

Canadian

FUNERAL NEWS



MARCH 2024



**ALONGSIDE FAMILIES
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JIM AND TRACY COCHRANE TAKE FERRIS FUNERAL HOME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

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Tracy and Jim Cochrane

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"Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened." ~ Dr. Seuss

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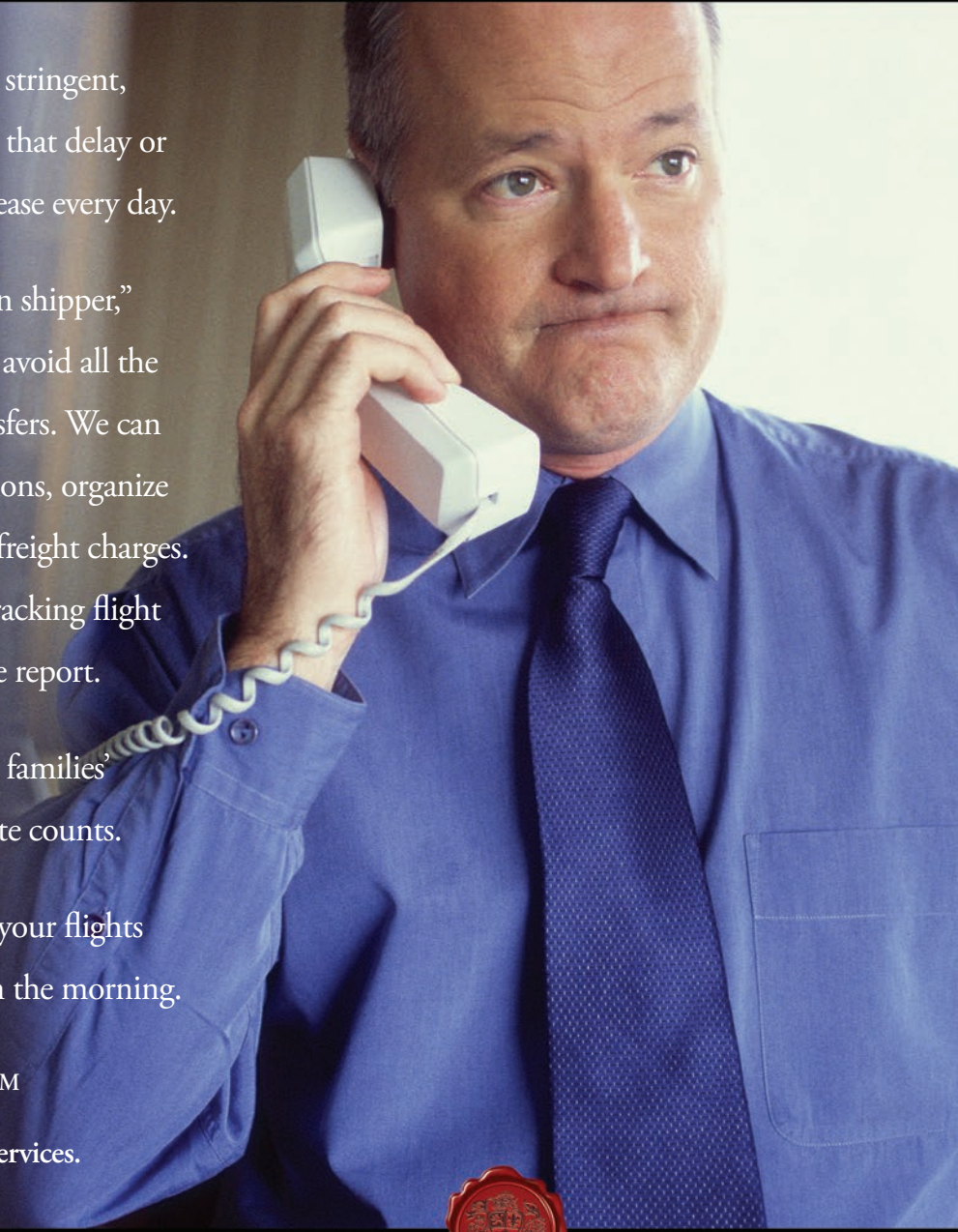
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Pat Ottmann

LOOKING AT THE WORLD WE SERVE

by Pat Ottmann

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

“Our technology is greater than our humanity.” This one sentence holds many meanings. It means that technology has exceeded what is possible of the human race; that technology has affected us in a way that makes us less human; and that technology has allowed us to reach beyond barriers like language, distance, time and space.

When I come across a quote like this, I first think about its effect on society, and then drill down deeper to determine its impact on the funeral profession. When I first saw this quote, there was no real context to it, just a statement, but with a little research, this quote is attributed to Albert Einstein. There was no date on the quote, but it must be pre-1955, as that was the year Einstein passed. I think most people can agree that Einstein was a pretty smart guy and for him to see this happening pre-1955 is truly amazing.

Humans have proven to be a fairly adaptable lot, but with the exponential rate of development with our current technologies, I don't believe we are doing very well keeping up. Data shows a large portion of society is shutting down and shutting in. Their best friend is their phone or computer. Friends, connections and followers have become the measure of success and prominence. Influencers have millions of followers they have never met. U.S. Congress is now grilling the heads of these companies, finally realizing they have created technologies that are literally killing young people through unintended consequences. If I am reading the politicians correctly, there seems to be a willingness to hold these tech companies accountable for what they have created and the resulting damages. We truly are at an interesting time in history.

Hard times create strong people, strong people create good times, which, in turn, create weak people. Weak people will create hard times, which will again create strong people. I am

not pretending to know exactly where we are in the cycle, but the data suggests the future for our young people is not nearly as bright as it was for the boomers.

As always, I try to relate this to the funeral profession. I have always thought the purpose of this page is to create thought amongst the people who serve this profession. I never worry about being right, only about planting enough seeds to have all of you think about the points I have presented. My hope is that your thoughts on the matter and how it affects your business will provide improvements on some level and allow you to serve your families with more understanding as to what we are dealing with.

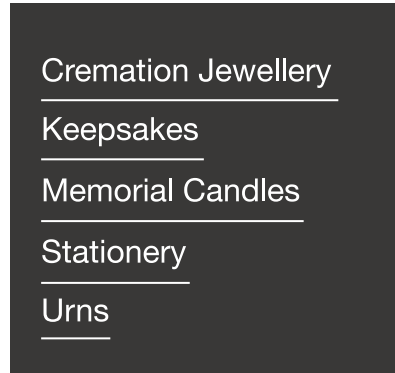
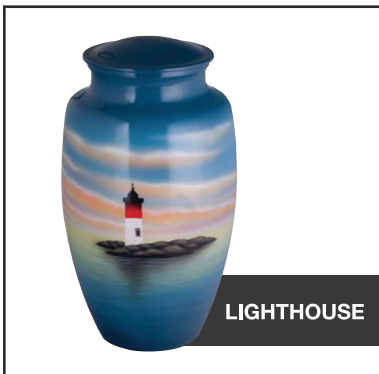
It must be inconceivable to the many of you who have spent a lifetime in the profession. To have a family communicate last wishes like a transaction with less emotion/love/feeling than deciding what to do for the weekend. As time goes forward with today's trends and technologies, I would venture to say this will only get worse.

While it feels pretty limited as to what can be done to fight a wave this large and with this much power and influence, I am still a believer in the effects of personal interaction within the communities we serve. The more we try to build and hold on to the in-person relationships within our communities, the stronger our businesses will remain. When we give in and allow the funeral profession to be digital transactions, then I don't believe we should act surprised when the service to community will be handled and viewed on a phone screen. We all know that it takes more effort to get out into the community and meet people than it does to sit on the couch and send messages. I suppose the only real question is: what do you want your business to look like in 10 years?

Until next month... 

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ALONGSIDE FAMILIES EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

JIM AND TRACY COCHRANE TAKE FERRIS FUNERAL HOME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

by Lisa Johnston

From their website guarantee to their daily interactions with bereaved families, Ferris Funeral Home has long been committed to walking beside the bereaved every step of the way. It's the way business has been conducted for over a century and will continue to be the backbone of operations for the firm's newest owners, Jim and Tracy Cochrane.

"Any funeral home can organize a funeral and provide service, but we always try to take it to a whole other level where every detail is considered," says Jim Cochrane, co-owner of Ferris Funeral Home with his wife, Tracy. "It's doing all the little things that families love – and it is something that families see value in."

Established in the 1880s as a funeral home and furniture dealership in Simcoe, ON, the beautiful 6,000-square foot, two-storey facility is heaped in tradition, but by no means stuck in the past. Even before becoming owners on September 1, 2022 – the fifth in the funeral home's long history – Tracy and Jim were working alongside their predecessor, David Ferris, to make the operation a progressive facility focused on the needs of current funeral families.

"I have known David since I was in high school when I began employment at the funeral home in 1992," says Jim, who was born in Simcoe



Tracy and Jim Cochrane



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Tracy and Jim Cochrane with their staff. Back row, left to right, George Demaiter, Gerry Branderhorst and Terry Sheppard.

and raised in nearby Waterford. “Even back then, David was talking about future ownership opportunities.”

Unbeknown to Jim at the time, a young woman two hours northeast of Simcoe was also pursuing a funeral service career at Jerrett Funeral Homes in Toronto. She would become Jim’s senior director during his apprenticeship and a few years later, his wife.

“In high school all I ever wanted to be was a nurse,” recalls Tracy of her journey to funeral service. “But our guidance counsellor was very good at making sure we had backup options in case it didn’t work out for acceptance to the college. I applied to both nursing and funeral service, and to be accepted into the funeral program, I had to do 40 hours of observation.”

The experience piqued Tracy’s interest and she never looked back. “It was great to see so many aspects of funeral service, but one thing I wanted to learn more about was what happened in the preparation room. I’m very much a science-oriented person, and to be involved in someone’s full care after death was incredibly appealing to me.”

In 1999, on David’s prompting, Tracy and Jim returned to Simcoe to start their family and begin the gradual succession to ownership of Ferris Funeral Home. As permanent faces in the staff conglomerate for over 20 years, nothing much changed when the transaction finally became official in 2022.

“We’d already been embraced by the community and our names were on the sign out front,” says Jim. “It was just a matter of taking David’s off following his official retirement, although he still helps with coverage and stops by for coffee all the time. He was very progressive as owner, but he likes how we are taking the business to a whole new level.”

