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A Gathering to Remember

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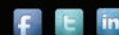
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Pat Ottmann

TODD VAN BECK

HE GAVE MORE THAN HE GOT

by Pat Ottmann

"To point with pride, view with alarm and occasionally recommend."

Can you envision Todd's 6-6-foot frame fitting into today's airplanes while travelling to speaking engagements with funeral directors worldwide? He was one of the most passionate people I have ever crossed paths with in our profession. The last time he spoke his message was clear: he wished he was just starting out again as he saw so much potential in our profession. The excitement in his voice for the future was not only rare but also uplifting in today's environment.

I know of no other person who could stand in front of a room for hours and hold the attention of funeral directors with entertaining and educational stories. Todd made learning fun, and he made the profession feel good about itself as he would share story after story about the things that mattered most in death care.

Who can ever forget Heafey & Heafey Mortuary and Mr. Heafey's little black book? While it allegedly held his gambling wagers (or the names of ladies about town), it actually contained the names of people who would be alone for Christmas following the loss of a loved one. The same people who would be invited to a Christmas dinner.

Who can forget Todd reciting "The Undertaker" to close out every speaking engagement? I can still hear his big voice quiver with emotion as he shared the poem – something that was so near to his heart and so real to him and everyone listening.

My association with Todd goes back at least 30 years and his contributions to *Canadian Funeral News* some 25 years. He was a prolific writer with a deep interest in the profession. He published books and wrote many articles on the funerals of presidents, prime ministers and historical figures. He documented the contributions of the funeral directors who put a huge stamp on funeral service as we know it today. I would encourage anyone who hasn't spent some time with his writings to do so.

For whatever reason, there were years that almost every Canadian association would have Todd speak. I would be near



Todd Van Beck

the front of the room, and even though I had heard the stories many times, I would always find something new that I'd missed earlier. Todd would joke with the audience that if he ever lost his place, I could finish his sentence or thought – and that between the two of us, it was sure to be a flawless performance. In essence, he had a way of making one feel important.

To an observer of the fine art of networking and making people feel special, I would watch Todd go through the room and shake people's hands while somehow remembering their name from a meeting years ago. The man had a memory for names and faces that was admirable to say the least. Whether your firm did 50 calls or 5,000, he was there to make you feel special and to help you be a better funeral director. He wanted service to grieving families to improve on every call every day. The profession will miss this gentle giant of a man. His knowledge, wisdom and passion know no parallel. Funeral educator and historian. May he rest in peace. ☪

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A Gathering TO REMEMBER

FSAC REUNITES DELEGATES IN TORONTO

by Lisa Johnston

Over 300 delegates made the trip to Toronto from June 7-9, 2023, to take part in a Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) conference reminiscent of the old days. This year's event – which also marked the celebration of the association's 100th anniversary – was a success, boasting educational content, a large trade show and multiple social events.

Over the three days at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel & Conference Centre, experts from all facets of death care graced the stage. Discussion topics included customer service, technology, marketing and human resources while also delving deeper into potential disruptions and risk reduction. Colleagues were able to reconnect with peers, while being inspired and enjoying some well-deserved fun.

Encompassing 28,000 square feet of exhibit space, the trade show boasted everything from a trip down memory lane to the newest offerings in the marketplace. Over 45 suppliers from Canada and the United States presented their wares and services – from technology solutions and pre-need options to urns, jewelry, caskets, embalming chemicals and more. The gamification app kept attendees entertained along with the opportunity to mingle during the welcome reception which featured food stations from different regions across Canada.

Networking was also on the agenda during the two-hour evening cruise around the Toronto Islands. There wasn't an empty spot on the boat, nor at the President's Banquet the following evening. During the gala celebration, outgoing president Allan Cole was thanked for his selfless service which led to the announcement of Jeff Weafer as FSAC's new president. Following an uplifting message from Weafer on the future direction of the association, several awards were presented. Eva Hébert received the National Scholarship while Randy Ling was announced as the 2023 Community Volunteer Award winner. The 2023 National Association Volunteer Award was shared between FSAC board members Janet Ricciuti and Ray Fournier, following their dedication to the association over the last year.



The 2023 FSAC board. Front row, left to right: Pam Moss, Ray Fournier, Jeff Weafer and Janet Ricciuti. Back row, left to right: Allan Cole, Shawn Williamson, Simon Dubé and Kollin Weatherbee. Missing: Jeff Hagel.

An impromptu auction for a \$4,500 marketing package donated from Sproing Creative led to a winning bid of \$8,000 from Pyrox's Sébastien Litalien. All funds were donated to the Michaëlle Jean Foundation for a grand total of \$13,320 over the conference. Both Jean and her husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, were in attendance, as was NFDA president Jack Mitchell, the first time a national president from south of the border made the trip to FSAC's conference.

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean also made history as the first former governor general to make a keynote address at

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an FSAC event. “I promised last year, God willing, I would be joining you in person and here we are at last,” said Jean in her opening remarks. “Through my presence, rather than virtual, I think we get to seal our alliance even more today.”

That alliance was created through a relationship with Allan Cole during the repatriation of Canadian soldiers from Afghanistan, and now extends to all members in her role as FSAC’s first honorary patron. “Then and now, empathy is what binds us together,” Jean said. “The ritual of mourning marks a transition that defines our humanity. When we pay our respects to the deceased, our hope is that somewhere, somehow, they can hear us. When we praise, mourn, laugh and celebrate the life that was, we restore their presence.”

Customer engagement expert Tony Chapman started his session by revealing that “attention” is the most important word in a business’ vocabulary. He then explained how to garner it through storytelling.

“How do we create the stories?” Chapman asked. “It is so simple, and if you master it, your business and your relationships will change forever.” Chapman stressed the importance of the hero battling a quest and used examples from movies and books before bringing it back to death care. “You could be in business 80 years and have the most beautiful funeral home ... but it’s not about you. Great storytelling in business is about the people who matter most. The protagonist – the hero – in your story is the person you are celebrating, and the family and friends around him.” According to Chapman, bereavement professionals have to completely rewrite their narratives from the transactional to the transformational. “Storytelling is where emotion plays best and I cannot think of a better industry for storytelling than yours.”

Funeral director and lawyer Poul Lemasters looked at things from a different angle. Using his wit and humour, he admitted his topic, Cover Your Ass (CYA), might make some delegates uncomfortable – and it should. A lot is at stake, but businesses can raise their CYA awareness to help safeguard their assets.

Lemasters described the eight donkeys that make up his A-list of personalities – the lazy ass, the half ass, the dumb ass, the old ass, the kick ass, the wise ass, the smart ass and the bad ass. All can be found in the workplace and all have good and bad qualities, but knowing the company culture and what traits will rise to the surface in problematic situations can go a long way to protecting the business.

Jim Harris, the fourth and final keynote, took delegates on a journey of market trends and potential disruptions. Describing how the pandemic shattered the way Canadians live and work, Harris explained consumers value different things in today’s world – where function trumps form.



Allan Cole receives a thank you for his service as FSAC president from NFDA president Jack Mitchell.



Pyrox’s Sébastien Litalien took home a \$4,500 Sproing marketing package. The donated item went for \$8,000 with all funds going to the Michaëlle Jean Foundation.



Arbor Memorial’s David McEachnie, Jerry Roberts, Eric Thompson and Mark Hooftman.



Eternity’s Touch Chantelle Bilodeau-Seton and Chuck Ferris.



Imperial Group’s Joel Poissant with Park Memorial’s Kirstie Smolyk and Nelson Lanca, and Canadian Funeral News’ Pat Ottmann.



With the Gravure-Craft team were James Allen, Jean Vaillancourt, Kelly Murphy, Laura McCaffrey, Milton Peach, David McCaffrey and Joan Peach.



Genelyn North America's Karl Wenzel visits with keynote speaker Poul Lemasters.



At the MacKinnon & Bowes' booth with Jane Titcombe, Amanda Harvey, Dan Apolito, Doug Kennedy and Alex Cole.



Eva Hébert, FSAC's 2023 National Scholarship winner, alongside her father Richard Hébert, second from right, and FSAC board members Kollin Weatherbee and Simon Dubé.

