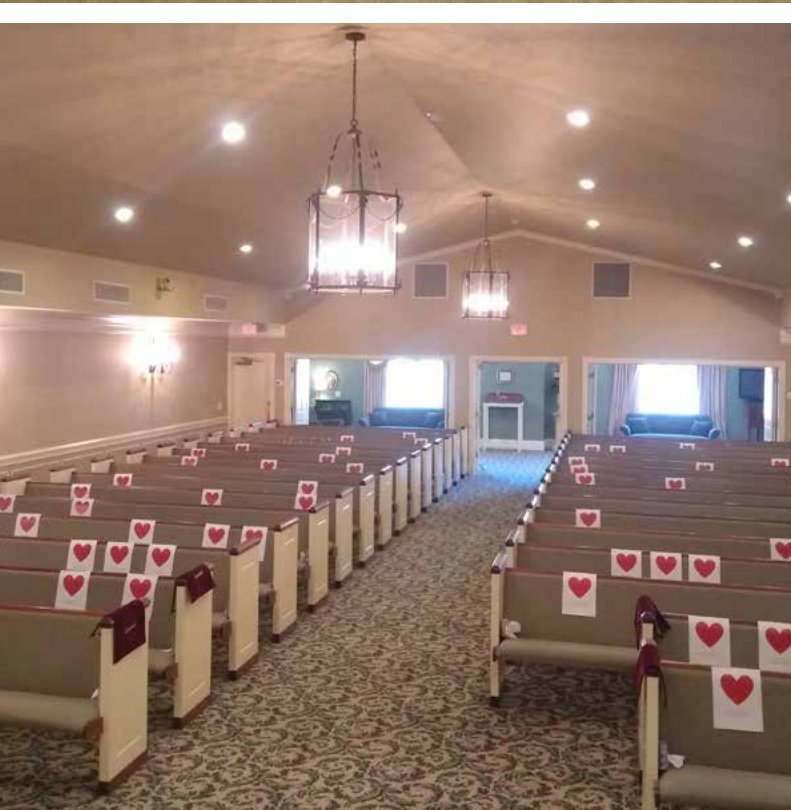
The most rewarding part of being a funeral director is when families tell us how much we helped them through such a difficult time. It is very gratifying knowing the difference you made in someone's life.

Do you have any advice you would share with other funeral directors, especially the younger ones who are just now entering the profession?

My advice would be to strive to be as empathetic and compassionate as possible. Realize that everyone grieves differently, so you have to personalize care to every family you serve. And never be judgmental, because you do not know everyone's circumstances.

When you are not at the funeral home, what are some things you like to do in your free time?

My favorite thing to do in my spare time is to spend time with family. I enjoy doing so many things, but it is always better when you are with the people you love most. Golf would be my next favorite thing to do. There is something about being in nature as you try to hit that pesky ball into the hole that really relaxes me. **FBA**



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Tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got into the industry.

I was teaching literature and American studies at Wayne State University in Detroit and working on my PhD when I realized that the academic industry was changing very dramatically in terms of hiring and tenured positions. Basically, tenure had disappeared for those specializing in the arts and humanities. So, I left the academic world and became a freelance writer. As I was going through that transition, my father was diagnosed with brain cancer and given only six weeks to live. I helped take care of him during that time and those last weeks of his life were some of the best we had together. My father's death was a truly remarkable experience for me and I'm very glad I was able to take what I learned from him and use that knowledge productively.

After he died, I made the funeral arrangements and decided to write the obituary myself. I have been a professional writer for nearly 30 years and had my first work published when I was just 14, so even at that time, I had a ton of experience. Also, my father was quite a character and I was excited to write an obituary that would really bring him to life.

When his story was done, I demanded that the Cheboygan Tribune in northern Michigan publish it in its entirety, without edits. And they did! Actually, I don't think there was any news in Cheboygan that week, so my Dad's story gave them something to put in the paper. However, his story took on a life of its own and became kind of famous in Cheboygan.

Two weeks after it was published, I was at the grocery store buying food for my father's memorial, and I heard two women in front of me talking and referencing my father's obituary. One of the women pulled a tattered Cheboygan Tribune out of her purse right in front of me and it was folded open to my Dad's obituary. She gave it to her friend to read. I thought to myself, "Oh wow, I can't believe strangers are talking about my father and laughing." I was ecstatic. It was a wonderful feeling. I knew I had created something which had an impact and which was memorable. I was proud that the story gave my father legacy.

Throughout my freelance career, I wrote other obituaries and eulogies here and there, but then it occurred to me that perhaps there was a full-time opportunity in helping others realize the legacies of their loved one in print. That's how Beloved came to be. And now that's all we do – we write personal and customized obituaries and eulogies. But I only use those words on first reference. They are truly creative life stories. I officially started Beloved in 2016 and it's been such an incredible experience. The business has taken off in just a few short years and has grown to include 12 contracted writers that help me on a regular basis.

With Beloved, do you work with the general public or do you work solely in partnership with funeral homes?

We do. However, funeral directors who sell our memorials provide a unique service for their families, and our stories also become marketing pieces for the funeral home. In fact, we often act as representatives of a funeral home when

interacting with families. In essence, we are the funeral home's staff writers.

What part of writing obituaries comes naturally to you? What do you find to be most challenging?

What comes easiest to me is immediately establishing a rapport and being able to tap into emotion very quickly. That's something that is hard to teach my writers because everyone is different, and they all have their own way of approaching people. For this reason, we work with a grief therapist to learn how to engage with people and to understand the best way to communicate with people while they are actively grieving. I really wish we could do more preneed, because it's a lot more fun. People get so much joy out of creating a story about their life, especially when they are able to see themselves on paper. And people love to be the star of their own story. I think there is a certain satisfaction in knowing how people are remembering you.

I enjoy listening to people and I love hearing and sharing stories. When people tell me stories about their loved ones, it's wonderful. You never know what you're going to hear. Sometimes it's really fascinating and at other times it's mundane, but you get a sense of just how precious each person's life is. What's most interesting is that you aren't just getting a story about the deceased, you are learning more about the loved one who is telling you about the deceased. I like that.