Self-described workaholics, the Cochranes are all about giving back to the community whether it’s through volunteer work with the Lions Club, past involvement with minor sports, donating to various charities and groups, or being there for funeral families 24 hours a day. As the only licensed funeral directors on site, they never venture far from the business, choosing weekend getaways or glamping in their RV while spending time with their sons, Avery, 23, and Jonah, 21. For them, it’s all about family – both their own and the ones coming through the door in need of help.

“There are 48 hours in our day and somehow we make it all fit,” says Tracy, who in addition to working part time at the funeral home is the operations manager for Norfolk Family Eye Care with three locations in the Simcoe area. “When we first came back in 1999, Jim joined David full time while I worked more on a part-time basis and took over the pre-arrangements. After we started our family, I joined the optometrist office as there wasn’t enough work for the three of us full time.”

That is all changing as the business continues to grow, leaving Tracy at a crossroads as to whether to be at the funeral home full time or to hire another director to assist with daily duties. “Jim and I just recently had this conversation and the answer will come down to what is best for the funeral home: to have me here full time or to hire someone else. We are workaholics, but it is also important to be conscious of work-life balance moving forward in the best service to our families.”

The Cochranes are assisted by three part-time staff members – director assistants George Demaiter, Terry Sheppard and Gerry Branderhorst – who are ready to spring into action at a moment’s notice, whether it is helping during a service or with a wide variety of maintenance tasks.

“Our staff is truly the heart and soul of the business,” says Jim. “We could not operate without them. They are all so personable and bring something special to the funeral home. We



The Cochrane family: Avery, Tracy, Jim and Jonah.

often get compliments about the friendliness of our staff and that the facility feels like home.”

The family feel is exactly what the Cochranes strive for every day as they serve the needs of each family. As a family-run business, they are always willing to go the extra mile to ensure services are unique, reflecting the life of the deceased, and providing value to families.

“Someone once asked us if we want to do all the funerals in our town and we said, ‘no, we just want the ones we do to be perfect,’” notes Jim. “That includes looking after all the details so our families don’t have to.”

Those details include everything from assistance with estate matters to planning a truly unique service. According to Jim and Tracy, families are not always sure what they want when they start making arrangements, and it’s only through listening that they can guide them on the right road to grief recovery. Today, that doesn’t necessarily mean a traditional funeral or celebration of life service. Instead, many are opting for intimate gatherings during a visitation.

“I don’t think people realize how much they can work outside the box,” says Tracy. “When they come here, they

have an idea based on what they have witnessed or been involved in before, but Jim has a really great way of helping them see beyond those options to create something truly memorable.”

According to Jim, they are willing to do anything for the family, provided it is not illegal or unethical. “We have had quads and motorcycles out front; we’ve had golf carts in the funeral home; we’ve had a sheet metal truck carrying a casket. It is not about what we want; it is all about what a family wants.”

Tracy adds, “And that’s huge. It’s important for them to know we are listening and not just doing routine services. It’s about making it unique for every family because it is different for every family we serve.”

While the Cochranes have upgraded their audiovisual equipment since acquiring ownership and are currently investigating streaming services, they are not planning too far into the future. Instead, they’ll be listening to families – and walking beside them – as they continue their commitment to service.

“We are always listening,” concludes Tracy. “The future will not be guided by us, but by where our families lead us.”



Michael Brooke

A TRUE NETWORK OF SUPPORT

by Michael Brooke

I take great pride in introducing ideas that will inform and inspire you. This month, I am proud to feature an article about the Bereavement Ontario Network (BON).

As chairperson of BON, Susan McCoy, explains, “Thirty-four years ago, a group of people ranging from funeral directors to therapists to police officers thought it would be useful to get together.” Their focus was to discuss death, dying, bereavement and how they could work together. “We felt people needed more information, so we just put it out there.”

Long before social media, they expected only a handful of people. “To our amazement, over 100 people showed up at Hamilton’s Royal Botanical Gardens,” recalls McCoy.

From that auspicious beginning, the BON has grown. At the first meeting, it was decided that a conference would be needed to promote the idea of networking. “Our first conference drew from a wide range of sectors,” says McCoy. “We had school boards sending their social workers and funeral homes were sending people. We even had police who worked in victim services.”

The first BON conference focused on death, dying and bereavement issues, while featuring workshops and plenary sessions. It was held at Geneva Park in Orillia. But the events – then and now – aren’t just about education. A critical component is networking to encourage the sharing of ideas. “A lot of connections and friendships have been made over the years,” adds McCoy.

Lori Ives-Baine, a pediatric nurse and grief support coordinator at SickKids Hospital in Toronto, serves as the conference chair of BON. She is quick to point to the fact the province has many incredible knowledge-keepers. “It’s essential to recognize those living in Ontario. But it’s also costly to bring in somebody who charges \$10,000 for an hour, and then there’s no funds for anything else,” she says. As a result, BON keeps

The first BON conference focused on death, dying and bereavement issues, while featuring workshops and plenary sessions. It was held at Geneva Park in Orillia. But the events – then and now – aren’t just about education. A critical component is networking to encourage the sharing of ideas.

things on a tight budget to ensure attendees get the biggest bang for their buck.

When it comes to supporting those who are helping the bereaved, BON is in a truly unique position. “When COVID hit, many of our members were feeling a great deal of angst,” notes Ives-Baine. “We were dealing with both mass numbers of people dying and the number of people who were bereaved.” In the beginning, the group got together weekly online to offer support. “We had an open forum because people were all over the place,” recalls McCoy.

Natalie Proulx, BON’s vice chair, remains a licensed funeral director but made the decision to continue her studies to shift into bereavement education and grief support. Reflecting on her time studying within funeral service education, she notes that quite a small amount was spent on grief and bereavement.

“Funeral directors are the front-line people. The public regards them as grief experts,” says Proulx. It was this disconnect that made her seek additional education on grief and

Beyond the educational component, BON's greatest strength lies in the camaraderie it builds for those who deal with grief and bereavement. The fireside or pool-side chats create a trusted environment where people can come and explain any issue that is happening to them.

bereavement. "People were coming to me assuming that I had these answers and advice, yet I was only pulling from personal and professional lived experiences, with little formal foundational knowledge."

As a result, Ives-Baine believes funeral directors would benefit significantly from the type of education BON offers. "There are tons of presenters talking about totally different ideas on grief and bereavement that they would never have heard about," she says.

For Proulx, it's all about getting the information to those who could use it. "When it comes to education about grief and bereavement, we need to recognize where we're at and where we could be." As she notes, there are different options to understand grief and bereavement better and many references outside of funeral services.

BON has a directory for their members, featuring all kinds of resources outside immediate catchment areas. So, whether it is the local therapists or bereavement support organizations like Bereaved Families of Ontario, Compassionate Friends or other like-minded groups, everything is listed on their website for members to access.

As McCoy sees it, BON can greatly benefit funeral directors because it will lighten their load and make them feel more confident when dealing with families. "They don't have to know it all. They can refer families to several different organizations and resources." According to McCoy, a funeral director should not have to feel they have all the answers and shouldn't have to think they have to reinvent the wheel. "Wherever you are in Ontario, we have connections to people who can help."

Beyond the educational component, BON's greatest strength lies in the camaraderie it builds for those who deal with grief and bereavement. The fireside or pool-side chats create a trusted environment where people can come and explain any issue that is happening to them. "They are not recorded, and you get

people who can give you support feedback," says McCoy. "Our network is beneficial to people, especially in this milieu."


BON recognizes that the funeral business has changed. "You're getting a lot more cremation and celebration of life," explains McCoy. "But many funeral directors are swamped due to staffing shortages."

Proulx acknowledges that the death movement is growing and thanatology is becoming a prominent field of study. "Funeral directors don't need to be left behind. We have so many death doulas out there marketing their services. We have people pulling people away from funeral homes." But Proulx also recognizes that funeral establishments and their services have a lot of value. "It's a matter of keeping up with education. This drive has led me to get additional degrees in adult education, thanatology and traumatology studies. This helps me ensure that people continue to see the importance and value of funeral services and recognize that it will continue to change."

Despite the incredible work and support BON has done and continues to do, it remains a stand-alone organization. "We're the only province in Canada with a network of people who want to serve the bereaved," says Ives-Baine. "And that is a sad reality." She quickly points out how Ontario has taken the energy and the hard work to put it all together.

BON has set it up and made it work, calling themselves a meagre organization because they don't charge members much. For them, it's all about networking. Ives-Baine mentions they even have a couple of members from other provinces who would like to have something like BON within their region.

Proulx adds she is happy to speak to others across Canada and encourages them to start their own bereavement networks. "We are more than willing to share what we have here."

The next two BON conference days are in April and June. They are excellent investments. For more information, visit bereavementontarionetwork.ca. 

Michael Brooke is both a writer and former publisher. He now turns people's memories into magazines. Contact Michael at mbrooke@timeformystory.com.



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



THE PURGE

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Have you seen it yet? To be clear, I'm not referring to the 2013 film of the same name. I am referring to something different, something that leaves a permanent image engraved in the memory of every family member who sees it. Allow me to elaborate.

I recently visited a customer with an extremely unsatisfied client family. It was actually worse than unsatisfied. What happened exactly? A body purged during a wake. In fact, there were actually several purges that occurred.

The first purge came from the deceased. He was quite large, about 180 centimetres tall and about 120 kilograms, with most of his mass centred around his waist. What caused the purge? A lack of planning, communication and thinking. You know, case management, plain and simple.

The first call arrived in the usual fashion. The family's outreach was intercepted by the answering service and details were gathered in the normal way. The director called the family back and set an appointment for the next afternoon. The family came in and, as is often the case, one of the first questions was, "Where is Dad now?" The arranger shared that once the paperwork from the physician caught up with the process, they would pick up their dad.

They went ahead and scheduled a viewing for the following evening. After all, the doctor was there when Dad died. How long could it take, right?

A few hours later, about quitting time, the transfer service was dispatched. The remains was placed in a tightly wrapped plastic sheet, uninspected and without a headrest in the cooler.

The next morning turned out to be a busy one. It started with a team member calling in sick and a walk-in family. Welcome to funeral service! Later that same afternoon, the remains was brought out of the refrigerator and transferred to a table for care.

He was cold to be sure and large, with abdominal gas, ascites and was already purging. Understanding that the family would be arriving in the next three hours, the technician immediately, and in rapid succession, arterially embalmed, aspirated, injected cavity chemical, dressed and applied cosmetics to the remains.