"You're not about bricks and mortar; that's the form. You're about the function of honouring and memorializing." According to Harris, the "value vortex" requires a consistent shift to reposition while offering new services and products. "Collectively in this room, I believe you have all the knowledge, all the wisdom, you need, and by working together, you will thrive ... but you do need to change. I don't have the answers but I do know the process you need to go through will involve experimentation, testing and seeing what works."

Throughout the sessions, MC Dave Hemstad kept things moving and added comic relief as the moderator of the three expert panels tackling the subjects of human resources, customer service and technology. First up was the human resources panel featuring Julie Ruben Rodney (MaxPeople), Leslie Kobayashi (Arbor Memorial) and Joel Smith (Williams HR Law). The key takeaway: people are out there but businesses have to work harder than ever to attract and retain high performers.

Creating a memorable hospitality experience was the focus of the customer service panel featuring conference chair Ray Fournier (Batesville), Neil Wilner (Summit Golf Club) and James Munroe (Oshawa Funeral Home). Through their personal experiences, inside and outside the death-care profession, the trio shared key ways to create extraordinary experiences to meet the client families where they want to be.

"It costs a lot less to keep existing customers than it does to attract new ones," said Fournier. "Some 65 per cent of sales tend to come from existing customers which makes an obvious case for ensuring those customers continue to choose you over your competitors. The overall customer experience is as important as the services and the products you offer. Customer service plays a critical role in ensuring customer retention but also influences new ones. Great customer service is a core deliverer of brand loyalty."


Learning how to increase brand awareness through social media and other online channels was the focus of the technology panel. Former FSAC board Ashley Montroy joined David Beaulieu (Fragment Social Tribute), Trajan Schulzke (Foveo Memorial) and Zack Garbow (formerly with IBM) to discuss the challenges in death care and what clients expect today.

More discussion also ensued at the 90-minute bear-pit session moderated by FSAC's new president Jeff Weafer. Topics included staffing, MAiD experiences in the funeral home, alternative disposition methods, biometrics and green burials, among other touch points. Throughout the discussion, Weafer encouraged delegates to ask questions or raise concerns for the board's future consideration.

FSAC also held a closed-door AGM for members only. With the realignment of its board, FSAC will be operating with regional directors instead of provincial, and currently comprises Jeff Weafer (president), Allan Cole (past president), Janet Ricciuti (vice president), Ray Fournier (treasurer), Kollin Weatherbee (eastern region), Simon Dubé (central region), Jeff Hagel (western region) and Pam Moss (executive director). Committees were also streamlined, improving efficiencies in the year ahead.

In addition to approvals and the presentation of reports, Anthem Partners' Todd Lumbard and Jeff Christiansen were on hand to announce a \$100,000 commitment to FSAC over the next 10 years. The funding will go toward the Lorne Palmer Educational Bursary to celebrate Palmer's upcoming retirement after 50-plus years of service in the bereavement profession.

FSAC also announced a new public awareness community project funded through a generous donation from Batesville in 2021. FSAC used the funds to produce a new recruitment video which was showcased at the AGM. Members can use this video and its accompanying collateral to help drive recruitment. According to Batesville's Ray Fournier, the donation recognizes the commitment of funeral professionals during the pandemic with the aim to better funeral service.

Following the three-day event in Toronto, it appears FSAC is moving ahead in ways that best support the profession and its membership. The return to an in-person event was all the inspiration needed for those in attendance to get back to business with new insights and passion in the pursuit of serving families. 

Look for more conference coverage in the next issue of CFN.



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



ANECDOTES AND ANTIDOTES

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Did you ever have a feeling of déjà vu? You know, a feeling like you've been somewhere before or heard a conversation before. I've been having a lot of déjà vu experiences lately. It began a few months ago when I started receiving regional technical calls from new clients sharing safety concerns. What were the concerns exactly? Simple. These folks were quite fearful about getting sick, being injured or, even worse, dying at work!

Let's start with who was calling. The callers were mostly new to our profession, being interns, apprentices or new owners. What exactly were the deadly risks they feared? Hmm. Was it accidental exposure to carfentanyl? Nope. Even with the narcotic exposure kit hanging on the wall behind some callers that never came up. Was it overexposure to methanol during the embalming process? No, that concern has yet to be brought up by a customer. How about needle-stick injuries resulting in a blood-borne pathogen infection? Nope, that wasn't on the top 10 list either. So, just what were they fearful of?

Fatal electrocution while removing pacemakers. Injuries and machine damage from pacemakers exploding in the crematorium. Getting radiation sickness from exposure to exploded devices with nuclear batteries and burst radioactive seed implants. Their fear was quite real; the risks, however, according to statistics and my research, not.

The new owner of a crematorium called and asked: how much is a fair price to remove a pacemaker? The reason he was asking was he had heard that if a pacemaker gets cremated, it will explode and "blow the doors off the crematorium." It reminded me of myself in the 1980s when I first began to see an increase in pacemaker implants and cremation; talk about déjà vu. I laughed and said after 35 years of operating and selling cremation equipment, I've never heard of any significant damage to a retort. Where did he get this idea? That's what he heard.

A few days later, a caller asked if we sell any heat reflective visors and aprons that will protect against shrapnel injuries when a pacemaker explodes while the door is open during raking. The technician was told if a pacemaker is missed during screening, they could be injured or even killed by shrapnel. I shared that I've never heard of any such incidence, but this did not give her any peace.

Not long after, I received another call asking if it was true that when a pacemaker explodes in the retort that both the machine and the cremated remains would be dangerously radioactive. Once again, I shared that in three decades of service, I have only ever heard of one machine that was "hot" radioactively speaking and it was caused by a lot more than a single pacemaker popping.

The call that inspired this article came the same day when I was asked to come and demonstrate pacemaker removal. The reason? The staff were refusing to do it because they could get a fatal electric shock if they did it wrong. I shared that to the best of my knowledge, there has never been any such injury to any mortuary employee, coroner or even a pacemaker implant team member anywhere, period. We could talk about it, but there was no need for the travel and expense. Their fear was not assuaged.

So, where is all of this fear coming from? I believe it stems from a combination of three ingredients: an influx of new people, some old wives' tales and our documentation process.

Do you remember the saying "old wives' tale"? It has fallen by the wayside in our modern politically correct era but can still be found in Merriam-Webster's dictionary. Old wives' tales are defined as "traditional beliefs not based on facts." The term superstition also fits well here. Where did these superstitions come from? I dare say from some popularly repeated urban myths and legends about what we do reinforced by our daily permission and disclosure forms.

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I am sure many readers have heard urban myths about embalmers receiving fatal electric shocks while removing a pacemaker or explosions that “blew the doors off” or “took out a retort and killed the operator” back in the day. These legends, although false, were popular lore back many years ago and they seem to have come back.

I’ve read that the antidote to fear is knowledge so, I decided to get a bit more knowledgeable about implanted devices and cremation. In March, I scoured the Internet for cases to study. I found nothing. I asked CANA. Nothing. I asked an industry attorney. Also, nothing. So, in April, May and June, I spoke with no less than five North American, one Japanese, one Chinese and two European cremation equipment manufacturers. I asked them two questions.

1) “Can you share with me the worst injury a cremation worker has experienced due to an implanted device exploding during cremation”? There were no reported injuries – zero – let alone a “worst” one.

2) “Can you share some experiences where a pacemaker (or other implanted device) exploded in the crematorium resulting in damage, the severity of the damage and the cost of repairs”? The answers were reassuring to me. Not one brand representative, or service technician, could remember anything worse than some minor pitting or chipping of the refractory. No doors blown off, no smashed floors or walls, no damage that resulted in an inoperable machine.

Not wanting to stop there, I asked super busy crematorium operators on four continents for their experiences. Nada! One operator told me they used to have a standard operating procedure (SOP) of getting a certification from their clients stating that there were no implanted devices. This was followed by opening all containers and scanning every remains with a hand-held Garrett metal detector with a detection depth of six inches.

