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Raymond Bailey has what he calls a typical funeral story – he grew up in funeral service, obtained his funeral director’s licence and eventually joined the family business. However, like many others in death care, he is far from typical. He spends countless hours dedicated to his community and profession – and is now president of the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA).

A fourth-generation funeral director, the family business began in the early 1900s when Bailey’s great-grandfather came west and established his own funeral home in Melville, Saskatchewan. His father, W. Allan Bailey, started Yorkton Memorial Gardens and Bailey’s Funeral and Cremation Services, both located in Yorkton, Sask.

“I was certainly influenced by my father when it came time to make a career decision,” says Raymond Bailey. “I started washing cars and was given more responsibilities as the years progressed. Out of high school, I thought I was either going to be a Lutheran pastor or a funeral director. Then by chance, I was in Ontario during summer holidays and toured Humber College. I applied and the rest was history.”

As Humber College had one of the most recognized funeral service programs in the country, Bailey enrolled knowing he would have to fulfill Saskatchewan education requirements before joining the family business.

“In those days, there wasn’t reciprocity, so I had to come back and fulfill more requirements including apprenticing and writing the board exam,” recalls Bailey, who was licensed in Ontario in 1991 and then in Saskatchewan in 1995. “My professors used to joke I could have been a dentist in the same time it took me to be a funeral director. In those days, you had to do the whole program all over again, but thankfully things are a lot easier today with labour mobility.”

Like his father and brother, Boyd, who were both WCCA presidents, Bailey decided to join the board as a Saskatchewan representative a number of years ago.

“Again, my father’s influence came into play,” notes Bailey. “He always volunteered to do his part to help the community or the profession whenever he could, as do many funeral directors. We give back to our profession and our communities to the best of our abilities and I think that is demonstrated anywhere you go in Canada.”

After taking a brief hiatus from WCCA to serve on the Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan, Bailey returned last fall when WCCA put out a call for a new executive group.

“I took on the vice presidency last year and it was a short stint as I was fast-tracked to president to fill a vacancy. Ralph Katzman and Archie Lang had both returned for a year to assist as the circumstances had changed for several
Bailey was more than willing to step up to the plate as he believes WCCA has a bright future ahead.

With a background in both funeral service and cemeteries, Bailey has the skills and mindset needed to lead the association during his two-year term as president.

individuals in terms of employment. Due to the way our bylaws were written, people serving in executive positions had to resign as their employment had changed. It put the whole executive into a transition period and Ralph had an extra-long term as president.”

Bailey was more than willing to step up to the plate as he believes WCCA has a bright future ahead.

“WCCA as an organization has a lot to offer small cemeteries. We are the voice for small cemeteries. We don’t have a lot of resources to serve our profession, so I think it is important for us to keep our association going and to be able to share best practices amongst each other. This will allow us to continue to improve our service to the communities we serve.”

With a background in both funeral service and cemeteries, Bailey has the skills and mindset needed to lead the association during his two-year term as president.

“I think my experience with the Saskatchewan Funeral and Cremation Services Council will serve me well,” explains Bailey, “I have experience in cemeteries in Ontario with the Mount Pleasant Group and here in Saskatchewan with Yorkton Memorial Gardens. I have worked with large and small cemeteries so I see the challenges and advantages of both. I think that experience will serve me well in this capacity.”

Bailey continues, “I also have a background in both funeral services and cemeteries. Going forward, I think the relationship between the two is strengthening in all provinces. There is increased cooperation and a desire to come together in our professional associations to serve the consumer and our communities better as a cohesive group.”

With the bereavement sector becoming less fragmented, the door is open for WCCA to become a go-to resource for death-care professionals in all three Prairie provinces.
There is certainly a desire for WCCA to align closer with funeral service associations. I think that can also be said for the other side. Everybody is struggling in one way or another with participation and membership, and I think we would all stand to gain by coming together.”

One of the challenges for Bailey is that WCCA encompasses three provinces – Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba – with different governing bodies, regulations and often thought processes.

“All three provinces have the same challenges but they are happening in different places and at different times. It is a curse and a blessing being in three jurisdictions. However, that can also help us as we can learn from each other,” says Bailey, who is also planning to focus on increasing membership and participation in WCCA during his tenure.