The most difficult part is that the loss the family is experiencing sometimes leaves them at a loss for words as well. Most people love to speak about their loved ones and tell me about their favorite memories, what their loved one used to say, the songs they sang, the movies they enjoyed. But, sometimes we have families that say they want to talk, and when the time comes, find they can't because the emotions are too much. For them, you are just the voice on the other end of the phone, but it's your job to gently lead



Petra at the NFDA convention in 2017 in a hearse.

them into discussion and sometimes that can be so difficult. I usually laugh with these families, but at times, I grieve with them too. Also, any time children die it's even more difficult because families are in shock, and grief has completely overwhelmed them – those are the hardest obituaries to write and are usually based solely on funeral directors' notes.

You also recently started Detroit Death Talk, what drove you to organize this event series?

Over the last few years, I have spoken to many funeral directors and I quickly realized that few people were publicly talking about death in a conversational manner. As a society, we talk about nearly everything else, but death is still off limits. So, just this past January, I started Death Talk and we had our first series of events here in Detroit.

At Death Talk events, we encourage healthy conversation about death and dying. We lead open, sincere, honest conversations about death and host public discussion. We also create an environment in which speaking about death is natural and comfortable. It's not just talking about the practical side of death and preplanning or making arrangements, but it's also talking about the emotional burden as well. Additionally, we emphasize that people create a personal legacy and think hard about memorialization because it's so important and helpful for the people we leave behind.

The Death Talk events are different from a Death Café or similar conversations, because we frame each discussion with a topic important to the funeral home which hosts the event. It's a community outreach that not only encourages people to invest in preneed, but also to tie up loose ends, practical and emotional. But it's also completely tailored for each individual home. Death Talk works with funeral home owners to present a conversation based on their personal interests and the interests of their community. We're



Petra, in front of her booth at the 2019 NFDA convention in Chicago.

tackling everything from Green Burial, for environmentally-conscious clients, to a public discussion at the Wayne State University School of Mortuary Science, explaining how future funeral directors are educated. We're really removing the mystery and showing people what goes on in the funeral industry, as well as providing each funeral home a service which ties directly into their business plan. Death Talk allows funeral directors to present unique and engaging programs without all the work. We're the resource. Death Talk takes care of everything, from creating the event and finding speakers to publicity.

Death Talk was able to co-host one event before the COVID-19 pandemic and it went incredibly well. Admittedly, it was a rather long event, but it was well received and well attended. The discussion was fantastic and the feedback was fabulous. I am looking forward to resuming our schedule when we are able.

Looking forward to the future, what are you most excited about?

I am most excited about the prospect of growing Beloved. I think that, particularly with the technology that is out there these days, our service is something that could easily be used by every client that a funeral home serves. The time of death notices being published in papers is sadly coming to an end. I am a huge advocate of the publishing and print industry, but to keep it alive in a world where content is generated and shared so quickly online, print is becoming irrelevant. Instead of churning out content, we have to produce high quality stories worth printing – which is what we do at Beloved.

I am also really excited to grow the Death Talks because America needs it. We need to continue to promote healthy discussion and urge people to think about death in more positive terms because it's a natural part of life that everyone experiences. By creating a space for people to have honest and open conversation, people start looking for ways to memorialize and build a personal legacy, and they look to funeral homes for help. When people come to these talks, they begin to see how important it is to build a plan for themselves and for the loved ones they will someday leave behind; many people realize they want and need so much more than just a direct cremation. It's also great that we present these talks as a series, so people can attend the ones they feel they need to round out their thinking and interests, or they can come to them all.

What is your favorite part about working in this industry?

My favorite part about my work is that I get to talk about my father all the time. His death changed the course of my life, for the better, and he is behind everything that I am doing. When I sat down to write his obituary, I realized that most funeral homes were just preparing elongated death notices from a template, and my father was more than that. Every life is more than a death notice. I love referencing him in conversation. The grief I hold for him is always just under the surface, so speaking about him, bringing him into my life, keeping him alive and well, all of these things make me very happy. **FBA**



Petra with the mariachi band she hired to play in her Day of the Dead booth at the NFDA convention in Salt Lake City, 2018.



Petra at the NFDA Convention and Expo in Salt Lake City, helping the vendor next to her demonstrate his body lift.

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MAKING REMOTE BURIAL VAULT ARRANGEMENTS IS NO LONGER A REMOTE POSSIBILITY:

How You Can Make It Effective

BY KEN MOORE



To say the landscape of funeral arrangements has changed is quite the understatement. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused every single funeral home, crematory operator and cemetery to make adjustments for social distancing and servicing families. In addition to the many operating procedures that have been modified, simply communicating with families and helping them make funeral arrangements has been severely impacted. In a world where the human touch is so critical, funeral professionals must find ways to still make that connection. One way is with remote presentations. While remote presentations have certainly been employed by a handful of funeral providers before 2020, current conditions have accelerated the need. Many predict that remote arrangements and presentations will continue to grow in popularity even after the pandemic is over. Regardless, we all have to remember this is still a high-touch business. The difference now is making those touches in a virtual environment – and doing so effectively.

In addition to successful remote engagement with families is the challenge of communicating the value of services and merchandise, especially that which can be perceived as extraneous if not presented cogently or within some context. In other words, if a family merely is presented with an online list of products without being shown how various options can add more meaning to their loved one's goodbye tribute, then often it becomes a lowest-cost decision.

The choice of an outer burial container (OBC) is especially prone to cost-driven decisions if there is no one, or no method of, articulating the value of a burial vault along with options that can significantly elevate the graveside service experience. A remote presentation should only be physically remote, not emotionally distant. So how can that emotional engagement be attained in a remote environment? The answer lies in straightforward choices and clarity in presentation, using strong visuals and ideally video.