The family arrived about a half an hour prior to the appointed viewing time. One of the visitation staff, an unqualified and unlicensed part-timer, rushed back to the care centre and said, "The family is here." The technician asked for help to whisk the remains into the casket and presented the remains about 20 minutes earlier than scheduled.

The wake began without any hiccups. The family was pleased with the early showing. About an hour later, some brownish fluid began trickling from the nose and mouth of the guest of honour. That trickle quickly turned into a flow and the family appointed the eldest son as spokesperson to inquire with the part-time staff hosting the viewing as to what was happening.

The staff member said, "I don't know, I'll get the embalmer." By this time, the embalmer had gone home. After all, it had been a busy, long, short-staffed day. They called the on-call arranger, who was not an embalmer. The arranger instructed the part-time staff to get some Kleenex and wipe up the liquid. It took an hour for the embalmer to return to the funeral home. By this time, the remains had given off a lot of purge. It was impossible to sop it up with Kleenex and the clothing and pillow were now quite sodden.

The family was horrified and deeply upset by this experience. The embalmer told them it was "nothing to worry about and it was in fact quite normal or at least not uncommon for corpulent people to give off a little fluid." The technician asked for permission to take the guest back to the prep room for another round of aspiration. The family agreed and for the next hour and a half, they welcomed visitors to the wake, sans the guest of honour.

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I am sure that all experienced funeral professionals reading this know that removing a large person from their casket, undressing them, re-aspirating, re-cavitizing, cleaning the clothing and pillow, redressing, re-cosmetizing and re-casketing them takes hours. Nobody told the family this. They waited.

The chapel closed at 9 p.m. and the guest of honour still wasn't ready. The family and friends were asked to leave and come back in the morning to spend some time with their deceased loved one before the funeral scheduled for the afternoon. They were many things: angry, worried, embarrassed and fearful to name a few emotions.

I arrived at 8 a.m. to make my usual sales call. The embalmer answered the door and said, "Boy, am I ever glad to see you! I have a case that just won't stop purging and I need a hand." Overnight, the remains had begun to purge again and the clothing and pillow were quite soiled. Tensions and tempers were getting high. Then it happened again. The family came in about half an hour earlier than scheduled. It wasn't going to be a great day.

Why was this remains so uncooperative? Why couldn't they stop the purge? The embalmer had even packed the nose with cotton. Simple. Let's start at the beginning again. The case was tightly wrapped, the head was unsupported and it was purging before care began. Preparation began while the remains was really cold. Cold retarded the chemical reactions, so decomposition due to the ascites and fermenting food continued after cavity injection.

What is the first chemical reaction of decomposition? Hydrolysis. Hydro referring to water and lysis referring to cutting. What is formaldehyde? HCOH. It's basically water with a carbon attached. When formaldehyde bonds with protein, it gives off some water too. When one considers the delaying effect of cold temperatures in chemical reactions and the hasty aspiration, it was a ticking time bomb.

Add also to the mix, the deceased had a swollen abdomen and tight-fitting pants. His waist size was larger than in life. He was slightly too large for the casket, too. There was insufficient room for him to have his head and shoulders elevated and the straps of the body lift were improperly placed, causing the man to almost jackknife during casketing. All these factors squeezed fluid out of the remains.

The ongoing fermentation of food and the poor choice of volume and type of cavity fluid didn't help matters, either. When I asked the embalmer why he didn't employ a rest


period following arterial injection and aspiration and why he did not re-aspirate an hour or two following cavity injection, he said he wasn't given time. When I asked if he had a hard time doing up the pants, he said, "Yes, they were way too small and the firm's policy was to never cut clothes." So, he simply forced the pants on and forced the waistband button and zipper.

Three missing ingredients would have prevented this upsetting experience: information, time and products. It takes a lot more than two hours to professionally embalm and aspirate a larger, difficult, purging case. It takes clarity in communication and good information to negotiate the time we need to do the work. It takes the right words to explain things to a family, too. And it takes the right products. Cotton alone is almost useless to prevent pressurized fluids from escaping through the path of least resistance. Use Dry Seal Powder held in place by Eckels Smile. This absorbs and gels liquids and creates a waterproof barrier to purge. Finally, if your case is purging or has ascites and is building gas, deploy Pene-Tone Cavity. Nothing will solidify viscera and its contents better or more reliably.

We did our best to clean up the clothing and the pillow, but it was clearly never going to be enough. The family waited patiently, but with growing resentment and bad feelings. When we finally presented their loved one, the eldest son said, "Just close the casket. We've seen enough and we don't want to have to explain the wetness and stains to relatives and friends."

The final purge came from the staff and management of the funeral home. They had a lot of feelings to vent and this incident was just the catalyst needed to open a heated conversation. Communication is hard and good communication is harder. In times of high stress, communication can easily be confused with conflict.

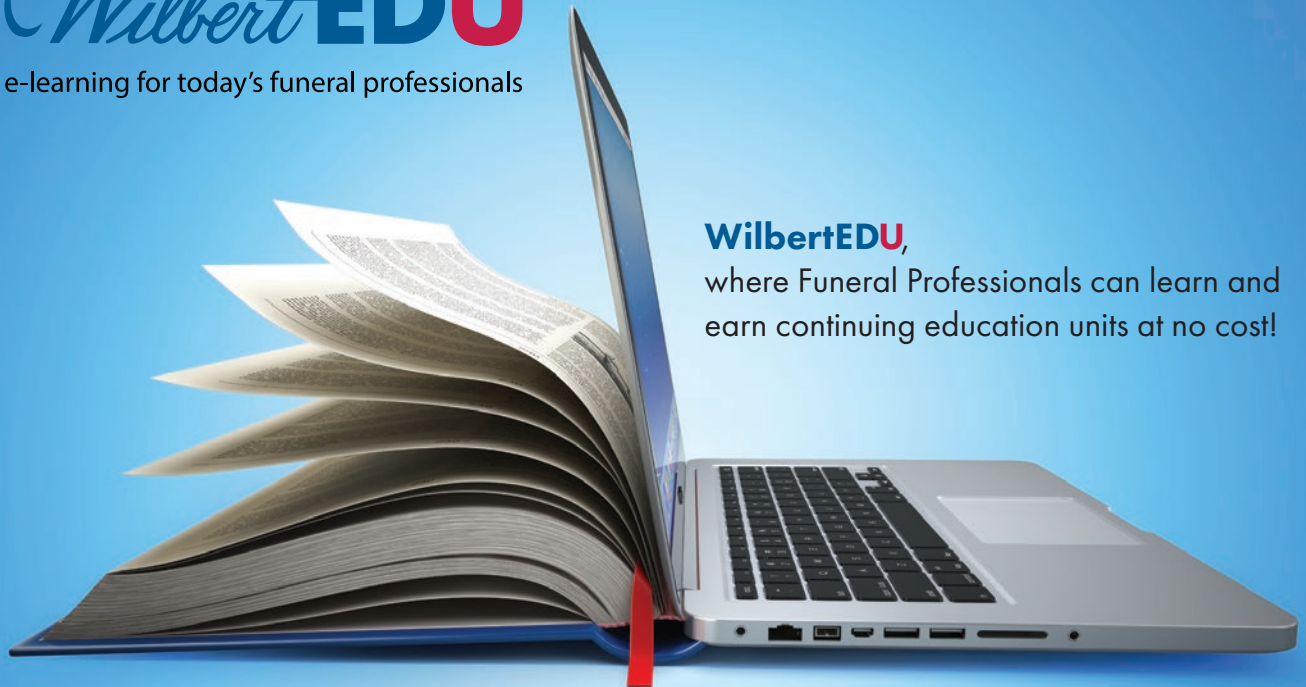
Working in death care is an emotive experience. To be surrounded daily by people in stress, sadness and fear can evoke vicarious feelings and unshared, they can build up. Being busy in the service of others often means putting ourselves and our needs second to those of our customers. It means biting one's lip and focusing on solutions, not blame. With a lot of pent-up anger and frustration from words said and unsaid between the team, it became a full-on purge of feelings. In other words, a "blamefest."

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

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Grief

the unwelcome journey

Dr. Bill Webster has written a new 40-page booklet designed for people in the early days of grief after bereavement. "Grief: The Unwelcome Journey" is an ideal resource to include in a stationery package or as a personalized token of your support to your families.

After a mere three months, the booklet is already in second edition in the U.K., and has been described as "... a masterpiece, covering all aspects of grieving in a most practical and helpful manner." (J. West, West & Coe, London)

Dr. Bill will introduce this product to the Canadian market in the fall of 2023, at less than the cost of a sympathy card.

To receive a complimentary copy for your consideration, please email Dr. Bill Webster (info@griefjourney.com) with your name and funeral home details.

Visit www.griefjourney.com for more grief support resources.



Dr. Bill Webster

A FRIEND IN NEED

by Dr. Bill Webster

Something I heard last week got me thinking. I listened to a eulogy spoken by someone who was paying tribute to his 90-year-old friend, Doug. He related how they had met in Grade 3 and had been best friends ever since. It was quite emotional to hear how they had been part of each other's weddings and had celebrated birthdays, family occasions and vacations together for over 80 years.

If I'm really honest, I found myself feeling quite envious of him, because I can't say that I have one friend like that who has been with me "through it all." Oh, don't misunderstand. I have been fortunate enough to have made many friends all through my life. I still get together occasionally with friends I went to school and university with, and keep in touch with others on social media.

I feel very blessed in friendships. But I don't have one life-long friend like Doug. My friends come into my life for a reason or for a season. And there are factors that contribute to why that happens.

While Doug and his friend lived in one community all their lives, tremendous geographical distances often separate friends and family today. The average person changes geographical locations six times in their life. Sadly, because we live in a mobile, individualistic society, it is difficult to maintain friendships, visit or even attend funerals when living thousands of miles away. Thus, we may not have the lifelong friendships, the sense of community or even family relationships of other generations. In today's world of communication, astonishingly, people tend to be more isolated.

These changes in family and community structure result in families who are not always present for each other in times of crisis. Admittedly, it is a small world after all, but that is little help when a family member lives on the other side of that world.

"When you're down and troubled and you need a helping hand and nothin', nothin' is goin' right. Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call and I'll be there. You've got a friend."

So, where does one turn for help and support in such times?

In 1970, James Taylor had a hit song "Fire and Rain" in which he sang *"I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend."* One year later, Carole King wrote her famous song "You've Got a Friend" as a direct response to Taylor's refrain, which Taylor later recorded with some of his own words:

"When you're down and troubled and you need a helping hand and nothin', nothin' is goin' right. Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call and I'll be there. You've got a friend."