“We are looking at developing a lot more training during our conferences which will be relevant to both funeral service and cemetery professionals. Safety training, sales training and cremation technician training are all possibilities moving forward. We would really like to work on coordinating our conferences better with each provincial association as we rotate between the three provinces we serve. This can be a challenge due to the seasonal nature of our business as we are all very busy in the spring. However, I think it would be beneficial to all – including suppliers – to try and be in the same cities at around the same time. That makes sense for a lot of people concerned – if they cannot participate in one, they can maybe get to the other and still obtain educational credits when required.”

Bailey hopes this will entice death-care professionals to belong to both their provincial funeral association and WCCA. Any funeral service professional, cemeterian or supplier with an interest in cemetery services is invited to join – and according to Bailey will benefit from becoming a member.

With two busy years ahead as president of WCCA, Bailey is relying on his staff and family, including his wife Crystal, who works at the funeral home and cemetery, and his semi-retired father, Allan, to keep everything running smoothly.

“With a full slate of possibilities as WCCA refocuses its energy, Bailey is excited for the future. What may have started as a typical funeral story has evolved into a positive for not only WCCA but all three of the Prairie provinces.”
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Happy New Year! The start of a new year is always an exciting time as it gives us an opportunity to reflect on our past accomplishments and look to the future with optimism as we begin to work on the goals we have set for the upcoming year. The OACFP board and committees worked very hard in 2016 to provide education and professional development opportunities and we look to continue to fulfill this commitment to our membership as we plan to improve upon and deliver our core programs while developing some new ones for 2017.

The OACFP education committee is in full swing preparing our programs for the year. The e-learning committee will deliver six webinars on a variety of industry and business-related topics. The Crematorium Operator Training is scheduled for March 28 and 29, 2017 at the Holiday Inn and Conference Centre in Burlington. The comprehensive two-day program will provide a thorough understanding of the cremation process. Keynote speakers include Larry Stuart Jr. (Crematory Manufacturing & Service Inc.), Poul Lemasters (Lemasters Consulting) and Jason Prentice (Commercial Burner). We welcome attendees from coast to coast to attend this informative and engaging program.

The very popular Front-Line Cemetery Training is expected to take place in mid- to late August and will include segments on health and safety, ethics and best practices along with demonstrations of grave setups for both full casket burial and cremated remains, niche setup, vault handling and monument handling. New for 2017 will be a Front-Line Mausoleum Training Program that will focus on best practices for mausoleum entombments, expected to be delivered in November.

OACFP recognizes the importance of continually creating new and dynamic education initiatives and this year we will concentrate on developing a Cemetery Administration Program and a Cemetery and Funeral Sales Program to be rolled out in 2018.

The year ahead promises to be a busy one, full of new opportunities and new experiences and I look forward to serving as president of OACFP. On behalf of the association, I wish each of you a wonderful and prosperous 2017.
The annual general meeting of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) took place at the conference and trade show held October 18-20, 2016, at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville.

Committees were able to update the membership on their focus over the past year while laying the path for the road ahead. Three new board members – Howard Mammon (Toronto Hebrew Memorial Parks), Frank Pinelli (Service Corporation International) and Steve Reynolds (Oakview Funeral Home) – were elected while longtime board members Nick Larter and Bruce Cooke ended their terms. Patty Harris, who became president of the association mid-term, was re-elected. She will be assisted over the year by first vice president Ian Merritt, second vice president Ron Hendrix and past president, Darren Denomme.

“I think the makeup of the board is excellent,” says Harris, who co-chaired the conference with Nick Larter. “It is a great slate of officers which is good as there is a fair amount of work to be done. I am grateful Darren Denomme has agreed to stay on for a second term as it is great for me to have a past president on board.”

Harris reports the conference was a nice mix of networking and educational opportunities. With over 250 delegates including 30 first-time attendees, the conference also welcomed 50 Humber students. Following the first-timers wine-and-cheese reception and the opening of the trade show, the conference took place.

Synergy: Moving Together – Changing Lives
Highlights from OACFP’s AGM, Conference and Trade Show – Part II

Current OACFP board. Back row, left to right: Tim Vreman, Jo-Anne Rogerson, Steven Reynolds, James S. Cardinal, Melanie Turner, Frank Pinelli and Howard Mammon. Front row, left to right: Corina Burnell, Darren Denomme, Patty Harris, Ian Merritt and Ron Hendrix.
The OACFP’s Life Membership Award was presented to Mount Pleasant Group’s Ian Young. Starting with Mount Pleasant Group as a grounds worker in 1969, Young was promoted several times during his lengthy career and also served as a foreman and/or property manager in locations such as York, Elgin Mills, Meadowvale and Mount Pleasant while also spending some time in the office. He officially retired at the end of June and was invited to attend the conference to say goodbye to the many people he had established friendships with over the years.