Even in a selection room or arrangements office, families who are presented with too many choices are overwhelmed. Putting an overwhelming amount of choices on a website or in a remote presentation truly is the recipe for confusion, frustration and poor decisions, especially when showing products that are exceedingly unfamiliar to most people. Consider the consumer research of Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper, social psychologists who demonstrated how too many options paralyze people's decision-making. They analyzed the choices which 800,000 people made pertaining to retirement funds offered by 647 employers, making this an empirically valid study. When given 59 retirement funds to choose among, 60 percent of employees participated. However, when offered just two fund choices, 75 percent participated. "Since these employees were even given incentives to participate in 401(k)s through employer matches and tax shelters," Iyengar noted, "choosing not to participate essentially throws away free money." Presenting families with limited, yet still distinct, burial vault options – especially remotely – will result in an easier user experience and you may even be surprised to see better choices being made. Take a look at your historical sales of outer burial containers and consider limiting the choices to those which constitute the majority.

Of course, even with a limited selection, merely presenting products without explaining the differences and the value won't be very effective. Why do some consumers buy an expensive car when a cheaper one will do the same functional thing which is transporting them from point A to point B? Because of the value that they see in the more expensive model, value that is likely more emotional value rather than practical value. That same dynamic is involved in an outer burial container selection. While there is definitely a functional difference between an unlined grave box and a lined burial vault, the emotional value in protecting a loved one from underground elements is perhaps even more important. Furthermore, the extreme emotional value that is derived from

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a vault that is personalized and reflective of the loved one's life is incomparable. A presentation must be done, and the more succinct the better since in a remote environment you don't have the family in front of you to validate that they are understanding what you are saying. Even if you have been a funeral professional for years, consider creating a brief script that ensures you inform the family on the why's, what's and differences among OBCs. Be sure to articulate the value of a graveside service and how a burial vault can play a significant role in commemorating a life – especially if that graveside service itself may be experienced remotely and the vault is the predominant commemorative component.

A concise presentation still needs strong visuals so be sure that you have visuals that the family can see on-screen while you are making the presentation. Perhaps bullet points for the various burial vaults you are offering can reinforce what you are saying. And strongly consider the use of video for a most effective presentation. A video has a way of engaging people and articulating both functionality and value of burial vaults, including those which can be personalized to transform it from a functional "thing" to a landscape of commemoration. Ask your burial vault provider if they have a video that can be utilized in remote presentations.

There is one other subject that is worth discussion which is posed with a devil's advocate question: with social distancing practices limiting the number of mourners, why bother with a personalized burial vault for a graveside service that barely anyone will attend? The reality is that it is even more important in terms of the emotional support for the few in attendance, who have less people around them who could give them that support, or through their stories talk about the significance that their loved one had. A vault cover that includes images, photos, symbols, and words that reflect the unique person who is being commemorated tells those stories and lends that emotional support. The service might also be livestreamed so that friends and family can view the service and indeed see and appreciate the treasured tribute on the vault. In fact, livestreaming not only "brings virtually" those who would have been in attendance, but even more who might otherwise not have been able to attend.

Social distancing is somewhat of a misnomer – in our present environment it is actually about physical distancing. In fact, it is more important than ever to build and maintain social ties with your communities and the families that you are helping. Effective remote burial vault presentations support physical distancing while achieving the critical social connection necessary for your business. **FBA**

Ken Moore is Senior Vice President-Sales & Marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services where he has guided sales and marketing strategies for over twelve years. He has also led the dynamic sales growth of The Wilbert Group's Signet Supply casket division since its inception in 2009. Ken has over 34 years of experience in sales, marketing, operations, executive leadership and strategy across various industries. In his leisure time, Ken enjoys boating and visiting his children and step-daughters that live in various parts of the United States and Germany. To connect with Ken, call him at 913-732-9063 or by email at KMoore@wilbert.com.



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TOP 5 THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN WORKING WITH A CASKET COMPANY

BY KATHY SHIREY

The funeral industry is constantly changing with different needs and wants from consumers. With advancements in technology, the desire to add more personalization to services, and the rise of cremation, it can be challenging for funeral directors to adapt to all the needs of families while maintaining a profitable business. Funeral directors do not have to face these changes alone, they should seek assistance from someone they trust as an expert on the subject. When seeking an expert, a funeral director can look internally at someone on staff who is talented in that subject; they can look to their vendors as a resource or can even go as far as hiring an outside consultant. One of the important things to take into consideration is a cost-benefit analysis. Does the cost of hiring an expert bring in enough revenue for the additional cost to make sense? Take the time to explore all your options when bringing in a specialist and you will most likely find that the benefits of utilizing a sales consultant from a family owned-wholesale casket company are incomparable. When deciding to bring in a sales consultant, there are many things to consider that will ensure you receive the best possible service that is in accordance with the goals and plans you have in place for your business.

Here are the top 5 things to look for when working with a casket company:

1. Partner with Someone who will Invest in You

Seek out someone who has a vested interest in your business. The individual you decide to work with should always make your business a top priority. From ensuring timely deliveries to helping you with special circumstances, the relationship is destined to fail if your needs are not being met. Utilizing a highly trained sales consultant will add value, expertise, and personal touch to your business that you might not otherwise get.

Working directly with a consultant allows you to trust that your business is staying up to date with the industry changes without having to sacrifice your time or values as a funeral director. Also, if you can find a vendor that caters to your needs, the added benefit is that your firm will benefit from that "personalized touch."

2. Keep Focus on Top Revenue Generating Opportunities

After the consultant relationship is established, work together to keep the focus on top revenue-generating opportunities. It is no secret that cremation is publicized and, on the rise, but that does not mean your focus should shift away from burials; cremations should just add to it. Burials account for a significant amount of revenue for funeral homes and they should remain a priority even as the industry changes. Let's face it, the funeral industry has undergone significant changes throughout the years. As the way the industry is viewed by consumers is changing, funeral directors must also change their approach to certain aspects of their business.