It's a song about a very special sort of friendship where you know another human being will be there for you no matter what, and they'll ask no questions and make no judgments. After all, one friend with whom you have a lot in common is better than three with whom you struggle to find things to talk about.

It's a lovely concept, but sadly one that doesn't happen as much as you might think. Men in particular have lots of acquaintances, buddies and colleagues, but few friends. A 2021 YouGov poll found that 10 per cent of men have only one person they count as a real friend, while a 2018 Movember Foundation poll revealed 27 per cent of men had no close friends at all.

So, as a result, many turn to the professionals: the counsellor, the clergy, the health practitioner, the social worker or towards community support programs. These then become what may be described as a surrogate family, a surrogate community and often, when someone dies, surrogate grievers.

We often have few people with whom we are close, and to whom we can turn for support in times of need. In many communities, we hardly know our neighbours far less feel able to ask them for help. If families and communities have changed and the fabric of relationships with them, where can people go for assistance and support?

So, as a result, many turn to the professionals: the counsellor, the clergy, the health practitioner, the social worker or towards community support programs. These then become what may be described as a surrogate family, a surrogate community and often, when someone dies, surrogate grievers.

Yet we are people who need people. You may remember a movie from years back entitled *Crocodile Dundee*. The hero hails from a little town in the outback of Australia called Walkabout Creek. He comes to New York City and at a party meets a person whom he later discovers is seeing a psychiatrist. Dundee is shocked and states, "I didn't know he was crazy." "Oh, he's not crazy," replies his friend, "he just needs someone to talk to."

Dundee thinks for a moment, and then asks, "But doesn't he have any mates?"

Whatever you think of the movie, *Crocodile Dundee* is correct ... people do need mates/friends to whom we can turn in times of need. We all hold in our hearts a longing for someone to assure us, especially in our difficult moments, that "you've got a friend."

Some 25 years ago, in conjunction with my grief support programs, we started a group called Among Friends. It began with monthly dinners at a restaurant, grew to include coffee mornings, social evenings, bus trips, theatre and movie outings, and even expanded to include holidays and travel.

In addition to the emotional and psychological support of our grief groups, participants discovered that just as important was the social component. They found friendship where they were able to share their joys and sorrows with like-minded people.

I attended the monthly dinner last Sunday, first time in a while. I observed that most of those in attendance had experi-

enced their loss a few years ago, yet they still faithfully attend these activities. Why? The answer is because they discovered that "you've got a friend" ... and talk between friends is always the best therapy.

But never forget. The best way to make friends is to be one. 

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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MOVING FORWARD WITH POSITIVITY

BCFA ANNOUNCES AGENDA FOR UPCOMING CONFERENCE

by Lisa Johnston

The British Columbia Funeral Association (BCFA) looks forward to welcoming delegates to a brand-new venue – the Westin Wall Centre Vancouver Airport in Richmond, B.C. – for its 2024 conference and AGM. After persevering through COVID-19 and staffing challenges that have marked the last few years, the planned agenda will unite funeral directors in a journey forward with positivity.

“Our keynote address will feature Jennifer Moss, whose main message will be on rediscovering happiness at work,” says Bradd Tuck, BCFA executive director. “As she says on her website, if we’ve regained footing and functioning at par or even better, now is the time to improve that good to great. From that theme, we are using this whole conference as an opportunity to look at what comes next through a much more positive lens than we viewed the past few years.”

Included in the educational sessions will be skills building, relationship building and learning how to care for those currently in the profession.

Amanda King, a U.S.-based funeral director and embalmer, has been booked to tackle two difficult topics: pediatric funeral care



and the biology behind better cosmetics. Professional coach Adele Warner will focus on the role of coaching in leadership; Jesse Kemp, an organizational learning specialist, will discuss how to create meaningful engagement in workplace training; and closing speaker Michael Dixon will share his journey with mental health struggles and the importance of networking and support to sustain a career within the profession.

As BCFA is an association for all death-care professionals, concurrent sessions will be held to appeal to those in the cemetery profession or other facets of funeral service.

“We have a couple of great sessions happening at the same time as the funeral sessions, including the fireside panel chat for our ceterians,” explains Tuck. “The topics will be based on what our cemetery group brings forward and will feature experts in database management, safety training and landscape design. In addition, the vice president of Consumer Protection BC will be on hand to talk about different regulatory requirements when it comes to things like expansion and changes.”

Intermixed with over six credits of continuing education will also be a number of social activities, including the cocktail reception at the opening of the trade show, the president’s banquet featuring service awards, and a networking evening at the Richmond Olympic Oval, located across the street from the host hotel.

“We are going offsite the first evening to enjoy the lounge space at the Richmond Olympic Oval,” says Tuck. “It’s going to be a lot of fun as it’s a really neat exhibit space where people

can try different Olympic sports in a virtual test environment. In addition to visiting the museum to peruse the medals and artifacts from when Vancouver hosted the Olympics, they can enjoy some great food and beverages in the lounge area.”

According to Tuck, the Westin Wall Centre is the perfect location to host the event for both those living in Metro Vancouver or flying in from different regions.

“What we really liked about this new facility is that the space brings everyone together in a more collaborative setting. Everything is located on one floor, so all our exhibitors and events will be together, allowing more opportunity for networking between sessions with both delegates and exhibitors.”

The BCFA board is also looking forward to updating members on some key initiatives.

“We will be hosting a roundtable discussion on our education program as we are making some changes this year to our logbooks,” says Tuck. “We will have some news to report on what that will look like for the upcoming year and will also be talking about our next objectives, such as whether our



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curriculum requires a review and what members would like to see moving forward.”

Tuck continues, “Regarding our AGM reports, the biggest thing we are engaging in this year is increasing our public messaging. In the last couple of years, we’ve done a lot to improve membership communications and we are engaging with a PR program that will really draw the public to BCFA as an entry way to funeral planning. That is something we will highlight at the town hall, along with some of the new partnerships in the government and legal realms. There are definitely a lot of positive things happening right now.”

For this reason, Tuck says there’s never been a better time to get involved with BCFA and to attend a conference.

“We’ve worked really hard to build a bright future and I think that message is going to be reflected in the speakers we have brought in, and also in our AGM and town hall,” concludes Tuck. “We have a really strong board of directors and a lot of projects on the go. I think it is a great time to be engaged with BCFA as there is a lot coming at us with different methods of disposition and challenges in education, recruitment and retention. Together, we can move ahead in a really positive direction.” 

Schedule of Events (subject to change)

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

10:45 am – 12:00 pm	Education Consultation Session
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	AGM & Town Hall
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Trade Show Opening/Cocktail Reception
7:00 pm – 10:00 pm	Networking Social – Richmond Olympic Oval

Wednesday, May 1, 2024

8:00 am – 9:00 am	Breakfast
9:00 am – 9:30 am	Welcome
9:30 am – 10:30 am	Session: Keynote Jennifer Moss
10:30 am – 11:00 am	Break
11:00 am – 12:00 pm	Session: Adele Warner – Coaching in Leadership
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Concurrent Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amanda King – Pediatric Funeral Care• Cemetery Fireside Chat Panel
2:30 pm – 4:30 pm	Happy Hour with Exhibitors
5:30 pm – 6:30 pm	President’s Banquet Cocktail Reception
6:30 pm – 9:30 pm	President’s Banquet
10:30 pm	Late Night Snack



Jennifer Moss

Thursday, May 2, 2024

8:00 am – 9:00 am	Breakfast
9:00 am – 9:15 am	Recap & Welcome
9:15 am – 10:15 am	Concurrent Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amanda King – Biology Behind Better Cosmetics• Jesse Kemp – Cautionary Lessons for Organizational Learning
10:15 am – 10:30 am	Break
10:30 am – 12:00 pm	Closing Speaker: Michael Dixon, Funeral Peer Support
12:00 pm	Closing Remarks
12:15 pm	Bag Lunch



Michael Dixon



IN MEMORIAM

Brian McGarry


It is with sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of Brian William McGarry on Saturday, January 27, 2024. Born in Wakefield, Quebec, Brian was the proud and loving father of Brett (Anne Tardif), Erin (Lucas Zinn) and Sheetza, and grandfather of Bobby and Sasha McGarry.

Brian enjoyed 55 years in funeral and cremation services and was the former CEO and founder of the McGarry legacy at Hulse, Playfair & McGarry funeral homes. He was a past president of the Funeral Service Association of Canada, past president of the Ontario Funeral Service Association and past chairperson of the Board of Funeral Services (Ontario). He served as a trustee on the Ottawa Board of Education for nine years with one term as chairperson. Brian was also a Regional Municipality Ottawa-Carleton councillor for three years. He was a strong supporter of Canadian federalism and was the co-founder of Dialogue Canada, Ottawa Division. Brian was one of the original investors who helped to bring the Ottawa Senators back to the capital. Much of Brian's community involvement is listed in Canadian "Who's Who." He was honoured to receive the Business Person of the Year Award, B'nai Brith Award for Ottawa and many more awards for his years

of commitment to funeral service. One of Brian's proudest accomplishments was the publishing of his memoir, *From Paupers to Prime Ministers*.

From Brian's first day of work at age 17 – when he arrived at the front door of Hulse & Playfair's Central Chapel in the milk truck from Wakefield – he enjoyed his decades in funeral and cremation services. He appreciated the mentorship and opportunities provided by the late Charles Hulse and Keith Playfair.

Brian was always grateful to his hometown for the support provided to him following his father's untimely death when he was 10 years old, especially being mentored by Dr. Harold Geggie and family. "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child."

Friends called at the Central Chapel of Hulse, Playfair & McGarry on Saturday, February 3 and on Sunday, February 4 with a funeral service following in the chapel on Saturday afternoon. Cremation was at the McGarry Crematorium, Wakefield. In lieu of flowers, those wishing may donate to the Ottawa Senators Community Foundation, Dementia Society of Ottawa, Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation or to a charity of choice. 



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BE A PART OF THE SYNERGY

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE AT AFSA'S
UPCOMING CONFERENCE

by Lisa Johnston

Building on years of past success, the Alberta Funeral Service Association (AFSA) is returning to the Deerfoot Inn & Casino in Calgary, from April 25-27, 2024, for its annual general meeting and conference. Packed with education and networking opportunities, the two-and-a-half-day event promises something for everyone in the death-care profession.

“We love hosting in Calgary and the Deerfoot Inn & Casino is a wonderful venue,” says AFSA president David Root. “As with past years, it will be a great time to connect, refresh, re-educate and grow both friendships and business relations as we continue to move the work of the association forward.”