If an implanted device was found, they contacted the customer and gave them the option to come and remove it or pay them \$150 to have them remove the device. This revealed two challenges. Occasionally, after certification and scanning, a device would still go “bang” in the machine and the bottle-necks created from changing the order of the queue were frustrating. The staff were not enjoying the practice of removing pacemakers either. Sure, they had created a safe workspace for this purpose, and provisioned them with the right PPE and tools, but the staff said it was gross!

So, they changed their SOP after realizing that any time one exploded (they completed the cycle and inspected the unit) there was never any real damage. They stopped opening the

containers, stopped metal detecting and if a device exploded in the machine, they would put the burst capsule in a plastic bag with the name of the decedent and return it to the customer alongside the urn with a bill for \$150.

When multiplied over 3,000-plus annual cremations, they saved a lot of time, made more money and had happier staff! The five minutes saved per case added up to almost eight weeks of labour and they earned about \$4,500 a year in “oops, I forgot a pacemaker” fees. They enjoyed more relaxed customers, happier staff and spent less than \$1,000 on refractory patching materials.


Unlike the aviation or health-care fields, almost every funeral business has its own unique way of doing things. When there are staff and ownership changes, there is often very little emphasis on active knowledge capture and transfer. Most small businesses do not have comprehensive job descriptions and clear, concise SOPs so, a lot of information is lost when seasoned folks retire and green folks take the wheel.

Pacemakers and defibrillators do not pose extreme dangers. In fact, all models have built-in safety features that are easily turned off with a 60 to 90 gauss ring magnet. Pacemaker removal is a simple and safe procedure. First, locate the unit, usually placed near the clavicle. Once located, place the ring magnet over top of the pacemaker body to turn the unit off. I like to tape the magnet in place while I use a scalpel to open the skin and reveal the scar capsule surrounding the device.

The longer the device has been implanted, the tougher and thicker the fibrous capsule will be. Use the body of the pacemaker or defibrillator as a cutting board, avoiding the lead wires. Once the capsule has been pierced, the device will be easily squeezed out exposing the leads.

There can be anywhere from one to four leads which are easily disconnected from the device with either a hex wrench or screwdriver. You will have to push to penetrate the clear plastic barrier to access the heads of the screws. There is no need to cut the wires.

Once the device has been removed, it is safe to touch and presents no danger. These devices are expensive and store a lot of information about the cardiac events of the patient, so it is just plain good citizenship to return them to the manufacturer for study and recycling.

With 700,000 devices being implanted worldwide this year, the growing cremation rate and the changing of the guard, your déjà vu may be coming soon. What will be your antidote to their fears? 

Jeff Chancellor serves as director of education, training and research for Eckels and welcomes your opinions.



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Dr. Bill Webster

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE – PART I

by Dr. Bill Webster

I love Paul Newman's classic old movie in the role of Cool Hand Luke. You may recall the prison warden's famous line, "What we've got here is a failure to communicate!"

How many times have you sat through seminars, committee or information meetings and come to a similar conclusion as that prison warden? Some presentations are captivating all right ... you feel like they'll go on forever, and there is no escape!

To say that communication has changed in recent years would be the understatement of the century. I plan to write two articles on this topic: communication in your workplace, for this issue, and next time, communication with your community.

Workplace communication is an oft-overlooked factor in job satisfaction and employee well-being. Strained communication and lack of connection by employers can cause stress and anxiety for employees, leaving them nearly three times more likely to experience burnout. It can detract from job performance and lead to lower morale.

Effective communication, however, helps raise confidence, improve teamwork and reduce work-related anxiety. Here are four crucial workplace skills to help avoid a failure to communicate.

1. Learn how to listen well

Being a good listener shows team members you're engaged and reliable. It enhances everyone's ability to absorb information more easily, respond more thoughtfully and collaborate with less confusion.

Active listening involves paying close attention to what people are saying when they talk, making good eye contact and waiting for them to finish speaking before you respond. Try to stay engaged during video meetings by looking at your screen, offering nods and smiles and positive body language, rather

than focusing on your phone. Asking thoughtful questions is an essential part of listening which leads to collaborative brainstorming. Let your workers and managers know you hear them by responding with words of affirmation or validation like, "I see where you're coming from" or "That's a great idea."

2. Learn the art of emailing

Email is probably the most popular way to share information at work, so it's critical to become a skilled email writer. Sending thoughtful, clear email messages can simplify work and make you more approachable. Here are some ideas for better email communication:

- Always edit your messages for clarity to get your point across in an informative but concise way. Eliminate unnecessary information and use simple, work-appropriate language. Include greeting people warmly and expressing gratitude for their help or efforts.
- It's easy to misinterpret a person's tone over email, so be careful not to jump to conclusions. Try to assume the best intentions. Approach every email with the goal of understanding, not blaming. You may need to ask questions for clarification or suggest a phone call to get on the same page.
- Working remotely is becoming increasingly common, so it's more critical than ever to learn how to collaborate with colleagues and clients from afar. Better collaboration leads to more productivity and happier teams. Make yourself available. Make sure your managers and team members know how and when to reach you by outlining which days and times are best for meetings or brainstorming sessions.
- Instead of operating on assumptions, ask clarification questions upfront and build in time for catch-up calls and progress updates. Being on the same page with your remote team is the key to success.

- When you're collaborating remotely, it's important that your team be able to depend on you. Do your best to be prompt for virtual meetings and respond to questions in a timely manner. Above all, exercise discretion. The tone you take and information you share at work depends on whom you're speaking to and what type of situation you're in. You can't talk to everyone about everything. It's never wise to gossip about co-workers or management, but it's completely acceptable to approach your manager or HR director to discuss your mental health or other concerns.

3. Communication skills

Company leaders, managers and supervisors can set the tone for creating a culture of positive, open communication in the workplace by "communicating with empathy," which is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. I realize this is not the traditional management style which tended to be more authoritative and even intimidating. Some may think that such methods are still necessary, but to those I would only ask, "How's that working for you?" Times have changed, especially since the pandemic.

I suggest that imparting empathy into your communication helps employees feel supported and cared about, which is usually a great motivator.

- Work on understanding employees' points of view. Ask them what they need to thrive at work.
- Respond to questions and concerns with compassion and kindness.
- Express support for employees who are struggling. It can be as simple as saying "I hear your concerns" or "How can I help?"
- Be inclusive, which in communications comes down to the "language you use, the tone you adopt and the subjects you discuss."
- Check in with your employees regularly, and pay particular attention to people who are part of marginalized groups. Use language that doesn't exclude, offend or hurt others.
- Foster a sense of belonging by uniting everyone in a common goal.

4. Support employee mental health

One of the best ways to be an effective and compassionate communicator is to show employees you support their mental well-being.

- Encourage employees to take advantage of available mental health resources, such as wellness platforms, counsellors or paid leave days.

- Create space to have conversations, support and education about mental health issues.

- Observe your employees' behaviour and try to notice signs of burnout, depression or other stressful symptoms.

- Remember, sometimes hearing is not enough. Listen and then "act" when employees are having a tough time.

So, back to the Paul Newman movie. A "failure to communicate" finally got Cool Hand Luke shot and killed. Don't say I didn't warn you!

But if you practice these suggestions, your management will be more effective and your workplace happier. **C**

Dr. Bill Webster is the director of the Centre for the Grief Journey, and can be reached at www.GriefJourney.com, and on Twitter @drbillwebster.

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IN MEMORIAM

TODD VAN BECK

The death-care profession lost an icon in funeral service with the sudden passing of Todd Van Beck on May 23, 2023. For over 25 years, Todd contributed as a regular columnist to *Canadian Funeral News*, providing his insights on a variety of topics. His interactions were cherished, along with the personal and professional relationships built with him over the years. His contributions, big personality and friendship will be missed.

Todd was a person who had a half-century love affair with both funeral and cemetery service. He willingly admitted that he was no “expert!” while also proclaiming there was nothing about this work and life he did not enjoy, and in which he did not have intense interest. Todd often said: “I have never done a day’s work in my life; it has all been fun and interesting.”