Your sales consultant will be able to guide you in the best practices for merchandising caskets in a way that allows you to continue to be profitable while continuing to meet the financial needs of the families you are serving. They will be able to assist you with setting up your showroom in a way that makes sense, as well offer knowledgeable insight to caskets that have are profitable for you while maintaining retail prices families are comfortable with.

3. Leave it to a Trusted Expert

Just as you might outsource your payroll, you can do the same thing for merchandising. Certain companies have highly trained, trusted sales consultants that know the industry and have dedicated many years to helping funeral homes be successful on the financial side while allowing you to do what you do best, serving families. As a funeral director, you are a caregiver, an event planner, a community leader, an emotional support system, a customer service representative, and the list goes on. Bringing in an outside sales consultant to assist you with product knowledge, merchandising, and other issues that may arise allows you to focus on your families without having the added stress of the necessary behind the scenes tasks. Properly merchandising can increase your revenue substantially, allowing your business to be as successful as possible and assisting in steady growth.

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4. Plan your Business

Work with your consultant to create a business strategy that makes sense for you. Additionally, you should base your plan on readily available merchandise. Promotions can be great and certainly offer an incentive to purchase caskets but try not to abandon your original business plan for the sake of a one-time discount. If a promo item does not fit your original business plan, do not order it just because it is discounted. Sticking to your original plan will allow for steady growth and will allow you to stay on track with your overall goals. A sales consultant with a casket company will be able to sit down with you and strategize a business plan that makes sense for your needs and is tailored to your goals.

5. Partner with Vendors who Understand your Business

Be sure to partner with vendors who understand all aspects of your business, from the administrative side to the sales side to the marketing side. With the advancements in technology, larger corporations have continually made decisions to scale back their face-to-face interactions. Therefore, it is hard for their remote personnel to act as a true sales consultant without ever stepping foot in your selection room. When you work with an independently owned and operated casket company that has people in the field and at your funeral home, you can trust that you are receiving subject expertise from people who are trained and exposed to hundreds of funeral homes. They understand what works and what does not work in the funeral industry. They are constantly adding new techniques and strategies based on field research and they can relate to running a small business.

Overall, working with a family-owned casket vendor can be extremely beneficial to funeral directors who are looking to optimize all aspects of their business. Funeral directors should expect their vendors to be just as knowledgeable as them on all aspects of the industry, therefore it is important to be selective when deciding on bringing in an outside sales consultant. This person will be taking on responsibilities that have the potential to influence the direction of your business, therefore you should invest in someone who genuinely wants to see you succeed. Taking these 5 points into consideration when selecting a casket vendor to work with will ensure the relationship is mutually beneficial and that your needs are being met on all levels. **FBA**

Kathy Shirey currently serves as the Sales and Marketing Support Specialist for Thacker Caskets. Upon graduating from Clarion University of Pennsylvania, she relocated to Maryland where she began her career in sales and marketing for an art gallery. Kathy will provide Thacker valued support in leading all marketing activities including designing printed marketing materials, leading collaborative efforts with industry publications, social media delivery and more! Kathy will also be directly involved in providing critical support to Thacker's growing outside sales team. In her free time, Kathy enjoys spending time with all her rescue animals. To connect with Kathy, email her at kathy.shirey@thackercaskets.com.

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WHAT FUNERAL HOMES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE FEATURED SNIPPET

BY WELTON HONG



Google's sole function is to connect people with pages that best match their searches, right? Actually, no. A quick Google news search about Google itself (yes, a "searchception") indicates that the internet giant is positioning itself to offer checking accounts. It's also already involved in medical data warehousing and providing products such as virtual customer service phone agent CallJoy—among many other endeavors.

With Google's tentacles so widely spread, no one should be surprised that it's regularly updating its own search pages to do more for consumers. Yes, Google wants to connect people with pages. But it's also making increasing efforts to answer search queries with content on SERPs. Examples of this include:

- Map results, which help users find local businesses or get directions without ever leaving SERPs
- Google My Business boxes, which appear on the side of search results if a single business is a good match for the query
- Local pack results, which provide the top three relevant businesses for queries with local intent
- Featured snippets, which give users a preview of page content that answers a specific question

Getting your funeral home listed in any of these places leads to more exposure and potentially more traffic and conversions. For this article, I'll cover everything deathcare firms need to know about the featured snippet.

What Is the Featured Snippet?

Also called the Google answer box, the featured snippet is a box that appears at the top of search results. It includes a section from a page that answers the question behind a specific query. It also includes a link to the page as well as an image. Interestingly, the image doesn't always come from the same page as the text snippet.

Not every keyword search triggers a featured snippet, but Google is always adding more. And only one site can currently own the featured snippet for a query.

Example of a Featured Snippet

I searched "cost of funeral," which triggered a featured snippet. As of November 2019, Lincoln Heritage Funeral Advantage (lhlic.com) owned the snippet with this answer:

The average funeral costs between \$7,000 and \$12,000. This includes viewing and burial, basic service fees, transporting remains to a funeral home, a casket, embalming, and other preparation. The average cost of a funeral with cremation is \$6,000 to \$7,000.

Google highlights the relevant keywords in the snippet so it's easy to see how applicable the answer is. This snippet also included an infographic from the same page that illustrates average funeral costs.

Other keywords that triggered this same snippet included:

- How much does a funeral cost
- Funeral costs
- Funeral costs 2019

You can see that Google lumps keywords together by intent when deciding which snippet to show. All of the above keywords indicate that the person wants to find out how much funerals cost.

Some other searches that bring up different featured snippets (from different sites) include:

- How much does cremation cost
- Ideas for funeral memorial
- How to choose an urn
- Types of caskets
- Veterans funeral benefits
- Cost of cemetery plot
- How to make funeral arrangements

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Benefits of the Featured Snippet

The Google answer box gets position zero in the organic SERPs. That means it sits on top of organic search results, ensuring it's the first thing to capture user attention.