Thursday morning will kick off with several education sessions that are open to both members and non-members alike. In addition to a keynote address on leadership and engagement by Hall of Fame speaker Linda Edgecombe, sessions will feature human relations, funeral processions from the perspective of law enforcement and the opioid crisis.

“There will be a lot of great information shared,” notes Root, who adds AFSA is expecting a good turnout from southern Alberta and across the province. “All the topics are timely, from understanding leadership to working in the world today. Growing that knowledge base will help ensure we are mindful of others’ needs and situations to create a safe and happy work environment for everyone.”



Linda Edgecombe

Day two will focus on everything government related. “We are going to have a number of government organizations in attendance to present to our members on different topics like securing the supply chain and electronic medical certificates of death. Our medical examiner’s office will be present and we will also organize a government relations panel. For almost the entire day, the focus will be on the government work the association does while bringing benefits back to our members as well.”



THE LEGACY EXPO

A Beacon
of Empowerment,
Education and
Community

The Legacy Expo stands as a pioneering event designed to reshape the conversation surrounding legacy and end-of-life planning. It shifts the narrative from one of hesitance and taboo to a realm of empowerment, enlightenment, and collective support.

This grassroots gathering champions open dialogue on topics that are traditionally seen as challenging, offering a new perspective on preparing for life's final chapters.

CORE OBJECTIVES OF THE LEGACY EXPO

DEMYSTIFY AND DESTIGMATIZE: We aim to transform the discourse on death and legacy planning, moving from a realm of taboo and apprehension to one of open and normalized conversation.

EDUCATE AND EMPOWER: The expo is a treasure trove of valuable insights and tools, empowering individuals to make enlightened decisions about their legacies and end-of-life care.

BUILD COMMUNITY: At the heart of The Legacy Expo is the creation of a nurturing environment, where shared stories, learning, and mutual support pave the way for a collective journey.

Our vision is to craft an expo experience that is not only empowering and educational but also provides solace and support.

JOIN US FOR THE INAUGURAL LEGACY EXPO

DATE: Saturday, May 4th, 2024 **TIME:** 10 AM to 4:30 PM

VENUE: Friends House, 60 Lowther Avenue, Toronto, ON

(Just a 5-minute walk from St. George Subway Station)

* The event will also be accessible via live stream.

ADMISSION IS FREE OF CHARGE.

WHO WILL BE THERE?

- Financial, digital estate, and elder law professionals focusing on end-of-life planning
- Artists, designers, and art therapists crafting unique memorials
- Healthcare experts from palliative care, hospice services, and bereavement support
- Death doulas and celebrants
- Family therapists, grief counselors, and support group facilitators aiding in emotional well-being
- Eco-conscious funeral directors, holistic health practitioners, and life coaches
- Community leaders and volunteers contributing to legacy through service

KEY MESSAGES FOR LEGACY EXPO ATTENDEES

EMPOWERMENT: Take charge of how you're remembered. It's time to redefine our legacies on our own terms.

EDUCATION: Benefit from the wisdom of leading experts in the fields of end-of-life care and legacy planning.

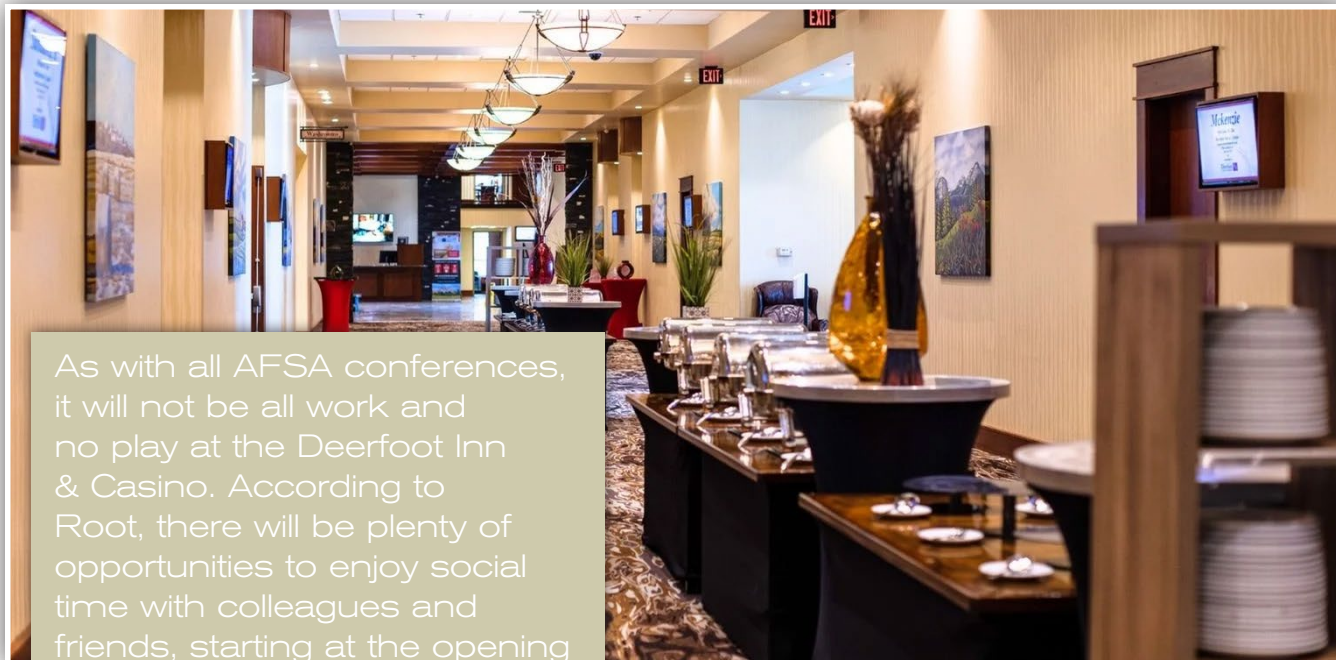
SUPPORT: Discover a community that embraces open dialogue and shared experiences, providing solace and support.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE: Engage in creative and heartfelt expressions that celebrate life's journey and honour cherished memories.

Whether you're beginning to contemplate your own legacy, supporting ageing family members, or a professional in the field, The Legacy Expo is a pivotal event that promises to enlighten, inspire, and unite.

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As with all AFSA conferences, it will not be all work and no play at the Deerfoot Inn & Casino. According to Root, there will be plenty of opportunities to enjoy social time with colleagues and friends, starting at the opening of the trade show.

Over the past years that work has involved extensive negotiations with Community and Social Services (CSS) to secure a new funeral benefit that just came into effect this past January. “We have already seen substantial change and improvements in that area,” states Root. “Our next government focus will be on the medical examiner’s rural transport contract, so there will likely be a good amount of conversation about that during the panel discussion as well.”

As with all AFSA conferences, it will not be all work and no play at the Deerfoot Inn & Casino. According to Root, there will be plenty of opportunities to enjoy social time with colleagues and friends, starting at the opening of the trade show.

“The supplier night is scheduled for Thursday evening, allowing us the opportunity to gather in the same room where the booths will be set up,” notes Root. “There will be plenty of time to visit and engage with our local supplier reps, as well as meet others from across the country and the United States. The trade show will remain set up until the following afternoon to continue building on the interactions.”

The past president’s reception leading into the formal banquet festivities will be the highlight on Friday night. While enjoying a full-course meal, those in attendance will honour this year’s long service recipients and witness the presentations of the prestigious Jerry Smolyk Award and Robert Snodgrass Memorial Award.

“The banquet is a great celebratory time with a lot of organic networking and visiting,” adds Root. “Delegates can stay and


enjoy the banquet hall for the entire night and then meet up with friends for some fun at the on-site casino.”

Last on the agenda for Saturday morning is the AGM, where new bylaws will be presented in addition to committee reports.

“With the vice president leaving the province shortly after last year’s conference, we have had a vacancy on our executive due to our past bylaws,” says Root. “As we were not able to fill that vacancy in accordance with our bylaws, our governance committee has been working on a new set of bylaws that will be presented to our members to address those challenges. That way, if a similar situation happens in the future, we will be able to address it easily.”

The vice president vacancy may result in Root extending his one-year term to serve as AFSA president until the 2025 conference, another aspect to be discussed moving forward at the 2024 AGM. “We are not quite sure what the executive will look like, but we will be ironing it all out with an official announcement at the AGM.”

With a bit of time for pampering and relaxation to a large focus on education with plentiful opportunities to reconnect, the Deerfoot Inn & Casino is the place to be this April. For more information, including the schedule and rates, visit www.afsa.ca or AFSA’s Facebook page.

“We have had great success with our conference every year, and we are thrilled to be keeping the momentum going,” concludes Root. “As always, our goal is to get together, have fun, enjoy each other’s company and learn something new in an engaging and interactive environment.” 



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HUMBER COLLEGE SHARES FUNERAL EDUCATION UPDATES

Humber College's Funeral Service Education (FSE) program is excited to share news of significant changes coming to the delivery of the funeral director programs starting in September 2024.


The new delivery options enable the FSE team to provide more accessible and flexible options to prospective students and employers. While face-to-face on-campus learning will remain available, 2024 will also feature remote access to learning for a limited number of people with the hope of expanding this cohort in the future.



Michelle Clarke

The number of courses per semester has also changed, allowing for the possibility of students to work in a concurrent internship as early as semester one, while completing their theoretical learning (the concurrent internship having already been approved by the Bereavement Authority of Ontario).

“While appreciating it is time for change, careful consideration has been given to ensuring that the high standard of learning our program has become internationally renowned for will be maintained,” states Michelle Clarke, program coordinator of FSE at Humber College. “We hope that making it possible for students to work concurrently in an internship while completing their learning will help to ease some of the staffing pressures that are being reported from the field.”

Humber's FSE team will be creating an information webinar outlining the changes that are coming to bring everyone in the field up to speed. Anyone who urgently needs more information about what is new in Humber's funeral director programs can contact program coordinator Michelle Clarke via email at michelle.clarke@humber.ca. 

An advertisement for Lamcraft's 50th Anniversary featuring 'Micro-Perf Prayer Cards'. The background is a dark night sky with golden fireworks. The Lamcraft logo is in the top left. The text '50th Anniversary' is in a script font. Below it, 'NEW DESIGNS!' is in bold. The main title '8-up Micro-Perf Prayer Cards' is in large, bold letters. A list of design categories includes Religious, Scenic Views, Flowers, and Birds and Animals. A QR code is in the bottom left, with 'View online' next to it. The bottom of the ad features the text 'Join the celebration – new products, sales & more!' and the phone number '800-821-1333 | Lamcraft.com'. The prayer cards themselves are shown in the center, featuring various religious and scenic images.