Todd was uniquely gifted and took great pride in providing reverent care for the dead and compassionate care for the living. He earned his professional diploma in mortuary science in 1973 from the New England Institute of Funeral Service Arts and Sciences (MA); his bachelor of arts in philosophy and psychology from Mount Mercy University (IA); and his master of arts in religion from Athenaeum of Ohio (Mount St. Mary’s Seminary). In 2005, he was awarded the honorary doctorate of humane letters degree from Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service (Houston, TX). Todd held several certifications and licensures, including the certified funeral service practitioner (CFSP), certified funeral executive (CFE) and licensure in several states.


Prior to his employment as program director at Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science (CCMS), Todd served as faculty/director of continuing education at John A. Gupton College (TN); general manager of Forest Hill Funeral Homes & Memorial Parks (TN); director of family funeral care and public relations at A.S. Turner & Sons Funeral Home (GA); president and CEO of the Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service

(TX); director of education for the Loewen Group, Inc. (OH); and director of education for Trust 100. His academic career began at CCMS in 1982.

Todd was an active writer and prominent international speaker. He authored eight books and over 400 articles on death-care topics. An avid historian and academician, Todd grew up in southwestern Iowa and declared at the young age of five that he would become a funeral director one day.

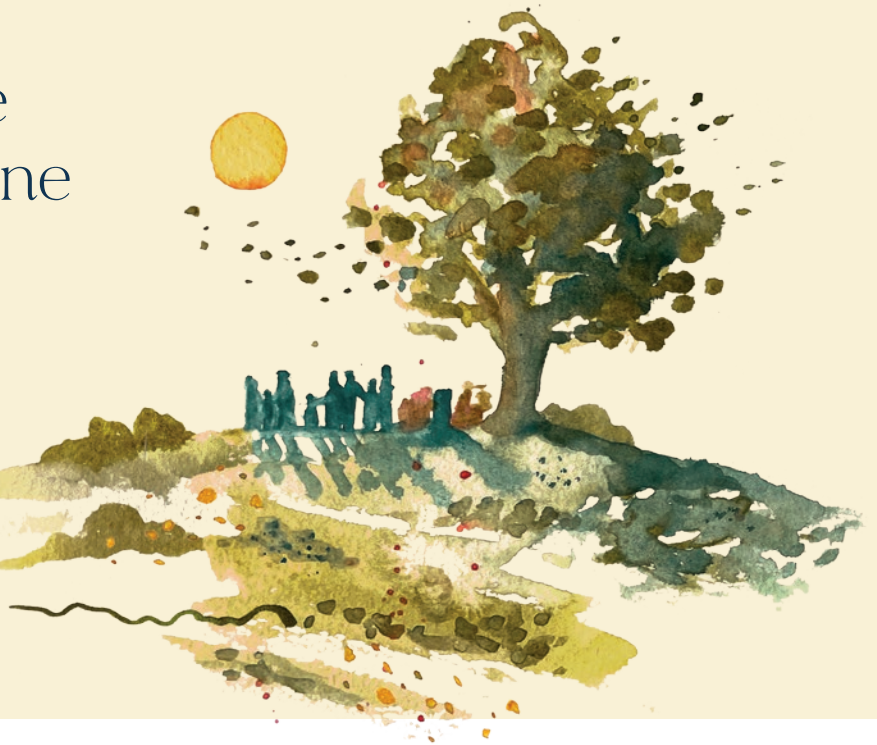
Todd operated funeral homes, cemeteries and mortuary colleges during his career. He selflessly served the death-care profession in many arenas across the nation and internationally, which satisfied his desire to see the world. An Abraham Lincoln scholar, he was an expert in the deaths of United States presidents and authored a presentation about each of the funerals of the deceased American presidents. He was thrilled and humbled to return to CCMS and his cherished Queen City where he planned to continue his mission until retirement. Todd served on the boards of the Cincinnati Fire Museum, the William Howard Taft National Historic Site and the Funeral Service Foundation of the National Funeral Directors Association.

Todd was the beloved father of Thomas; son of the late Tony and Norma (nee Feekin); brother of Scott (Sarah) Van Beck; and uncle of Wesley, Helen, Sam and Neil Van Beck.

Visitation occurred on Saturday, May 27 at the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. A Masonic service began at 2 p.m. followed by a celebration of life service. Visitation also occurred on May 30 at Hancock Methodist Church, Hancock, Iowa, followed by a 2 p.m. service. Burial took place at Oak Hill Cemetery in Hancock, Iowa. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Todd Van Beck Memorial Scholarship Fund at CCMS. Arrangements were made by the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science in conjunction with Vorhis & Ryan Funeral Homes. 

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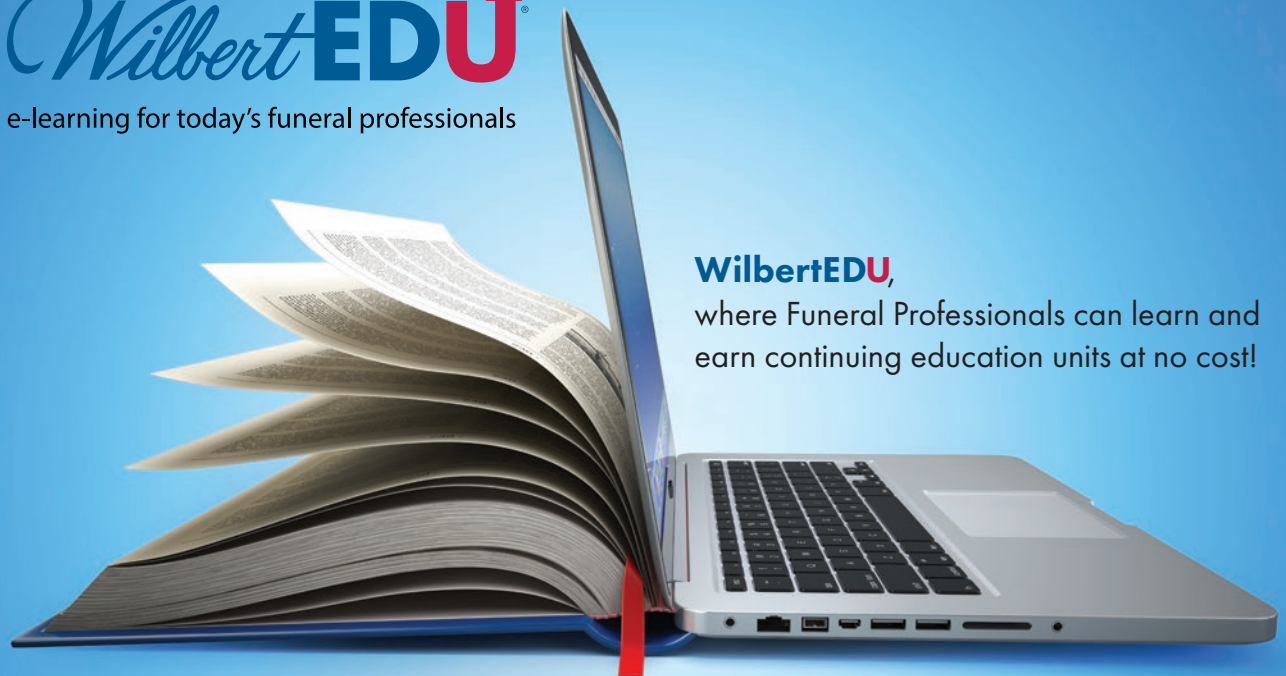
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TACKLING THE TOPICS

FCSCS DELIVERS AT SPRING SYMPOSIUM

by Nerissa McNaughton

The 2023 Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan (FCSCS) Spring Symposium took place on May 11 and 12 in Saskatoon.

FCSCS was established in 2001 to ensure consumer confidence in buying funeral and cremation services. Its annual Spring Symposium brings together professionals from across the province and beyond to listen to engaging speakers, earn continuing education credits and celebrate the achievements of its licensees.

As always, FCSCS did a wonderful job of securing speakers that have a strong impact on the profession.

Thursday's first speaker was Christopher Bauer, a licensed psychologist with over 25 years of experience as a trainer, keynote and consultant. Bauer is also known for his work with front-line professionals who faced unprecedented pressure during COVID and its aftermath.