That provides the advantage of exposure. Plus, if your content is relevant and high-quality enough to win the featured snippet, there's a good chance your page shows up as one of the top organic results. That's double the exposure and chance that someone will choose to click on your page.

Aside from increased exposure and web traffic, other benefits associated with the answer box include:

- **Increased authority.** The featured snippet demonstrates Google considers your answer the best for the query at hand. That lends authority to your content.

- **Increased recognition.** Even if someone chooses to click another link, they likely read your content and saw your business name. That may help them think of your firm at their time of need.

- **Engagement in no-click searches.** Since Google is answering many queries with information on SERPs, searches aren't always leading to clicks. This is especially true with mobile searches. Landing featured snippets ensures people engage with your company even if they never leave search results pages.

Tips for Winning the Featured Snippet

A guaranteed path to the answer box doesn't exist. But you can take some steps to create the type of content Google favors for this powerful spot. Even if you don't land the featured snippet, asking and answering questions that are popular with your target audience improves the relevance and quality of your content, which can boost both SEO performance and conversion rates.

Follow these tips for creating content Google might pull for the answer box:

- **Answer queries that already have a featured snippet.** You may be able to steal the snippet from your competition. Look for answer boxes during keyword research or start with some of the queries listed above.

- **Ask and answer the question.** Make it obvious to Google what you're doing by asking the question in a subheading or bolded text. Then answer it concisely, in about 40 words, which fits nicely in the answer box. You can go into more depth about the topic in paragraphs that follow your short answer.

- **Use markup language.** Clue the search engines in even further by coding your questions and answers with markup language. This tells the search bots exactly what type of content they're crawling.

- **Write for the future snippet.** Even if your keywords aren't triggering the answer box now, don't assume Google won't include one in the future. Whenever possible, include questions and answers in your content to put yourself in a strong position to win snippets later.

As with any SEO effort, featured snippets don't exist in a vacuum. A lot of businesses are making this a primary push for their content, but chasing the answer box without paying attention to other elements of SEO is a mistake. Always remember to take a well-balanced and comprehensive approach to funeral home marketing for the best results. **FBA**

Welton Hong is the founder and marketing director of Ring Ring Marketing (FuneralHomeProfits.com), which specializes in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. Welton also is a speaker at funeral home conferences and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes. Reach him by email at info@ringringmarketing.com or call toll-free at 888.383-2848.



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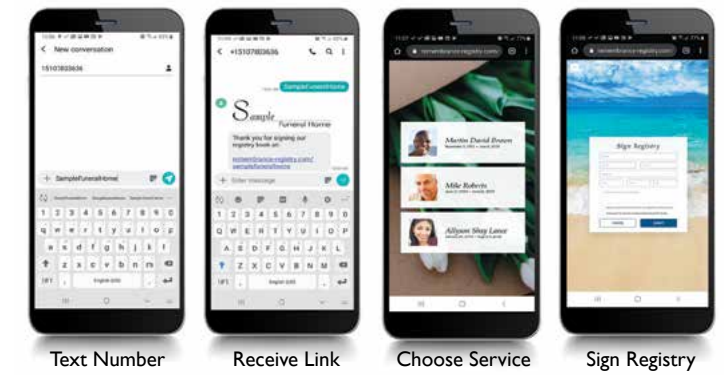
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THE FUTURE OF FUNERALS – A Guide to Live Streaming

BY JEFF MCCAULEY

Few could predict that in early 2020 the funeral industry would be forced to change how they do business, but that's exactly what happened as the COVID-19 virus rewrote the social climate of the United States.

The future of funeral homes, how they conduct business, and how they perform services is affected by the recent pandemic social distancing restrictions that have limited and even stopped funeral services in some areas. COVID-19 may have been the start of a forced industry change, but it isn't without noting that the industry was already moving in the direction of providing a more modern solution to funerals. Technology has created a "new world" where social connection is more common on a computer or device than it is in person. For businesses that have been built on a foundation of social gatherings such as funeral homes, technology has created a pause and the need for an upgrade.

Prior to 2020 the movement into a more tech-savvy industry with digital screens, elaborate websites, and streaming services were for many funeral homes considered an added luxury. Now, it is considered necessary to stay in business. Streaming services bring families closer.

Funeral and memorial services are a time for friends and family to gather in celebration of a loved one's life. However, as state and federal guidelines become more restrictive, the funeral industry finds itself in a difficult position as it searches for a balance between the needs of family and industry guidelines.

Funeral homes across the nation are grasping to upgrade their services to provide virtual streaming of funerals. With the speed of these changes, many funeral directors are suddenly unprepared because of the requirements to use streaming technology; streaming services, video obituary pages, service recordings, access to cameras and hardware. Not to mention the technical knowledge required to provide a service, has become overwhelming to many.

As the funeral industry is making an extreme change to how funeral and memorial services are conducted one positive takeaway is that the technology not only exists but is used by tens of millions of people in the United States already. Streaming services have seen a huge push in recent months and for funeral directors, this is the new future of funeral, memorial and graveside services.

As funeral homes prepare to offer streaming services we have prepared an easy to follow guide to prepare your funeral space and record live streaming services.

Needed Equipment and Installation

Streaming services need specialized equipment and local installation may be necessary for funeral homes. When considering streaming services, it helps to bundle equipment and installation into a single service and should include the following.

- Streaming service account
- Internet connection
- Video camera(s)
- Microphones and audio equipment
- Natural and/or artificial lighting
- Computer or laptop to manage a website, streaming, and video editing
- Additional HDMI and power cords

Commit someone to live-streaming

While it is always important to cross-train your staff, committing a single person to focus on and fully understand streaming services, as well as filming practices, will help you successfully manage the steep learning curve that may come from streaming funerals and memorials.

First, commit to a funeral home streaming service. Then designate an employee to live-streaming. This will help to prevent missteps during the service. This person should understand how to film a streaming service as well as create, store, and replicate the streaming service for family

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members, and navigate the upload and display of the video content.