“It totally caught me off guard when they called my name as I had no idea that was why I was in attendance,” says Young. “I was at a loss for words but thrilled and honoured to have received the recognition. I thank Heather Weir, Anita Mazzara and Dennis Moir for nominating me, and for all the support I have received over the years at Mount Pleasant Group. It was a good place to work and rewarding to know we were always trying to do our best.”

Young was a regular at OACFP conferences starting in the mid-’80s. Now officially retired, he and his wife, Maureen, have sold their home in the city and have moved to Port Hope, Ontario, to be close to the lake and their three granddaughters. Young looks forward to spending more time with his family and travelling with Maureen.

“It wasn’t a difficult decision to nominate Ian for the Life Membership Award; after all he had spent almost his entire lifetime working for our company so it seemed rather appropriate that his hard work and commitment should be acknowledged,” says Dennis Moir, Heather Weir and Anita Mazzara, who jointly nominated Young for the award. “Ian not only committed himself to the company for an amazing 47 years but to the people he worked with. He prided himself on helping others grow within their roles and he helped them shine so they were recognized and given opportunity. In addition to his contribution to Mount Pleasant Group he participated in a variety of task forces, committees and groups that contributed innovative ideas and best practices that ultimately benefited the industry as a whole.”

show, the camaraderie continued with an evening bonfire under clear skies.

“It was a warm beautiful evening outside so everyone really enjoyed themselves,” continues Harris. “We had some entertainment and even a few members picked up the guitar to join in. It was really nice.”

The banquet, featuring Pauly and the Goodfellas, also provided an opportunity for all delegates to gather in a casual atmosphere while enjoying a fabulous dinner. During the evening, the Life Membership Award was presented to Mount Pleasant Group’s Ian Young, while Manchester Supply’s Bevan Bonthron was awarded the John Cleminson Award (see sidebars for more detail).
The education slate was also full with a small and municipal cemetery meeting, several inspirational and informative guest speakers, and a panel discussion featuring past presidents as well as BAO’s Michael D’Mello. BAO’s Carey Smith and Peter Jordan were also in attendance over the course of the conference.

“One of our speakers was retired Staff Sargent Brad McKay, who spoke about his life experience dealing with stress and job-related trauma,” says Larter. “His presentation was so riveting you could hear a pin drop in the room. As there was not much support back in the ’80s when he was dealing with this, he has focused on creating peer-to-peer support groups to assist current police officers and front-line emergency workers who encounter trauma.”

As bereavement profession workers are also on the front end of trauma, McKay’s presentation resonated with all in
Manchester Supply’s Bevan Bonthron was awarded the distinguished John Cleminson Award at the recent OACFP conference. Named in honour of a former OACFP president who devoted countless hours serving on numerous committees shaping the direction of the association, the award recognizes an individual who continues that tradition of service and truly exemplifies high standards.

According to OACFP past president Darren Denomme, Bonthron was the perfect candidate for this year’s award. “I have known Bevan since I first became involved with the OACFP board organizing my first regional seminar in Sault Ste. Marie in 2007,” says Denomme, who nominated Bonthron for the award. “Bevan was one of the first suppliers to sign up for the event and has always been incredibly supportive as we try to bring bereavement sector education throughout the province. Bevan has always been a fixture at OACFP events, quietly supporting every activity in which our association engages. The John Cleminson Award is one that recognizes someone for excellence in service. In my experience, Bevan Bonthron has shown that excellence to his customers, his community and our association.”

Bonthron, who accepted the award from CMC’s Jeff Johnson, was surprised and honoured to be this year’s recipient. “It was something I never expected and I feel very humbled,” says Bonthron. “The John Cleminson Award is something very special to receive. Over the years, I have gone about doing my best looking after our customers without the need for recognition. I have a passion for the business and I enjoy what I do every day.”

Bonthron joined Manchester Supply in 1985 as a salesperson for southwestern Ontario. He purchased the company from Wendell Alton in January of 2005. In November 2012, he sold Manchester to Victoriaville Funeral Supplies, remaining with the company as business development manager. While he has worked four days a week for the past two years, he switched to three days a week in the new year to spend more time with his wife, Bonnie, at their cabin in Bayfield, Ontario.