During his presentation, Professional Ethics: Recognizing Often-Overlooked 'Red Flags' for Ethics Risk, Bauer pointed out that being ethical does not mean being stoic and remote. He taught attendees creative ways to address ethical concerns in an assertive manner, essentials on confronting others during ethical disputes, how to tell who is most likely to violate a code of ethics and why to include a personal ethical code in daily operations.

The second presentation of the day addressed an event that changed Saskatchewan forever.

On April 6, 2018, a northbound coach bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos junior hockey team collided with a westbound semi-trailer truck, resulting in deaths and injuries among the



Brian Starkell



Mike Kwasnica

players, coaches and staff. The driver of the truck was charged with 16 counts of dangerous driving causing death and 13 counts of dangerous driving causing bodily harm.

The aftermath of this tragedy affected many Canadians who were left wondering how to make sense of it all. For some, it meant finding ways to forgive and move forward; for others, it meant seeking justice for those who had lost their lives. It was clear, however, that the biggest impact was in Humboldt. The small city was devastated as many had known someone injured or killed in the accident.

In the funeral profession, there are always talks about how to prepare for and deal with the aftermath of a large-scale tragedy. For citizens and funeral professionals alike, the Humboldt accident was that tragedy – one whose effects would be felt for many years to come.

On May 11, Brian Starkell and Mike Kwasnica discussed how the accident was still affecting families, the city and the funeral profession five years on.

Kwasnica joined the Humboldt Fire Department in 2001 and became the fire chief in 2012. He was part of the senior management team that led a massive response to the community that was grieving from the crash.

Starkell, a licensed funeral director since 1988 and a retired fire chief, led the Nipawin Fire Department's mutual aid support of the Tisdale and Zenon Park Fire Departments in their response to the horrific crash.

Both possess a unique view of the events, being responders and citizens, helping those grieving while also being affected by grief. Tackling such a heavy issue in ways that support first responders, families, funeral professionals and the community at large was a huge and emotional task; these two presenters were up for the challenge and with plenty of grace, did a talk that left no heart untouched.

The final presenter of the day was Lilian Thorpe MD, PhD, FRCP.

Dr. Thorpe is extensively involved in clinical work related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), with experience in over 800 assessments and provisions. She is also actively engaged in teaching, research and graduate supervision. Currently, she holds positions in several prominent organizations including the Health Canada MAiD Practice Standards Task Group, Canadian Association of MAiD Assessors and Providers (CAMAP), CAMAP Guidelines Working Group and the Saskatchewan Health Authority/Saskatchewan Cancer Agency Joint Ethics Committee.

Her talk, Medical Assistance in Dying – Old and New Challenges, summarized the current status of laws regarding MAiD, while also discussing the challenges that persist around the process.



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Her session included a practical look at MAiD around the death itself and the role of funeral homes in a MAiD death.

MAiD, for some, is a controversial subject, influenced by personal, religious and societal beliefs. By asking Dr. Thorpe to do a session, FCSCS did not shy away from ensuring licensees of the profession had a chance to ask questions, voice concerns and learn more about the legal and practical aspects in an educational and open way.

Friday's speaker sessions kicked off with a familiar face and longtime favourite – Larry Stuart Jr.

Stuart Jr. is a respected professional with an impressive background in funeral service consulting. He is the principal and founder of Raven Plume Consulting, president and founder of Cremation Strategies and Consulting and was formerly the president of Crematory Manufacturing & Service Inc., a leading manufacturer of advanced cremation equipment. He has served as a former member of the board of directors of the Cremation Association of North America as part of his mission is to improve the public's perception of the funeral service profession through innovative strategies that transform operations and marketing.

His talk, Funeral Directors and the Age of Cremation: What Every Funeral Director Needs to Know, centred on the growing choice of cremation among families. Today, it is the choice of more than 70 per cent of pre-need/at-need service. His view was that, even if a funeral home did not perform cremations, it is essential to know about the process and its risks and liabilities. More importantly, it is important for funeral professionals to keep up with the pulse of what families need and want for their departed loved ones, and to meet – and exceed – those expectations.

Friday's final speaker, Dominick J. Astorino, also took a heavy subject head on, ensuring attendees could engage in a growing topic in an informed and empathetic way.

Astorino's talk, Relevance of Restorative Art, drew on his experience as a distinguished educator with vast knowledge in mortuary science. He is an adjunct professor of mortuary science at both the Worsham College of Mortuary Science in Chicago and Wayne State University in Detroit. His expertise in restorative art and reconstructive embalming has been widely recognized across the United States, Canada, Europe and Africa. Astorino also serves on the restorative art curriculum review committee for the American Board of Funeral Service Education and is a licensed funeral director/embalmer in Michigan and Illinois. He places great importance on education and holds degrees in cellular biology and mortuary science.

Astorino discussed the shift from closed caskets after a traumatic/unexpected death to the now preferred, and often requested, open casket. Viewings provide much-needed closure

for families and thanks to restorative art and new embalming techniques, viewings are allowing that farewell. It's not just technology that has changed the art of restoration. There has been a sociocultural shift that has inspired the change – and drive – for viewings. Astorino's session presented a well-rounded look at how all these varied aspects have come together to allow families that last and so very important final look.

The FCSCS Spring Symposium never fails to address the most prevalent and demanding topics of the day so funeral professionals can be equipped for daily challenges. However, the symposium is also a time of celebration and connection – and this year was no exception.

FCSCS acknowledges and rewards exceptional performance by interns each year. The intern(s) who receive the highest mark on both the practical embalming final examination and the jurisprudence licensing examination for a funeral director and/or embalmer are both recognized. This year's recipients, Jennifer Schindelka (practical embalming) and Wendy Saskowski (jurisprudence licensing) achieved perfect scores on their final exams.

Long-term service is also recognized. This year's recipients are:

• **25 years**

Connie Danyliuk
Corinne Palka
Dereck Wolkowski

• **35 Years**


Pierre Charpentier
David Diakow
Terry Hastings
Douglas Lett
Daniel Martens
Darcy Thomas

• **45 Years**

Richard Schneider

Funeral homes and individuals who obtained practicing, conditional and owner's licences were also celebrated. With more than 60 such licences awarded between May 2022 and April 2023, it is clear to see that the profession is thriving.

Once again, the FCSCS Spring Symposium provided the ideal blend of celebration and connection for funeral professionals, along with continuing education and a high-level look at the issues affecting the profession today. Licensees left with a renewed sense of purpose and pride in what they do, ready and recharged to fulfil their purpose – to help families through the most difficult life transition before, during and after the time of need.

Learn more about FCSCS and details (as they become available) for the 2024 symposium at fcscs.ca. 



Left to right, Mount Royal University funeral students Mike McCrae, Camil Huberdeau and Melanie Dyment with David Root (MRU instructor and AFSA president), Sandy Nordstrom (MRU program coordinator), Bridget Halfyard (MRU instructor) and Jim Storch (MRU alumni).

EXPLORING THE LABOUR SHORTAGE

A SECOND LOOK AT CANADA'S FUNERAL EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

by Lisa Johnston

Last month, *Canadian Funeral News* presented the first in a series of articles focused on the staffing shortage affecting the death-care profession. With the continued aim to promote discussion in search of solutions, this month's article shares insights from the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) and Calgary's Mount Royal University.

According to FSAC board members Allan Cole and Janet Ricciuti, Canada is currently experiencing a significant shortage of skilled labour throughout the country.

"It's evident given the number of funeral service position job postings across the country – from Vancouver Island to the Maritimes," report Cole and Ricciuti. "All regions are impacted; however, the greatest challenge is often seen in remote areas where large geographical areas are being serviced by a single licensed staff and a couple of support staff."

As education requirements for licensed positions fall under provincial legislation, FSAC is not involved in course delivery.

However, anything that impacts the membership is a priority for the national association.

"We encourage provinces to explore existing programs that create flexible training options to ensure students develop the right skills that have a proven track record of retaining those students throughout the program and following completion of the program. Eventually, a national endorsement of provincial programs such as a Red Seal endorsement would promote excellence to employers, instill pride in skilled professionals, and facilitate labour mobility."