Test the Technology

Prior to advertising your streaming services, it is important to test the equipment, internet speed, and filming area to minimize or eliminate mishaps during streaming. This is a time of need for your client families and you never want them to feel as if celebrating a loved one's life isn't taken seriously.

We recommend that you run through several tests prior to the first funeral or memorial streaming. When running mock-services things you will want to look for include:

- Is the lighting right for the area or are there reflections, shadows, and other disturbances?
- Is the audio working correctly or does it sound inaudible, scratchy, too loud, or not loud enough?
- Is the internet connection fast enough or do you need to contact your local internet provider to increase your internet speed?
- Do you understand how to set-up, use, and implement streaming technology online?
- Do you know how to use the software to set-up and manage services for new funerals or memorials?

Running through the technology should follow all steps from set-up and filming to using the software online by setting up mock services.

Advertise streaming services

Don't forget to advertise streaming services. While many funeral homes have been offering a form of streaming, this may not be known to potential customers. In fact, many people are under the belief that funeral and memorial services are restricted altogether. By promoting streaming services and what you are providing, you can help grieving families balance the challenges of social distancing and the long-held values of saying goodbye to a loved one.

Engage with Families

Prior to the service, it is helpful for you to engage with the family. Ask for photos, vignettes, and an obituary which can be displayed on the family's personal webpage. Remember, each service should have its own custom-branded webpage memorializing their loved one. While family and friends will not be able to socialize in person they can still reflect and remember their loved one. This can be best presented in the family's engagement and publishing of content on the webpage.

Utilize Filming Best Practices

When filming a funeral or memorial service there are several best practices you can implement that will help your streaming feed look professional and keepsake videos remain memorable.

- Decide if your camera will remain stationary or move during the service. If you choose to move the camera during the service it is important to plan that movement, the close-ups, and how the surrounding lighting and audio will be affected.
- Designate one person to be the videographer and a back-up if available. Having someone who is dedicated to shooting the

video means you have someone who is prepared and versed in how to shoot the service, also with the ability to manage any unforeseen circumstances.

- Check that all equipment is working properly the same day as the service, giving yourself enough time to adjust for faulty equipment.
- If you choose to move during the service move slowly so as not to skew the visuals or interrupt the audio.
- Be close enough to the microphone and cameras so that the audio is not fading in and out.
- Stream and record the service completely through without pausing or stopping recording.
- Zoom in as little as possible, preferably not at all.
- When checking the equipment make sure that the camera settings are adjusted properly.
- Lighting is important. You don't want to have shadows, reflections, or glare. Natural light works well, but if natural light is limited you can use portable artificial lights and lighting screens to prevent awkward or challenging filming.

Save Streaming Event

It is important to save your video recording and we recommend archiving so the family can retrieve the recording if lost or if they would like additional copies.

When saving the video it is important to remember that video files can take up a lot of space. The good thing is that you do have several options that can provide plenty of storage for your services.

- An external hard drive or USB drive is convenient and located on-site. However, when using an external hard drive one thing to consider is that they are prone to damage, loss, and even malfunction resulting in the loss of information.
- Cloud Storage is a very helpful subscription-based service that can be upgraded when you need more storage. It is reliable, safe, shareable, and you do not need to worry about the loss of information.

It is important for families to understand that while in a time of need funeral homes are here to help balance current challenges and the importance of celebrating a loved one's life. Funeral streaming services are the future of funerals and a great way for families to come together in a time when we must remain apart. This best practice guide for live streaming funeral services will ensure that you are providing streaming services that will be remembered and preserved for years. **FBA**

Jeff McCauley is a licensed funeral director, retired funeral home owner, and owner of Greene Valley Media – FuneralScreen, and winner of the NFDA Innovation Award. Jeff, and wife Sue McCauley, launched the FuneralScreen brand to help guide funeral homes into the changing world of digital displays and smart phones. FuneralScreen.com provides a complete digital service to funeral homes throughout the United States. Contact Jeff at jeff@mygvm.com or call 800-270-1237.

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WHY 84% OF YOUR AFTERCARE FAMILIES AREN'T LEAVING REVIEWS

BY JON LEFRANDT



At-need families find your funeral home in one of three ways:

1. Family tradition
2. Referral
3. Online

Though some families still maintain the tradition of using the same funeral home for generations, finding a funeral home online is more popular than any other search method.

Families who move into a new home in a new town have no other resource than the web for finding a funeral home. And when a researching customer uses the web to find a funeral service, they rely on funeral home reviews to make a decision.

Positive reviews are now more important than ever. In fact, 4 out of 5 people don't shop around for a funeral home. They go with the first funeral home they call. That means that being #1 in Google is vital.

So how do you generate reviews for your funeral home?

More importantly, how do you generate POSITIVE reviews for your funeral home?

Great question. I'll tell you, and I think it's important for you to realize you aren't the first person to ask this question! Let's begin.

Why Your Aftercare Families Can't Leave Reviews

First, it is important to understand that Google is on the consumer's team.

It shows your funeral home in comparison to all other funeral homes in the local market and shows the satisfaction ratings of your funeral home in the form of customer reviews.

So imagine your funeral home is the highest rated funeral home in your local market, has 100 more 5-star reviews than your competition, and rakes in just 50% of the local funeral home search traffic each month – in major cities, that's anywhere from 100 to 200 potential calls per month.

That would be great.

There's just one problem: funeral homes are only having conversations with under 16% of their aftercare families.

And if you can only communicate with 16% of your families, you are only tapping into a fraction of the positive experiences your at-need families have had.

Studies show that funeral homes can only communicate with up to 15.75% of their aftercare families through any one of the traditional communication methods (email - 15.75% open rate, direct mail - 1% return rate, phone calls - 13% answer rate).

In other words, 84% of your aftercare families can't leave reviews, because you aren't communicating with them. You can do better.

What you need is a communication method that is 1) fast, 2) personal, and 3) effective.

Text messaging is the perfect answer.

Aftercare communication through text messaging has proven to revolutionize the funeral aftercare profession.