“In 2013, I was also able to work four days a week,” says Bonthron. “I’m not ready to retire yet,” says Bonthron. “While I am backing off a little bit and taking things easier, I will still be keeping my hand in the business. I’ve enjoyed 30-plus years working with our customers across Canada and I look forward to continuing that.”

Denomme adds, “Not only does Bevan epitomize the criteria for the John Cleminson Award, he is also a wonderful example of the professionalism and support that OACFP represents.”
Only two short years ago, Carter Kinvig was working in telecommunications at SaskTel and commuting over an hour to work. The birth of his daughter, Mia, in the summer of 2015 caused him to sit back and reflect on what he wanted to do with his life. Working for the government offered safe and steady employment but Kinvig knew he needed to do something different – something more fulfilling.

Sitting at his window one day, he saw his neighbour, Wes Topal, coming home from work. He went out to talk to him and the discussion forever changed his life.

“I wanted to be able to spend more time around the family and be closer to home, so I was brainstorming about different things I could do,” recalls Kinvig. “I went out to talk to Wes because I felt his company, ECL Fiberglass, was something that had a healthy future and room to grow. I had no idea the company was up for sale at that time. We started discussions and the ball just rolled from there.”

Kinvig took official ownership of ECL Fiberglass Manufacturing in February of 2016. To help make the transition as smooth as possible, Topal agreed to stay on for two years as Kinvig thoroughly learned the business and its product lines – largely comprised of burial vaults and grave liners.

“Off the start, I knew nothing about the industry so it was a fairly steep learning curve,” explains Kinvig. “Being a new owner, I tried to learn about everything. I was shocked at the range of our clients – we are shipping all the way from Kelowna to Newfoundland. Now that I have a grasp on operations, my focus is in the manufacturing shop, looking at ways to speed up production to make it more efficient.”

Based out of Balcarres, Saskatchewan, the ECL office is a short 10-minute drive from both Topal’s and Kinvig’s houses in Fort Qu’Appelle. With Kinvig and his fiancée, Sam, expecting a baby early in the year, Kinvig is happy to be closer to home. Without the long commute he also has more time to pursue leisure activities such as slo-pitch and golf in the summer and curling in the colder months.

Kinvig and Topal are joined by a group of five dedicated employees and also operate as a supplier for KMI Columbaria. While Topal is still focusing a lot of his time on KMI, that end of the business will also be eventually transitioned to Kinvig as well.

“It is basically the same industry and we talk to a lot of the same people with both ECL and KMI,” explains Kinvig. “It allows us to add a new product line for our clients.”

Kinvig hopes to be able to expand in the future (although the shop is stretched to capacity at the moment) and plans to attend as many conventions as possible to meet death-care clients across the country.

“Wes has made a good name for ECL and it sounds like we have never missed a convention. When Wes was looking to sell, he was searching for someone who would not only continue his business but would also continue his trends of supporting the industry and the community. That is as important as keeping the company running. I have to maintain every aspect of it.”

Kinvig is quick to point out that with Wes’ experience and knowledge, and a “grand network of people,” he has transitioned to entrepreneurship with relative ease and has no regrets about leaving his job at SaskTel. Today he is singing a different tune on the way to work as exceeding the expectations of clients and building on Topal’s success has led to the fulfilment he was searching for at the end of the day.
On Saturday evening, October 22, Hillside Cemetery foreman Tim Sterkenburg received a call from his wife. She had heard a plane had crashed in the cemetery and he better go check to see if it was true.

Arriving on site at about 8:45 p.m., a section of the cemetery was cordoned off with numerous emergency response vehicles illuminating the area with emergency lights and spotlights. The pilot, and only occupant, survived the crash and had been rushed to the local hospital before being airlifted to Calgary.

Hillside Cemetery is directly across the highway from Medicine Hat Airport and staff had often commented on the possibility of a plane one day coming down on their worksite. It had happened once before during the Second World War Harvard Training School.

An event like this could be catastrophic in a cemetery setting possibly damaging dozens of family memorials, disturbing turf and trees, and putting cemetery visitors and workers at risk. Amazingly the plane came to a final rest on an asphalt roadway after running through three large trees. All fluids leaked onto the asphalt which made for easier clean-up rather than having to sterilize a large section of turf. Equally amazing, there was superficial damage to only four headstones as the tail section clipped them alongside the road.

By Sunday afternoon, at 4:00 p.m., the plane was cut into fuselage and engine pieces and transported off the cemetery grounds.
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