According to Ricciuti and Cole, FSAC is committed to supporting initiatives that assist with recruitment, education and licensing of death-care workers. The Journey to Serve campaign, labour mobility and other programs that promote employment opportunities in the sector are key priorities.

While COVID-19 changed many facets of life during pandemic restrictions, it also presented the opportunity to re-evaluate

OUR PROFESSION | *Exploring the Labour Shortage*

educational options. As a result, dialogue is currently underway to rethink education delivery and licensing prerequisites in all parts of Canada.

“Similar to other educational programs, the online distance learning component can be beneficial,” relay the FSAC representatives. “Elements of shorter classroom training and on-the-job practical training can be a winning combination.” Listed among the benefits are the opportunity to gain hands-on experience; access to support systems and other learning aids; the potential to be paid while learning and getting a feel for the work environment; improved employability; and the availability of provincial and federal subsidies for tuitions and employers. “Online learning has been successful in several areas of Canada and is being re-imagined in areas not familiar with this practice.”

One current option for online funeral education can be found at Calgary’s Mount Royal University (MRU). With the majority of its funeral education components delivered remotely in conjunction with in-person attendance for embalming labs and restorative art, MRU offers three credentials: a funeral service diploma for dual licensing as a funeral director and embalmer; a funeral director certificate; and an embalmer certificate. All programs include work experience at a licensed funeral home.

“Students who reside outside of the Calgary area are able to complete embalming labs and restorative art during a Calgary-based Intensive Institute – a 12-day, condensed delivery format offered in spring and fall,” says program coordinator Sandy Nordstrom. “Local students can complete embalming labs during the fall and winter semesters. During the embalming practicum course, students receive specialized training in anatomy and embalming skills with cadaveric specimens through classes held at the University of Calgary Anatomy Lab.”

Work experience courses are conducted at licensed funeral homes and require completion of academic assignments, work hours and documentation of activities including arrangement conferences. Students are responsible for securing their own work experience and may need to relocate to find an appropriate placement.

Since 2019, the average annual intake to the funeral programs has been approximately 120 students. However, MRU has the flexibility to increase class size to help the funeral profession fill their vacancies. Currently, MRU is an approved educator in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Students from other provinces may start their online courses and then relocate at a later point when they are ready to begin work experience.

Nordstrom believes there should be greater flexibility offered to students for their educational options. “While some components



Sandy Nordstrom



Janet Ricciuti



Allan Cole

With an average student age of approximately 30 years old, most MRU funeral students are likely returning to school for a second or possibly third career. To help students predetermine if funeral service is the right fit, MRU offers an introduction to funeral service.

of funeral education are location specific (i.e. laws and regulations), many aspects of funeral education are more universal in nature (e.g., grief, conflict and negotiation, anatomy, funeral arrangements, restorative art, embalming skills)."

With an average student age of approximately 30 years old, most MRU funeral students are likely returning to school for a second or possibly third career. To help students predetermine if funeral service is the right fit, MRU offers an introduction to funeral service. Many students come from a helping background like health services and military service. Others are already employed in the field and are looking to formalize their credentials and become licensed professionals.

Nordstrom feels flexibility is the key – something MRU fulfils by providing the option to study online without the need to move for education.

"They can begin studies in September or January," notes Nordstrom. "They can complete work experience courses in the location of their choice; work experience can begin in any semester and may be completed at the same time as academic courses. In addition, they can also choose to personalize their course schedule, which can include part-time or full-time studies, completing the program within one to six years, while earning a university credential."

With so many options to fit the schedules of all students, Nordstrom sees many positives in online education. "Our focus is on delivering quality education that is accessible to students. Our courses are instructor-led and offer a robust learning environment that includes virtual tutorials and practical assessments where students demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge. The online nature of our programs also allows students to begin their programs in their own location without having to relocate to begin their studies."

Like FSAC, Nordstrom believes Canada is already on the cusp of a funeral director shortage. "In some jurisdictions, the shortage is already a reality. Many funeral professionals will be retiring in the next five to 10 years and there will be demand for new professionals."


She feels provinces and schools can adapt to help fill these vacancies by providing students with the opportunity to gain practical experience in all aspects of funeral home operations. Having funeral homes willing to mentor and coach funeral students is a crucial piece of the puzzle.

"Access to work experience placements to complete their educational programs may be a barrier for some students," notes Nordstrom. "Also, the cost of education can be a factor for some students. Mount Royal University programs are eligible for student loans and government initiatives like the Canada-Alberta Job Grant, but more entrance scholarships for the profession would help deserving students fulfil their career aspirations."

Even if schools like MRU can increase the number of students enrolled in funeral programs via online delivery methods, the death-care profession still needs to address the attrition rate – the number of students leaving their studies before they graduate, or leaving the profession soon after beginning their career. According to FSAC, "out of the box" thinking is required to tackle this issue. "Long hours and compensation seem to be areas that require significant consideration to address challenges in the sector."

When asked what else the profession can do to help ease the labour shortage, FSAC answers, "We need to raise the awareness of what it means to be a funeral service professional – rebrand the 'face' of the funeral professional through public awareness initiatives. We also may need to modernize our marketing. The days of being available to provide professional services 'on demand' – 24 hours – seven days a week is not supported by the current workforce nor is a service available from other professions. Work/life balance and competitive compensation appear to be leading factors."

There is a lot to consider to fill the vacancies across the country. Help ads will only continue to mount if nothing sustainable is done, but there are solutions available.

"In our experience at Mount Royal University, demand for funeral education has stayed strong and in fact, has grown dramatically over the past decade," concludes Nordstrom. "We are open to working collaboratively with other jurisdictions to increase access to funeral education." 

If you would like to join the education and labour shortage discussion, email editor Lisa Johnston at lisjoh@telus.net.

PROGRAM ANNOUNCED FOR CANA'S 105TH CREMATION INNOVATION CONVENTION



Delegates will only be 1,287 steps away from the U.S. Capitol when they join the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) for its 105th Annual Cremation Innovation Convention at the Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill. This premier event brings innovative cremation professionals together to share ideas, learn from experts, and see the newest products and services from death-care suppliers. CANA encourages all cremation professionals to head to Washington, D.C. this August 9-11, 2023, to join the conversation and plan for the year ahead.

Innovative sessions are the core of every CANA convention, and the D.C. program is sure to measure up.

The convention will begin by tackling burnout and staffing shortages head on. Brent Patterson, memorial care specialist and licensed funeral director with Tribute Memorial Care Southwest, and InSight Institute vice president Glenda Stansbury kick off the convention with a discussion on providing the right environment to grow and nurture employees. In *Blocked, Burned Out, Blasé*, they share strategies to engage staff and help them grow as creative and enthusiastic professionals.

Drawing from national data collected over the last several years, Eric Layer, partner at McKee Wallwork, will divulge key findings about family preferences around disposition, memorialization and the funeral profession generally – and talk about how delegates can respond to these trends by Targeting with Data. A perennial favourite, the statistics and research session is always a source of thought-provoking and practical advice for applying the latest research to operations.

Regulate, Recruit and React: A Quick Take on Current Issues brings together three presenters on three topics in bite-size format. Caressa Hughes, CANA president and assistant vice president of government and industry relations for Service Corporation International, will present a Regulatory Update and answer participant questions. Next, Jim Price, president of the ICCFA Educational Foundation, will discuss tools for Recruiting Veterans to serve families, followed by Scott Smith, past president of CANA and Texas Funeral Directors Association. Smith will share his tips on *How Can I Pitch In?* when disaster strikes a community.

Following lunch, Your Funeral Coach founder Lisa Baue presents seven essential components of mentoring, discussing


Why Mentoring Matters to both owners and team members. Baue will pay special attention to the benefits mentoring has on millennials and gen Z, who are now the largest generations in the workplace.

In a special two-hour session, death educator and suicidologist Dr. Sara Murphy will assist attendees in Responding to Suicide Death and Recognizing Suicide Risk – both for the families served and among members of the funeral profession. Importantly, it will also reframe factors contributing to complicated grief and to suicide risk in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking for success stories and ideas to help breathe new life into cemeteries? Merendino Cemetery Care account executive Dan Cassin joins forces with sales manager Bryan Mueller and vice president, sales operations, Cole Waybright of Foundation Partners Group to close the convention, reframing the discussion around permanent memorialization. In *Built to Last*, they'll feature ideas to turn challenges into new opportunities for growth and profitability, including a cremation garden that increased memorialization sales by 350 per cent.