If you use aftercare text messaging the right way, you could boost the number of conversations you're able to have with families by over 300%.

How to Get a 98% Read Rate and Boost Reviews through Funeral Aftercare

When you use text messaging to contact your families through aftercare services, the vast majority respond within a few minutes with words of both gratitude and grief.

You should ask yourself what's the best service you can provide to these grieving families.

How will you respond if they say they aren't able to handle the loss?

How will you respond if they ask for help?

How can you maximize the amount of 5-star reviews you generate from aftercare families?

KIM HARRIS

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My dad worked his entire life to build a funeral home that loved and served our community. I wanted to honor his life's work and keep his dream alive. To do that, I knew I needed help growing the business and staying ahead of our competitors. When I started to consider retirement, I knew putting the right succession plan in place would be key. After meeting

Foundation Partners, I immediately knew they were family-focused, understood what a successful succession plan looked like, and desired to keep our current team in place. If my dad were here today, I'm confident he'd be proud to see his legacy carried on by a company invested in his life's work and the families we continue to support in our community.

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Your text messaging service should include:

1. Live text responders: This is non-negotiable. While you should certainly have an entire team helping respond to aftercare families, you should not resort to chatbots to contact families. This is about creating relationships, not exchanging blanket messages.

2. Grief resources: 40 percent of aftercare families request grief and bereavement resources. Be ready to fulfill any need the family might request, whether it's an additional death certificate, headstone recommendations, and grief resources. With your grief resources, make sure they are available on a mobile device! Printed materials are not enough.

3. Brand Champion Identification: Your live text responders should be trained to identify the families who've had the best experience with your funeral home. All of your brand champions should be selected and set aside until the time is right to request a review. This is more difficult than you might think, make sure you take the time to train the right person to handle this very important task.

4. Review Generation: Only ask for reviews from your brand champions and only ask them for reviews at the right time. How do you know what the right time is? Only ask for reviews after you've done everything you can to help the customer, the customer has no lingering needs, AND the customer has expressed gratitude. In other words, ask when you've already helped the aftercare family/individual overcome their needs.

Families are more likely to respond if they feel that the message they have received was sent out of care and respect. This is accomplished by reaching out to check-in and make sure they're doing well. Your aftercare text messaging should include offers of help and support.

If the aftercare family requests bereavement resources, you should have a wide range of grief resources available to fit each individual's unique situation, and again, these resources must be available on a mobile device.

Why Are Funeral Home Reviews So Difficult to Generate? Funeral home owners are not the only ones to struggle with generating reviews, but the funeral profession does have additional roadblocks to generating reviews.

First of all, "funeral home customers" are families who've just lost a loved one. Asking for a review after a funeral is not only difficult, it's incredibly awkward for the funeral home.

Requesting a customer review from aftercare families must be done at the right time and in the right way or it will be considered inappropriate.

Review generation also requires a high degree of dedication and commitment to staying organized. Not only must you have relationship-building conversations with each family, but you must also track those conversations, reviews requested, and reviews generated.

Because the review generation process includes much more than just asking for the review (it involves aftercare communication, grief support, AND THEN review generation), it is a monumental task.

Most funeral homes either don't do review generation correctly or they give up in frustration way before the "ask for review" phase. It is worth the investment to do this the right way.

Aftercare for the Digital Age

Whether you choose to create your own text-messaging aftercare company that generates reviews, provides grief support, and allows for appointment setting or you'd rather hire a digital aftercare company, the important thing is that you do aftercare correctly.

Funeral homes should be helping families heal and move forward — it's not only beneficial to the families, but it's also beneficial to the funeral home.

Our aftercare families are ready and willing to leave reviews; they just need the right pathway.

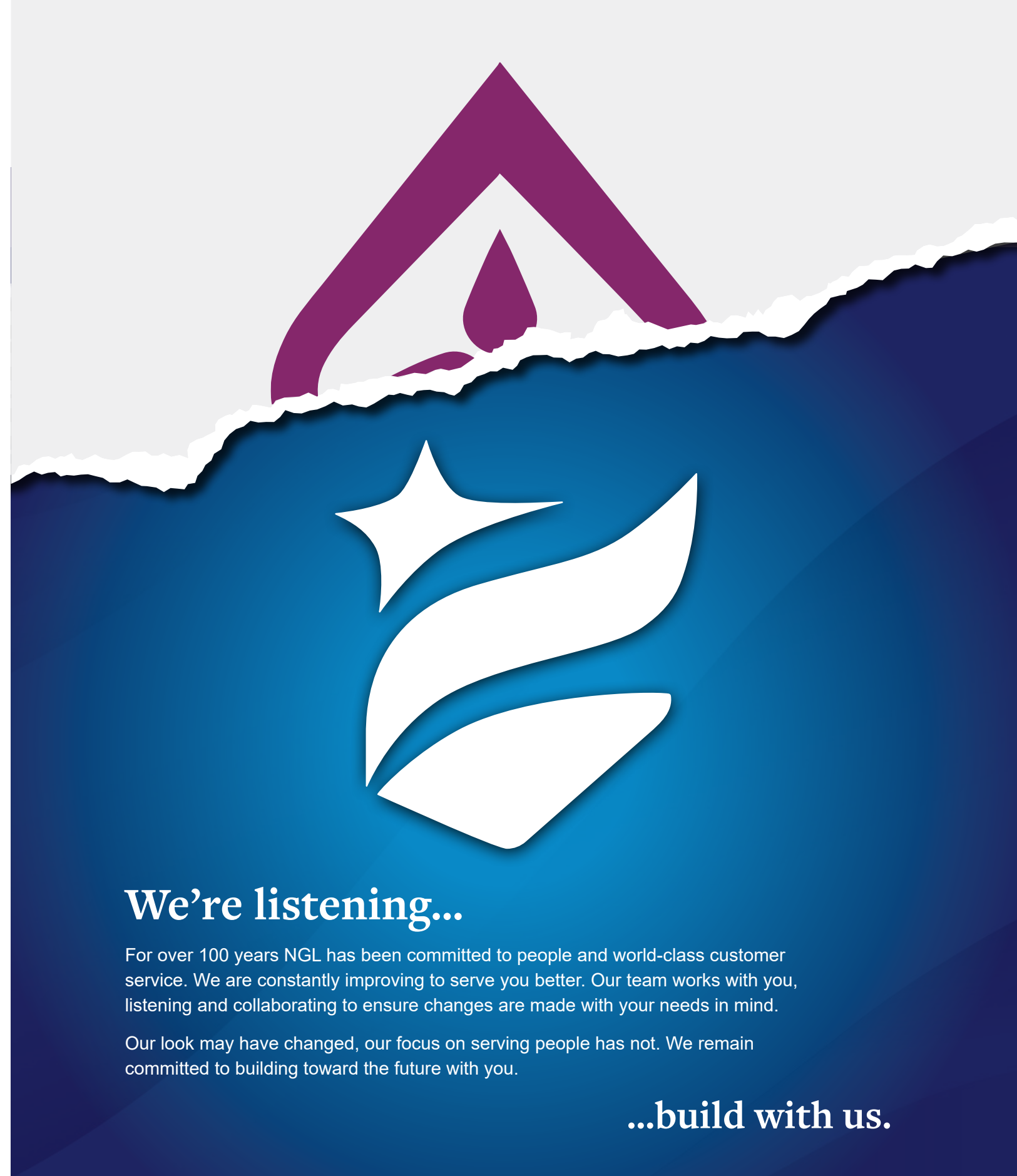
And text-messaging based aftercare is the pathway that we've been waiting for. **FBA**