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FUNDRAISING PART OF MACKINNON AND BOWES' UPCOMING STUDENT DAY

Since its inception in 2017, Capes for Kids has raised over \$5 million for Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation. The goal this year is set at \$1 million to help kids with disabilities move, speak, play and heal.

Allan Cole and his team at MacKinnon and Bowes have long supported Holland Bloorview. In addition to personal donations made by employees every holiday season and equipment loans, Capes for Kids has become an integral part of MacKinnon and Bowes' annual Student Day. Scheduled for April 5, 2024, students and staff from Humber College, Collège Boréal and other funeral education programs are encouraged to raise funds for Capes for Kids while also experiencing a day of hands-on learning.

Humber College will be participating with a funeral team in this year's fundraising campaign and is encouraging participants to sign up to help secure donations. As students, there is no expectation to personally donate, but MacKinnon and Bowes will generously donate \$20 to the first 50 participants who register. In addition to the fundraising drive, students and staff will wear their capes – to class, to the gym, to the cafeteria and everywhere else they go – from March 1-8.


Everyone who raises \$100 will earn a red branded cape and anyone who raises \$1,000 will earn a gold cape. Participants are also encouraged to take photos in their capes and share on social media. Be sure to use the hashtag #CapesforKids and tag @hollandbloorview.



Holland Bloorview believes in creating a world where all youth and children belong. They are the only children's rehabilitation hospital in Canada focused on combining world-class care, transformational research and academic leadership in the field of child and youth rehabilitation and disability.

While the campaign runs from March 1-8, participants can fundraise until March 31. Capes will also be worn on the April 5 visit to MacKinnon and Bowes to celebrate the shared success in fundraising. Collège Boréal and funeral students and staff from other funeral programs have been invited to participate.

Holland Bloorview believes in creating a world where all youth and children belong. They are the only children's rehabilitation hospital in Canada focused on combining world-class care, transformational research and academic leadership in the field of child and youth rehabilitation and disability.

For questions or to support the campaign, please email Alison Hughes at ahughes@hollandbloorview.ca. To access MacKinnon and Bowes' Capes for Kids' fundraising page, visit <https://fundraise.capesforkids.ca/cf24/mackinnon---bowes>. 

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IN MEMORIAM

J. Michael Curry

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of John Michael Curry on January 16, 2024, at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital in Sydney, Nova Scotia.


Michael was born in Glace Bay on May 1, 1936, son of the late Charles and Mary (McLaughlin) Curry.

A third-generation funeral home operator until 2013, Michael was a highly respected professional in the sector. He attended

St. Francis Xavier University, excelled in sports, and was a singer and coach with the XMen of Note, returning to manage the family business in the early 1960s. Apart from his dedication to work, his community involvement included many years in the Knights of Columbus and Rotary Club as a past president. An avid horseman, Michael enjoyed owning, driving and training horses (pets with personality). An entertaining piano player, his showmanship qualities prompted many roles in musicals.

Michael is survived by sisters Char-mayne, Eileen and Rosemary (Nick); brothers Arthur (Anne), Joe (late Sandra) and Ernie (Elizabeth); sister-in-law Joanne Curry; brothers-in-law Ed (Ginger) Murphy and Kevin Peach; niece and caregiver Wendy Currie; Jean's son Tom MacLean; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his wife Jean (MacLeod).

Visitation was held at T.W. Curry Parkview Chapel, Sydney, on January 21, 2024. Funeral mass followed at Holy Cross Church, Glace Bay, on January 22, with Fr. Norman MacPhee presiding. Burial will take place at St. Anne's Cemetery at a later date. Funeral arrangements were jointly made under the direction of C.L. Curry Funeral Home, Antigonish, and T.W. Curry Funeral Home, Sydney.

Donations in memory to the charity of your choice are appreciated. Online condolences can be left at www.clcurry.com. 



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Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

COMPLICATED GRIEF: THE ART OF COMPANIONING

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

A significant part of your role as funeral director is to provide emotional support to at-need families. Ideally, this emotional support comes in the form of what I call “companionship.” If you’ve heard me speak or are a regular reader of this column, you know that companionship is my model of grief care.

Companionship is about presence, learning and bearing witness to what is fundamentally a spiritual or soul-based journey. It is not the grief companion’s role to carry, lead or find the way out of the wilderness, but it is our responsibility to check and safeguard vital signs, provide shelter, offer sustenance and carry a toolkit. We are not rescuers in the savior or saviour sense; rather, we are rescuers in the “thank goodness you’re here to help me” sense.

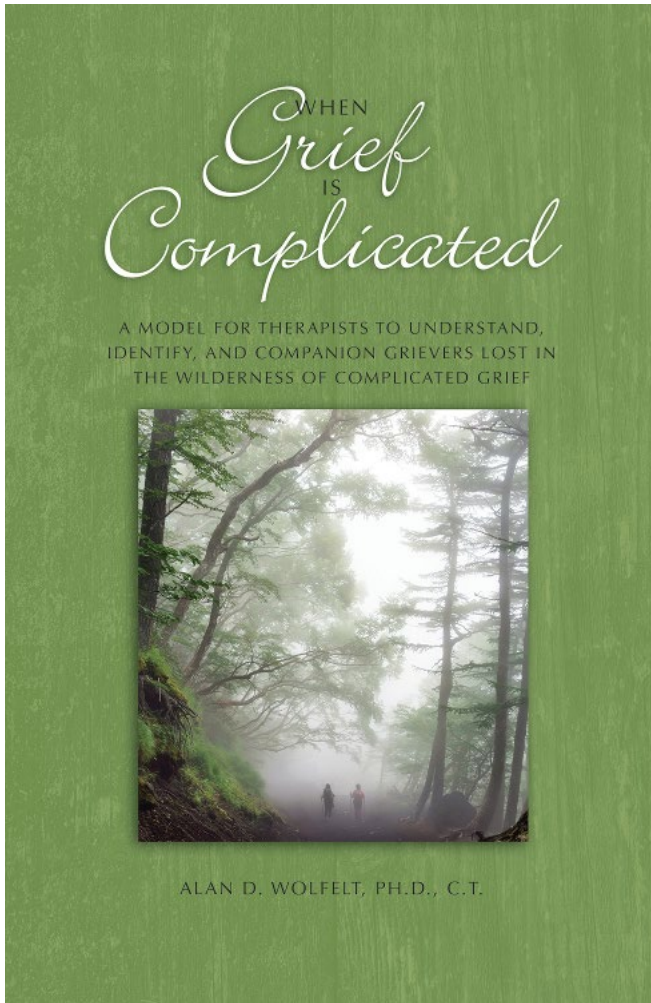
When it comes to complicated grief, here are the essential companionship responsibilities.

CHECKING AND SAFEGUARDING VITAL SIGNS

To check and safeguard the griever’s vital signs, in addition to basic physical wellness you will be looking for signs of suicidal ideation, clinical depression, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress or other immediate and possibly life-threatening co-occurring mental-health challenges. When you notice any of these red flags, you are under obligation to refer the complicated griever for immediate support from community professionals and resources.

PROVIDING SHELTER

When you first meet a complicated griever, establishing safety is the critical first step. The griever must feel safe, both in his or her life and in your care. After vital-sign stability is ensured, grief companions further a sense of safety with trust and hospitality.



This article is excerpted from *When Grief is Complicated: A Model for Therapists to Understand, Identify, and Companion Grievers Lost in the Wilderness of Complicated Grief*. To order, visit www.centerforloss.com.

Trust is about consistency and safety. Complicated grief often naturally leaves grievers feeling a lack of trust in the world around them. As a companion, you have an obligation to establish a strong sense of trust then continue to safeguard that trust.

Next, you provide hospitality by establishing a safe harbour with empathy and effective communication skills. The griever must understand that you are trained and competent but also empathetic, trustworthy, genuine, engaged and hopeful. You are there to listen, learn and bear witness before offering any guidance.

OFFERING SUSTENANCE

In the wilderness of complicated grief, grievers are often depleted of energy. They are often starved of support. A precondition to help another human being integrate loss into their life is to create a “holding environment” anchored in empathy, trust, immediacy, hope and heart.

Empathy is the art of bearing witness and, as you do so, exuding acceptance, compassion and warmth. It is about allowing the griever to teach you instead of the other way around. As a companion, you do not judge or prescribe. Rather, you seek to understand each unique griever’s story and convey a warm, accepting presence.

Immediacy is also of critical importance when companionship fellow humans through complications of grief. In our distracted, media-addicted world, immediacy is about being fully and completely present to the mourner in the here and now.

Effective grief companions also provide the sustenance of hope, which is an expectation of a good that is yet to be. It is an expression of the present alive with a sense of the possible. It is through your genuine sense of hope that you communicate your belief that the mourner can and will heal, or “become whole again.”

Finally, to have heart as you companion people in complicated grief is to be true to your own feelings, humanness and vulnerabilities. When you minister from your heart, you are in a state of deep connection with the divine, with yourself and with your fellow human beings.

TIPS FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS WHO ENCOUNTER COMPLICATED GRIEVERS

Now that you have a better understanding of the definition, origins, symptoms and basic care philosophy of complicated grief, I would like to offer the following tips for working with complicated grievers, both at-need and in the aftercare setting.


Trust is about consistency and safety. Complicated grief often naturally leaves grievers feeling a lack of trust in the world around them. As a companion, you have an obligation to establish a strong sense of trust then continue to safeguard that trust.