And there's more! Delegates can renew certification by registering for an in-person, pre-convention CANA Crematory Operations Certification Program™ (COCP™) taught by Tom Krowl of Cremation Systems and Wendy Wiener of WRW Legal. Celebrate being together in D.C. at the CANA after party. Reflect on another year in funeral service at the annual membership meeting and in memoriam. Attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and tour Arlington National Cemetery on Friday afternoon, then enjoy America's pastime when the Oakland Athletics meet the Washington Nationals on Friday night.

What more could attendees want? How about an opportunity to attend for free! New this year, the Funeral Service Foundation offers five scholarships to attend the CANA convention. Valued at up to US\$2,200, each scholarship covers full registration for the event, plus three nights at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill, and up to \$500 in travel reimbursement. Candidates can learn more on the convention website.

Join colleagues in the room where it happens! Get ready for a capital event and book to attend this year's convention. For more information, visit goCANA.org/CANA23. 



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UPCOMING EVENTS 2023

ATLANTIC PROVINCES FUNERAL DIRECTORS & SERVICE CONVENTION (APFD&SC)

September 14-17, 2023
Delta Fredericton
Fredericton, NB

ALBERTA FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (AFSA)

Harald Gunderson Memorial Golf Tournament
September 19, 2023
River Bend Golf & Recreation Area
Red Deer County, AB

CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Innovation Convention
August 9-11, 2023
Hotel Regency Washington on
Capitol Hill
Washington, DC

INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCF)

ICCF AU
July 21-26, 2023
Emory University
Atlanta, GA

Leadership Summit

October 24-26, 2023
Loews Ventana Canyon Resort
Tucson, AZ

NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION (NFDA)

International Convention & Expo
September 10-13, 2023
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, NV

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)

Front-Line Funeral and Cemetery Training
July 20, 2023
Mount Pleasant Cemetery
Toronto, ON

Educational Conference & Trade Show

October 3-5, 2023
Deerhurst Resort & Conference Centre
Hunstville, ON

ONTARIO FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (OFSA)

Webinar: Nutrition for Healthy Aging
Presenter: Lisa Tsakos
September 13, 2023

AGM & Conference

September 25 & 26, 2023
Hockley Valley Resort
Mono, ON

SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES

Annual Meeting
October 10-13, 2023
JW Marriott
Chicago, IL

WESTERN CANADA CEMETERY ASSOCIATION (WCCA)

Annual Conference & Trade Show
September 6-8, 2023
Royal Hotel Edmonton Airport
Leduc, AB

NETWORK

Canadian Cemetery Management

July 2023



RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Allan Job serves as OACFP president

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Association Update

Allan Job, centre of back row, with the OACFP board of directors.



RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Allan Job serves as OACFP president

By Lisa Johnston

While it might have seemed customary for Allan Job to accept the nomination to join the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) board in the fall of 2018, the decision to continue into the executive – and the president’s role – was entirely his own. A choice fuelled by passion and a steadfast belief that anything is possible with a value proposition, teamwork and a vision for the future.

Having served senior roles with both Mount Royal Cemetery and currently Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa, Job has a wealth of knowledge to share with the death-care profession. He began his lengthy career mowing lawns on the grounds of Montreal’s prestigious Mount Royal Cemetery while studying computer science. Upon graduating, he was offered a position to automate the entire cemetery’s operation.

“At the time, the most sophisticated piece of equipment they had was a typewriter and probably a calculator,” recalls Job

with a chuckle. “The first step was to learn the business, so I spent about four or five months shadowing almost every part of the office process.”

Job stayed almost 30 years, designing software that ran all cemetery departments, and eventually moved into senior management positions. Throughout the time span, he helped Mount Royal expand into the funeral business, adding four funeral home properties to their three cemetery locations. Then, in 2021, he made the move from Montreal to join his former colleague, Andy Roy, at Ottawa’s Beechwood Cemetery, where he currently serves as vice president.

“The opportunity to work with Andy again was one of the reasons I decided to make a career change after almost 30 years with Mount Royal,” says Job, who moved to the Ottawa Valley with his wife, Laurie Cornay, an independent consultant with Batesville. “It was like bringing the old team back together again and I had always enjoyed military history which is a big part of

Beechwood. In addition, over the last 10 years, Beechwood has been experiencing a tremendous amount of growth, and I think my experience growing Mount Royal made me the perfect fit to get Beechwood ready for the future.”

In the same manner, it seems Job was also a perfect candidate for the OACFP board. While he admits he initially stepped up to the plate to fill a role often occupied by senior staff from Mount Royal, Beechwood or the Mount Pleasant Group, he says the commitment to see the role through to president was much more personal than that.

“I was asked if I’d apply and I did,” recalls Job, who also spent many years volunteering for minor hockey boards while his three (now adult) sons laced up their skates. “At the time I wasn’t sure where it was going to go as it’s a big time commitment, but then I was asked to join the executive and I realized I wanted to go further. I think once you are there and you start participating, it recharges your perspective on the whole profession.”

With a number of concerns vying for his attention from the shortage of workers to lobbying government, Job still believes the biggest challenge for the profession and OACFP is vocalizing the value proposition.

“Everybody who takes on the presidency probably has their own opinion of the role, but having been involved with boards and not-for-profit companies before, I feel it is all about teamwork. OACFP really goes out of its way to create strategic plans on a three-year basis and I see myself as more of a facilitator to ensure the goals of the association are met, but at the same time, I want to change how we communicate value.”

Job continues, “My old boss, Merle Christopher, once said, ‘Working for a cemetery is different from any other company. Every single day we have an opportunity to do one last good thing for somebody, and we need to keep that in mind with every action we take.’ Even in my first role building software, I was there to help our staff help our customers.”

To help hammer home the value proposition, he stresses the importance of sharing death-care stories every day. Not the negative stories that often dominate the media, but the beautiful renditions that happen every day at funeral homes and cemeteries across the country.

“In my opening speech as president, I shared a story about a family I met who wanted to purchase five or six keepsake urns. When I asked them why, they told me they planned to give one to each grandchild to bury at a special place at the family cabin to remember granddad. It’s an amazing story I like to share, but there is really nothing unique about it. We all have stories like that but we don’t share them enough. We don’t



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Allan Job with his family, left to right, Spencer, Laurie, Tyler and Connor.

share the good as easily as the media and public like to share the bad. And if we don't make that change, who will?

"As far as articulating our value, I think we need to refocus. From the moment we are meeting with customers, we need to share these stories to help them visualize something special in every opportunity that we have."

To help OACFP achieve the goal of sharing stories and demonstrating value, a marketing company – Halmyre – has been hired to help perform a value audit. Recommendations are expected in the coming months to help OACFP continue moving forward with their strategic plan.

In the meantime, Job will be working closely with OACFP executive director Darren Denomme to help find solutions to the staffing shortage plaguing the bereavement profession. "We are looking at ways for OACFP to support our members by promoting the industry as a career choice. We are also speaking actively with Ontario stakeholders, including the registrar, to try and see how we can get more people licensed, particularly on the funeral side. Currently, the method of being licensed in Ontario is through one of two schools – and that is fine for a young person looking

"As far as articulating our value, I think we need to refocus. From the moment we are meeting with customers, we need to share these stories to help them visualize something special in every opportunity that we have."

for a career path, but it is definitely a barrier for entry for anyone wishing to change careers. They can't likely stop working, pack up their family and move to Toronto or Sudbury to spend a year in class learning to be a funeral director. So, there's a barrier there and we are looking at ways to overcome the barrier, and we think what is lacking is an apprenticeship program that will lead to licensing. I don't know what the answer will be, but those are the conversations we need to have to support a profession that needs people."

From the get-go, Job has done everything in his ability to help both colleagues and death-care families. Something he is looking at today with a recharged energy from both his position at Beechwood and serving as OACFP president. **N**



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ASSOCIATION UPDATE

Wind of Change (Part 2) – The Coming Storm?