Jon Lefrandt is the CEO and co-founder of Domanicare, an innovative and award-winning text-messaging based aftercare program. Jon created Domanicare after experiencing crippling grief first-hand. After that experience, he decided to do something about the gap that has existed between funeral homes and aftercare families for years. To connect with Jon, call him at 385-203-0199 or email him, jon@thedomanigroup.com.

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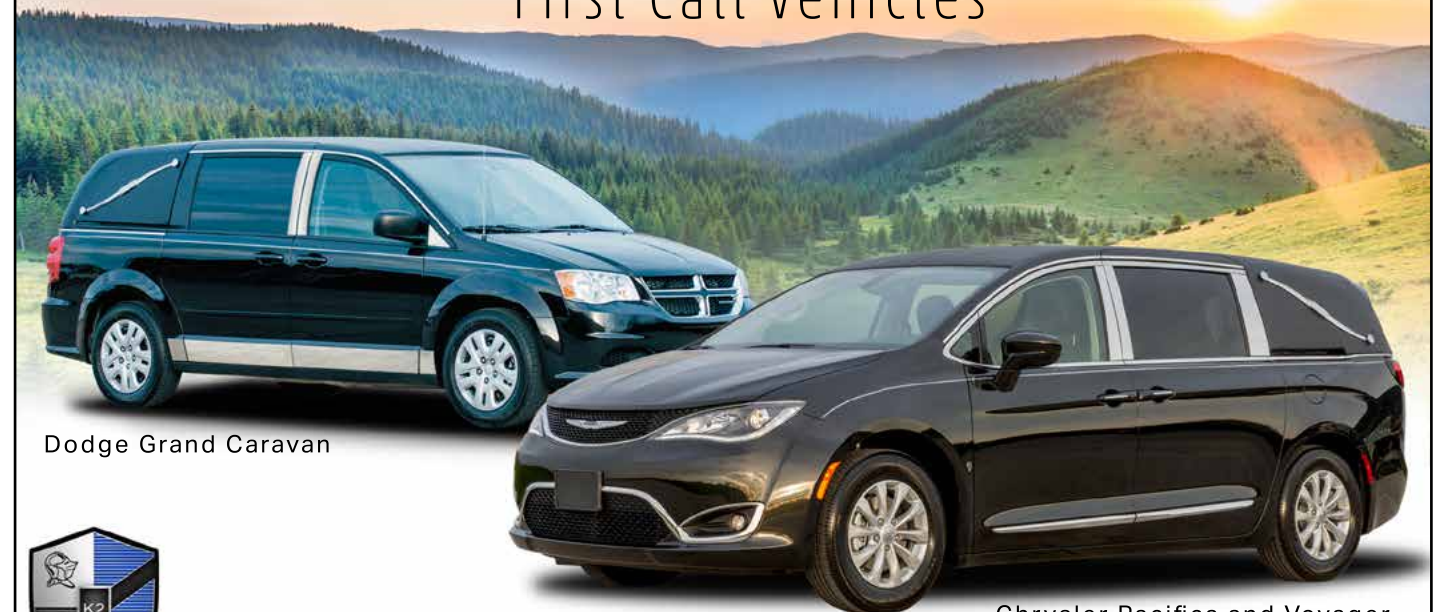
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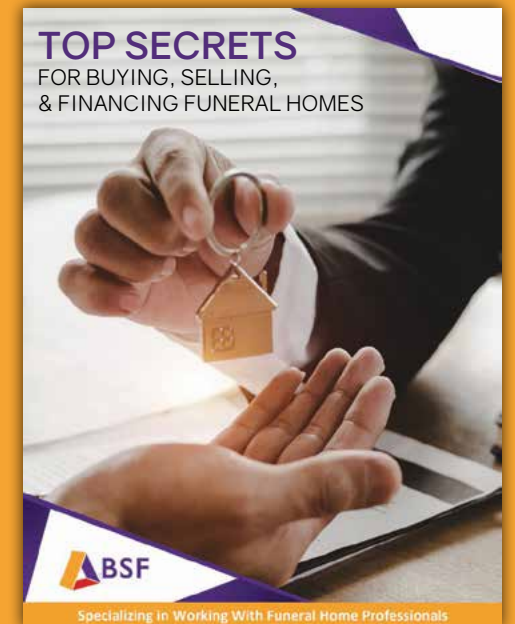
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