- **Be a gatekeeper.** As with many things death- and grief-related, you are the first professional many families will turn to in their time of need. As such, you have both the obligation and the privilege to be aware of complicated grief presentations and needs.
- **Respond with understanding.** When a complicated griever is exhibiting extreme symptoms in your arrangement room, chapel, gathering space or anywhere else, you can help by offering your empathetic understanding. You are not there to judge or to tell people what is appropriate or inappropriate in grief. You are there to listen and to seek to understand. Your calm acceptance will often help to de-escalate behaviours that might be disturbing to other mourners.
- **Try a one-on-one conversation.** Funeral directors often work with more than one family member at a time, but when you notice a complicated griever among a larger group, try approaching that individual alone if and when appropriate. You might open such a conversation by saying, “You seem to be really struggling with...” then listen without judgment or trying to “fix things.” In fact, you might be the only person who offers this individual this kind of attention and support. And when necessary, you might invite the complicated griever to a more private area to speak with you and calm down.
- **Follow written policies.** Your funeral home should have a written code of conduct that promotes safety and fosters a healthy mourning environment. If a complicated griever is breaking the code of conduct by, for example, raging drunkenly or physically provoking others, you must take appropriate action (which also should be spelled out in written policies). Again, please take care not to judge or tell people how and how not to grieve; refer to safety rather than decorum. Complicated grief is not wrong – it is a normal and necessary response to abnormally complicated circumstances, some of which may be invisible to you.
- **Refer to professional support.** While you are a gatekeeper and early companion, it is not within your realm of expertise or responsibility to counsel complicated grievers. That is the role of the professional grief therapist. It is essential for

you to maintain a list of trained, skilled therapists in your community and to offer that list to complicated grievers you encounter. Sometimes it may also be appropriate for you to offer this list to friends of family members of the complicated griever on their behalf, especially if the complicated griever rebuffs your attempts to make a referral.

• **Hold a complicated grief in-service.** A dedicated training and role-playing session on complicated grief would help your staff unify their approach to recognizing, responding to and referring complicated grievers.

• **Follow up and through.** Complicated grievers often need special support for months and years after a loss. Your funeral home's aftercare program can help provide some of this support.

In the funeral home setting, complicated grief can be a challenging issue. I hope this article series has helped you better understand complicated grief and prepare to respond in effective, compassionate ways. As always, thank you for all the work you do on the front lines of bereavement care. You are making a difference in ways that will ripple for generations. 

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt is a noted author, educator and grief counsellor. He serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado, and presents numerous workshops each year across North America. Perhaps best known for his companioning model of caring for people in grief, he is the author of *Companioning the Bereaved*, *Companioning the Grieving Child*, and *When Grief is Complicated*, from which this article is excerpted.

For more information or to order Dr. Wolfelt's books, visit www.centerforloss.com or call 970.226.6050.

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Todd Van Beck

THE FOSSORES

PART I

Editor's Note: Todd Van Beck was a friend and valued contributor to *Canadian Funeral News* for over 25 years. In honour of Todd's memory and his passion for the profession, we will continue publishing the articles he shared with us prior to his death. Below is the first of those articles.

by Todd Van Beck†

The vocation of funeral service has deep historic roots. This article is about fossores in ancient Christianity. From the beginning, Christians revered their dead and as this story tells, the Christian community designated special people to undertake the responsibility of caring for the dead.

Early Christians took the reverential care of a deceased member of their community seriously. Because of these religious and ethical sentiments, the places of Christian burial and entombment were viewed as important sacred spaces. As a result, the early church charged a group of clerics with the responsibility of taking care of the catacombs. These men were called fossores, and this is their story.

Approximately three miles from the centre of Rome exists a series of subterranean regions composed of dark passages, recesses and chambers. These subterranean regions were, and are still today, known by titles such as Callixtus and Domitilla, or Praetextatus and Sebastian, or Marcellinus and Peter. Within the shadows of these murky quarters are interred martyrs of early Christendom.

Also located in these sacred sepulchres are special chambers, where the holy relics of the early Christian dead were deposited for safe keeping. These subterranean regions described are the sacred catacombs of Christian antiquity.

For centuries, the catacombs have been of great interest to historians, archeologists and church leaders throughout the world. This interest is evidenced by the fact that notable scholars of every age since the 16th century have studied and written about these sacred burial places. This article, however, is dedicated to presenting little known information about the men who worked, supervised and devoted their lives in service to the functions of the catacombs on a day-to-day basis. These men were known far and wide in Christian antiquity as the fossores.

The fossores or fossarii (Latin, fodere: to dig) were the grave-diggers, sextons and cemeterians in the catacombs during

the period of early Christianity (300 AD to 450 AD). Early in Christian history, the fossores were organized into special guilds and received special directives from the various priests and bishops of the diocese with regard to Christian funeral and burial responsibilities. A determination existed from the earliest days of the church that the mortal remains of the Christian faithful be interred in cemeteries (catacombs) which were built and reserved for Christian burials only.

By virtues of the obligation to care for the Christian dead, the fossores were placed in an extremely dangerous and vulnerable position. Historically, the danger emanated from Rome's vicious attitudes towards Christians, living or dead. Often when securing the remains of a Christian martyr, the fossores found themselves obligated to risk their own life and limb by basically sneaking into a Roman "dead-house." This is where Christians were left to decay and/or become food for the lions, following their torture and execution. If the fossores, or anyone, were discovered attempting to retrieve a Christian corpse, Roman law imposed the penalty of death upon them.

The duties of the fossores corresponded with those of the pagan "vespillones," who performed the basic duties of undertaking and funeral work in pagan societies. Whereas pagan society held the vespillones in low esteem, the Christian church elevated and ranked the fossores amongst the minor order of the clergy. In the early church, the clergy hierarchy went this way: high orders were the bishop, priest and deacon; low orders were the lectors, acolytes and fossores. Reference to the clerical role of the fessore is found in a work by St. Optatus called *Gesta apud Zenophilum*. St. Optatus spoke of the "house in which Christians assemble" and talked directly about the higher order of clergy and then mentioned by name the


The Fossores – Part I | TODD VAN BECK

www.toddivanbeck.com

fossores Januarius, Herzchus and Frustusus. St. Jerome also alluded to the fossore as clerics, and a sixth century chronicle edited by Cardinal Mai told of the clerical role and order of the “osstarius, fossorius, lectors, etc.”

The burial of the earliest Christians was simply an act and duty of Christian charity and was performed by the “ecclesia” or community. This act of charity was performed without a fee or any reward by the community at large with assistance from the family if they wished. However, when the church expanded and grew in population, the responsibility for the care of the Christian dead became a vocation. These responsibilities were entrusted to the fossore. When the fossore first appeared, all Christian burials were funded through a pooling of funds from each Christian family which in turn was tapped when a death occurred. All funeral activities were overseen by the priests and bishops in the loose confederation of churches in Rome.

At first, the fossore were paid only from this pooling source of money on a case-by-case basis. With the expansion of the church, however they were paid formally on a salary basis from the church treasury.

When Christianity became the established religion, the fossore developed a kind of cemetery property management system in the catacombs. Also, because of Christian persecutions by Roman officials, the fossore almost exclusively worked at night when all early Christian funerals were held. In fact, the word funeral (Latin: funeralis) translates into English meaning “a torchlight procession.” The slow-moving funeral procession of today owes its origins to this custom, but in early Christian funerals if the procession marched too fast, the torches and candles would blow out. Hence, to the annoyance of thousands of people today, funeral processions, without any torches or candles, still move at a snail’s pace. 

Part II will continue in the next issue of CFN.

Todd Van Beck was a prolific writer, educator and supporter of the funeral profession. Prior to his employment as program director at Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, 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); and director of education for the Loewen Group, Inc. (OH). Todd passed suddenly in May 2023 and will be forever missed by his many friends in funeral service.

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AGM & Conference

April 25-27, 2024

Deerfoot Inn & Casino

Calgary, AB

BRITISH COLUMBIA FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (BCFA)

Annual Conference & AGM

April 30 – May 2, 2024

Westin Wall Centre, Vancouver Airport
Richmond, BC

CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Symposium

March 14-16, 2024

The Linq Hotel + Experience

Las Vegas, NV

Cremation Innovation Convention

September 11-13, 2024

Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park

Chicago, IL

FUNERAL AND CREMATION SERVICES COUNCIL OF SASKATCHEWAN (FCSCS)

Spring Symposium

May 23 & 24, 2024

Saskatoon Inn & Conference Centre

Saskatoon, SK

FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (FSAC)

Summit & Exhibitor Showcase

(In partnership with CFTA, MFSA and WCCA)

June 11 & 12, 2024

RBC Convention Centre

Winnipeg, MB

INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCFA)

Convention & Expo

April 10-13, 2024

Tampa Marriott Water Street

Tampa, FL

ICCFA University

July 19-24, 2024

Emory University

Atlanta, GA

Fall Leadership Summit

October 15-17, 2024

The St. Anthony Hotel

San Antonio, TX

NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION (NFDA)

Meet the Mentors

March 19-22, 2024

Washington, DC

Professional Women's Conference

April 28-30, 2024

The DeSoto

Savannah, GA

Embalming & Restorative Arts Seminar

May 2 & 3, 2024

Pittsburgh Institute of

Mortuary Science

Pittsburgh, PA

Leadership Conference

July 29 – August 1, 2024

Ponte Vedra Inn & Club

Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

International Convention & Expo

October 20-23, 2024

New Orleans, LA

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)

Professional Women's Symposium

March 6, 2024

New Haven Funeral Centre

Mississauga, ON

Cremation Symposium

April 16 & 17, 2024

Best Western

Cornwall, ON

Trusted Advisor Training and Certification

May 15, 2024

Capital Funeral Home

Ottawa, ON

OACFP @the Jays

June 4, 2024

Charity Golf Day

June 17, 2024

Richmond Hill Golf Club

Richmond Hill, ON

Educational Conference and Trade Show

October 8-10, 2024

Caesars Windsor Hotel & Casino

Windsor, ON

ONTARIO FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (OFSA)

Webinar: Support Strategies Following Suicide Death Loss

Presenter: Sara Murphy, PhD, CT

March 27, 2024

Mid-Year Meeting

May 15, 2024

Hilton Garden Inn

Toronto Airport West

Mississauga, ON

AGM & Education Conference

September 16 & 17, 2024

Westin Trillium House

Blue Mountain, ON

SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES

Annual Meeting

September 25-28, 2024

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa

Lake Buena Vista, FL

NETWORK

Canadian Cemetery Management

March 2024



Searching
FOR VETERANS

Last Post Fund volunteer Ted Usher continues the hunt for unmarked graves

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Searching FOR VETERANS

Last Post Fund volunteer Ted Usher continues the hunt for unmarked graves

By Lisa Johnston

Since 2021, Comox Valley resident Ted Usher has committed countless hours of his time searching for unmarked veterans' graves all over the province of British Columbia. Through his work, he has helped uncover over 130 graves, providing honour to those who served for Canada.

Funded by Veterans Affairs Canada under the umbrella of the Last Post Fund, the Unmarked Grave Program provides a permanent military marker for all eligible veterans who have not previously received funeral and burial funding.