By Allan Job, President, Board of Directors

I do not know what the future holds, but I do believe in looking forward and not backward. This is also the mantra of OACFP.

Many know that OACFP was originally an association of cemeteries and cemetarians. However, with vision and forward-thinking, my predecessors who led this organization realized that only by representing all facets of the profession can we really be the voice of the sector and provide the necessary professional support to our members. Our recent growth in membership, educational offerings and influence with the government has proven that vision to be justified.

In the last association update, I explored the idea that, from the consumer's perspective, our profession is ripe for disruption. Technology, labour shortages and a predictable increase in the number of deaths can be both a hurdle to overcome and an opportunity to serve. Despite the challenges and the disruption in the sector, we should focus on what I see as opportunities to better serve our client families in a modern world.

The Baby Boom

As the baby boom generation enter their final years, the effect on the death-care profession will be profound. More importantly, the baby boom generation will demand services

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to be delivered in a less formal way. As a sector, we must be ready to adapt.

Our greatest opportunity lies in the fact that, in the next 15 to 20 years, we will serve more families than ever before in our history. This is an opportunity to solidify our value as caring and compassionate bereavement specialists and demonstrate the professionalism we have practiced for generations. In this way, we can renew our commitment to the communities we serve.

Technology

I believe the greatest risk of disruption lies in the area of technology. In many markets, crematoriums and transfer service providers could be pooled to provide direct cremation services. Technology companies are very good at pooling different services in order to market packages directly to consumers. Consider the business model of companies such as Expedia, KAYAK or Booking.com. What would prevent this business model from happening in the bereavement sector?

While technology can be used as a disruptor, we must also recognize that technology can also be used as a tool to enhance and customize the customer experience. We need to strike the right balance of integrating technology into our services so that when the disruptors do what they do best, they will not be viewed as being so different from us as to provide, in the eyes of the consumer, a viable alternative.

Today, funeral and cemetery service software can be very robust and revolutionize the way we do business. Every business should be able to enter information only once, print all necessary forms, have digital whiteboards, digital signature capability, share information with staff using mobile devices, and most importantly have a client portal. These features should be considered essential, and we must recognize that systems without these features place our businesses and employees at a significant disadvantage.

Of the technological features I have mentioned, the most critical, in my opinion, is the client portal. A fully integrated client portal would be used as a digital marketing tool to establish a trusted online relationship even before services are needed. Once services are needed, from the moment of the first call, the client portal would be used to fully engage the family being served. Client portals can be used to begin the collection of vital statistics, collaborate on an obituary notice, upload documents and photos, and even pay invoices. These are the types of services clients are becoming accustomed to and an example of how technology can provide an enhanced personal experience, at the client's convenience.

Using an effective client portal will help establish rapport with a client family even before the initial arrangement meeting.

Information collected prior to the arrangement meeting, at the convenience of the family, should be viewed as a time saver, allowing the funeral director to spend valuable time satisfying the unique needs of each family.

Labour Shortage

There has been much discussion across the country about the challenges we face in finding sufficient licensed staff to carry us through the coming storm. In Ontario, the path to licensure is seemingly more difficult than in any other province in Canada. Many stakeholders in the sector wear this distinction as a badge of honour, but does this not just exacerbate the current situation? They would prefer to say that we have a "retention problem" rather than acknowledge the situation is far more complex.

By saying we have a retention problem, the implication is that companies are not doing enough to make sure employees do not leave. In my experience, companies are doing everything they can to retain their employees – paying higher wages, developing creative schedules and enhancing benefits all to create a better work-life balance. Using the far too simple explanation of "retention" also ignores the fact that "job hopping" or "career hopping" are approaches comfortably employed by today's youth.

It is likely that in each of our companies we employ caring and compassionate people who would make great funeral directors but the path to licensure is not practical in their life situations. We must find a way to have these mature, caring individuals become licensed without the current obstacles. We must be open to adapt the path to licensure using a combination of online education, apprenticeships and recognition of experience. While this seems obvious, I am constantly surprised at the resistance expressed by many in the sector. "We" must all be open to new and inventive ways to solve this problem. The "we" in this case includes all stakeholders in the sector – the regulator, educators, associations, employer establishments and even fellow licensees. Clearly, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario has a difficult task ahead to quell the coming storm.

Ours is a profession that began from a commitment to community service, touching the heart of every grieving family we were honoured to serve, and today, nothing has changed. We still need to approach every day with the desire to do good and assist grieving families. However, we need to do so in a different way; a way that the consumer recognizes as convenient and having value. Letting go of the past has to be part of our evolution and the only way we can strengthen our value proposition for the future.

Now more than ever, we need to look forward, adapt and overcome. **N**



Ken Munday



ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Ken Munday, WCCA President

Why does it always feel like spring is the shortest season of the year? It seems like we only had a week or two, and we are already into summer, even though at the time of writing this, it isn't officially summer yet. Thankfully, we have been very fortunate to have had some long summers over the last few years.

The warm weather will bring more people to your cemetery. They could be out for a nice leisurely walk, getting some exercise jogging through the grounds, or coming to visit a loved one.

Summer also means getting back to regular maintenance and doing what you do best: keeping your cemetery looking beautiful for your families and the community. For the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA), things are a bit slower as your board is focused on cemetery maintenance, vacations and getting out to enjoy the beautiful weather.

This time of year also means that we can start looking forward to another great WCCA annual conference! We have some exciting topics lined up for the conference this year. We will be discussing pest management, turf maintenance, celebrants, indigenous burial sites, legislation and the Last Post Fund. To top that off, we will also be going out to tour Alberta Wilbert Sales and Evergreen Memorial Gardens.

In addition to great speakers and tours, this conference is also where we get a chance to meet with others in the profession to share ideas, stories and make some lifelong friendships. This year, we will be in Edmonton from September 6-8. WCCA members should have already received information about the event. If you haven't, please reach out to Lorraine Piller at administration@westerncemetery.com. Registration fees increase on August 1, 2023, so don't delay, register today!

Summer also means getting back to regular maintenance and doing what you do best: keeping your cemetery looking beautiful for your families and the community. For the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA), things are a bit slower as your board is focused on cemetery maintenance, vacations and getting out to enjoy the beautiful weather.

At our annual general meeting, we will be looking for new WCCA directors. Please give some thought to joining the WCCA board. This is not only a great way to give back to the association, but it is also a way to grow both professionally and personally. I have certainly learned a lot throughout my time on the board. I look forward to having you join us and working with you to help grow and strengthen WCCA.

WCCA is still looking to offer webinars to our membership. If anyone would like to present an educational webinar, please reach out to Larisa Day at LarisaD@wilbert.ca or our WCCA administrator Lorraine Piller at administration@westerncemetery.com.

If you have any questions about WCCA or would like more information, please visit our website at westerncemetery.com or send us an email.

Have a great summer and I look forward to seeing everyone again soon at the WCCA conference in September. **N**

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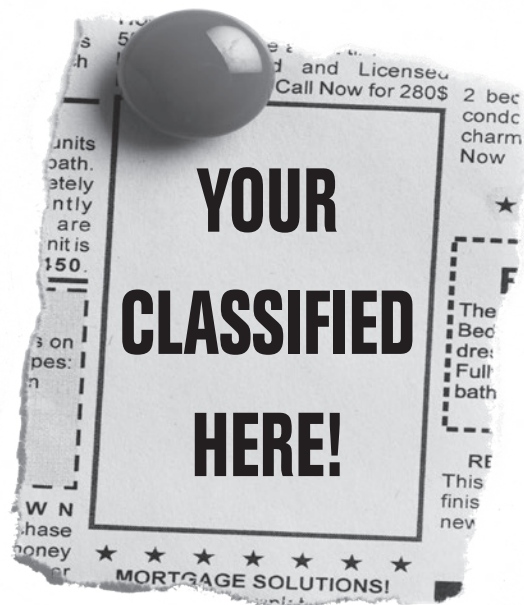
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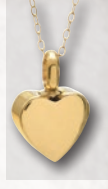
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