"I've known about the work of the Last Post Fund for two decades as my brother, Ken, worked for the organization for 20 years," says Maj. (Ret'd) Ted Usher. "After my wife and I moved to the Comox Valley following my retirement from the City of Port Coquitlam in 2019, and previous retirement from the New Westminster Police in 2004, I was looking for something to do and Ken encouraged me to get involved as a volunteer with the Last Post Fund's Unmarked Grave Program."

The work was right up Usher's alley. Combined with his extensive military background spanning over 30 years, and investigative skills honed through his lengthy career as a police officer in New Westminster, he also had the time necessary to research each veteran's final resting place.

Usher began his search in the Comox Valley and was fortunate to receive a selection of books from the local genealogical society which contained the names of everyone buried at both the Cumberland and Courtenay cemeteries, including inscriptions on the headstones. Using the books as a guide, he then began checking sites such as Ancestry and various databases to confirm service records.

"Basically, I look for veterans who have no headstones," explains Usher, who is also an active volunteer with the Comox Air Force Museum and with the local army cadet corps. "For every name listed without a headstone, I have to confirm whether or not they were a veteran first. If they were, I then go online to Ancestry, Archives Canada and the provincial archives to dig out as much information on the person as I



Ted Usher organized a private fundraising campaign to get a new headstone commissioned for Private Edwin Harbottle.

can, which may include visiting the cemetery or contacting the local cemetery office. Once I compile that information, I then submit the application to the Last Post Fund."

Today, Usher serves as research coordinator, working with nine volunteer researchers across the province to continue the search for veterans. Along with Alberta, British Columbia is one of the most active regions, submitting hundreds of applications every year to the Unmarked Grave Program.

At the same time, Usher is also searching for Indigenous veterans for the Last Post Fund's Indigenous Veterans Burial Program, a new initiative started in 2019 to provide grave markers to Indigenous veterans lying in unmarked graves while also adding traditional names to existing military markers. Over 18,000 Indigenous veterans served in the First World War, Second World War, Korean War, Afghanistan and other peacekeeping missions, many of whom are now buried in B.C.

All the hard work and dedication has not gone unnoticed. On January 18, 2024, the B.C. chapter of the Last Post Fund was invited to attend a ceremony at Victoria’s Government House, where representatives were presented with a B.C. Reconciliation Award. Hosted by Lt.-Gov. Janet Austin, the award program recognizes individuals, groups and organizations who demonstrate exceptional leadership, integrity, respect and commitment to furthering the calls to action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

“It was quite an honour,” says Usher, who attended the event with Maj. (Ret’d) Gino Simeoni, president of the B.C. branch of the Last Post Fund, and fellow Abbotsford researcher Glenn Smith. “We are pleased to be able to help remember these veterans. Whether they served overseas or not, they signed up and committed themselves to going to war. We should never forget that and one way we can honour them is by ensuring they have a headstone which indicates they were a veteran.”

Funding for both programs provides for the installation of 600 to 700 headstones per year across Canada. At any given time, there are over 1,000 applications waiting to be processed. If a non-military headstone is already erected at the burial site, no funding from the program is allowed. Unfortunately, this also applies to headstones in disrepair, which led Usher to organize a private funding campaign for one veteran resting in Cumberland Cemetery.

“I came across a headstone belonging to a Mr. Edwin Harbottle that was so hard to read that I took it upon myself to get a new one commissioned,” says Usher. “I started a fundraising campaign and with the help of the local Royal Canadian Legion branches, we were able to honour this gentleman with a new headstone. As most of the work we do is with First World War

veterans, as their service records are easier to find, this will continue to be an issue as time wears down these stones.”

This is exactly what has happened in Ocean Falls, a remote B.C. town that is only accessible via boat or floatplane. However, this time the project wasn’t instigated by Usher but by a BC Ferries crew.

“A couple of months ago, we were contacted by a fellow who is the chief steward of the Northern Sea Wolf ferry that runs up north. He and some of his crew wanted to do something to help veterans and as we didn’t have a researcher in the area, we asked them to visit the cemetery in Ocean Falls to check on some graves. In the summer months, the ferry stops overnight, which allowed the crew to investigate, and last year, they found several headstones that had completely disintegrated because of the weather and salt air. When I told them that it would take two years to process the application, they raised funds through BC Ferries to replace the headstones. The crew will bring the headstones on board their vessel this summer for installation and I’ve been in contact with a person who says they’ll cut the grass and maintain the cemetery better than it has been in the past.”

For Usher, volunteering has long been in his DNA, even prior to retiring and moving to the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island. He enjoys the satisfaction of helping others, including veterans who he believes should never be forgotten.

“It’s important for me to continue doing this work,” concludes Usher. “When I am out walking in a cemetery, it gives me great pleasure to stop and read about a veteran and where they served. It is rewarding to no longer see a bare spot and I feel quite close to these servicemen as I have spent hours researching their history.” **N**





OACFP

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY
AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS

ASSOCIATION UPDATE

**OACFP's Focus – Strength by Association
Strong Communities**

By John Perrotta, OACFP President,
Board of Directors




John Perrotta

Did you know that our organization was founded in 1913 as the Ontario Association of Cemeteries? I find it hard to wrap my head around the changes our predecessors have gone through in both society and in our sector.

From changes in technology to social norms to the makeup of our multicultural society, every year and decade requires our sector to respond and, dare I say it, pivot.


To outsiders, our sector may seem staid or perhaps stuck. After all, the difficult realities of death and death care haven't changed. But what has changed – and will always change –



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More than this, let's not forget the invaluable open spaces many of our members caretake: Ontario's cemeteries. Now, more than ever, they provide a vital connection to our past and our histories. They provide a place of desperately needed quiet and solitude in our busy world. I personally observe this every day in our Hamilton cemeteries, where people come to seek out green spaces for better mental health in our busy, densifying communities.

are the values, expectations and social norms for grieving. OACFP members move with the times because they are an integral part of their communities. We are there in the towns, neighbourhoods and virtual communities we serve.

More than this, let's not forget the invaluable open spaces many of our members caretake: Ontario's cemeteries. Now, more than ever, they provide a vital connection to our past and our histories. They provide a place of desperately needed quiet and solitude in our busy world. I personally observe this every day in our Hamilton cemeteries, where people come to seek out green spaces for better mental health in our busy, densifying communities.

I know this is all true, as do you. But not everyone has the luxury to stop and think about us in this way. For me, this is why our association exists – to ensure that those who need to understand it, do.

A Strong Sector

Just as our members have changed over the years, so has our association. We have a lengthy tradition of responsiveness. For instance, in 2003, significant legislative changes led to the expansion of our scope as a trade organization, which means we are focused on the organizations and businesses of the whole sector. This inclusiveness has become one of OACFP's hallmarks, the importance and significance of which was reaffirmed with our new value proposition strategy. It drives the pace of our evolution as a trade association. We must move with Ontarians' needs to grieve, which can sound today more like: "online," "personalized" and "environmental."

To this end, here are just a few of the things OACFP is doing to help all our members be stronger. Together, we are:

- Starting a new environmental sustainability committee. Approved by the board in July 2023, this committee will advise the board on new environmental protection and enhancement opportunities, advise on stakeholder and legislative matters,

and seek a balance between social, environmental and economic aspects of our sector.

- Developing a bilingual mental health training program. This initially free, research-based program will enhance location and line managers' skills in supporting the mental health and wellness of staff (registration details for this June event will be available in early March. Program details can be found on the OACFP event calendar).

- Empowering individual professionals to keep learning. We support member organizations by offering training, specialized sector education and CE credits for licensure or by just being a valued resource that really understands day-to-day challenges; we know individuals make the organizations and that we all need support.

Navigating Rapid Change: OACFP Membership in Action

But there is more for us to do. OACFP's members face unprecedented workforce issues such as recruitment, retention and succession planning challenges. Anticipating potential legislative changes, navigating crematorium emissions regulations and understanding the implications of Priority of Persons legislation add further complexities and are just a few of the issues OACFP is committed to address head-on, providing support and guidance to our members.

OACFP is not just an association; it is a community committed to progress. We encourage members to participate in our activities. Reach out to Darren Denomme, our dedicated executive director, to express your interest and be part of the positive change.

I invite you to stay engaged, comment, volunteer, support and discuss issues with us. There is much to do, but I know we can do it together: for your community, your business and your association.

Drop me a line any time. [N](#)



Ken Munday



ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Ken Munday, WCCA President

Information sharing and networking are two important benefits of any association. When we have built strong relationships within the profession, our first thought is to reach out to our colleagues. Unfortunately, there are times when they are unable to help for one reason or another. When this happens, the next call should be to your association. Unfortunately, we often don't even think about the association. Instead, we wait for our colleagues to come through when they have time.

I recently met with someone who had contacted a few colleagues and was waiting to hear back on some questions. I asked if they had also reached out to the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA), and they said they had not. When I hear of someone searching for information from other cemeteries, it always surprises me when they haven't communicated with WCCA. Which means it's time to remind everyone of the additional benefits of the association.

WCCA has an ever-growing variety of member cemeteries and suppliers. We have municipal, corporate for-profit, not-for-profit board-run, and small to large cemeteries of different religions. This allows the association to help cemeteries of every type connect with other cemeteries that might be experiencing issues specific to that type and size of operation.

In addition to this, we strive to keep current with new trends and happenings within the profession and share this information with our membership through email, conferences, our Facebook page and our newsletter. Further educational content is offered via supplier webinars and during our annual conference.

We also created a tri-provincial PowerPoint program for owners and operators of smaller cemetery facilities and provide access

We will continue to look for additional benefits we may be able to offer our members. If anyone has any suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact our WCCA administrator, Lorraine Piller, at administration@westerncemetery.com. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing everyone in Winnipeg!

and insights into cemetery legislation, regulations, bylaws and safety procedures.

Working towards strengthening the partnership between cemeteries and funeral homes is the latest benefit we are striving to provide not only to WCCA members, but to the death-care profession as a whole. The Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC), Manitoba Funeral Service Association (MFSA) and Canadian Funeral Trade Association (CFTA) all share in this desire. This has led to our respective associations working together in partnership to present the upcoming FSAC Summit in Winnipeg this June 11 and 12. More information on the FSAC Summit will be coming soon!

We will continue to look for additional benefits we may be able to offer our members. If anyone has any suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact our WCCA administrator, Lorraine Piller, at administration@westerncemetery.com. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing everyone in Winnipeg! **N**

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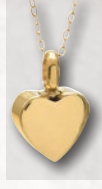
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