

Canadian FUNERAL NEWS



MAY 2023



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Countdown to Toronto

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Canadian FUNERAL NEWS

"The value, purpose and benefit of the funeral profession is not a tangible thing, it is what is in a funeral director's heart. I truly believe that nothing good happens in our beloved profession until first something good happens in a funeral director's heart." ~ Todd Van Beck

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Pat Ottmann

BROKEN


by Pat Ottmann

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

Last month, I shared with you the dire need for licensed funeral directors in northern Ontario and the lack of any plan or desire from the regulators to establish one to date. When the profession simply closes a viable funeral establishment due to lack of licensed people, one could say the system is broken. There is a whole population that must now travel many miles when services are needed.

In fairness to the current registrar, Mr. Jim Cassimatis, this was not his doing. It is, however, his problem to fix, and only time will tell what that looks like. As for the past registrar, there seemed an unhealthy obsession in which hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees and untold hours of resources were spent attempting to shut down one resomation operator (a process many other provinces and states have used for years). All of this took place while a vast track of northern Ontario pleaded for some solution to the staffing shortage.

To better explain the situation, we are sharing three communications in this issue of Canadian Funeral News. The first one is a message from the registrar that initially ran in the BAO's March 31 Lifeline followed by two letters from funeral home owners in northwestern Ontario – John-Bryan Gardiner and Valerie Kerry. These communications share the story in depth.

I do not think this is the end of the labour issue. Every province needs to look at where they are on this and get ahead of it instead of waiting for services to crumble. Many of the regulators across the country have some line about consumer protection in their reason for existence. While this term has always been offensive to the profession, it now appears consumers need protection from the very agency claiming to protect them. 

ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR FUNERAL DIRECTORS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO

(REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF THE BAO)

by Jim Cassimatis, Interim CEO/Registrar

Northern Ontario funeral homes are having difficulty attracting funeral directors needed to meet the needs of families in their areas.

This challenge in small and northern communities is being experienced in several business sectors – and death care is no exception.

Provincially, the number of funeral homes across Ontario hasn't changed much in recent years. At fiscal yearend on March 31, 2022, there were 582, one less than five years ago.

But the number of funeral directors is a different matter.

7.7% fewer FDs provincially

Across the province there were 2,562 funeral directors in FD Classes 1 & 2 as of the fiscal year ended March 31, 2022.

Between 2017 and 2022 our number of FD Classes 1 & 2 licensees decreased by 7.7 per cent, or 214 funeral directors.

This decrease is more acutely felt in northern Ontario and other smaller communities.

Continued on page 22



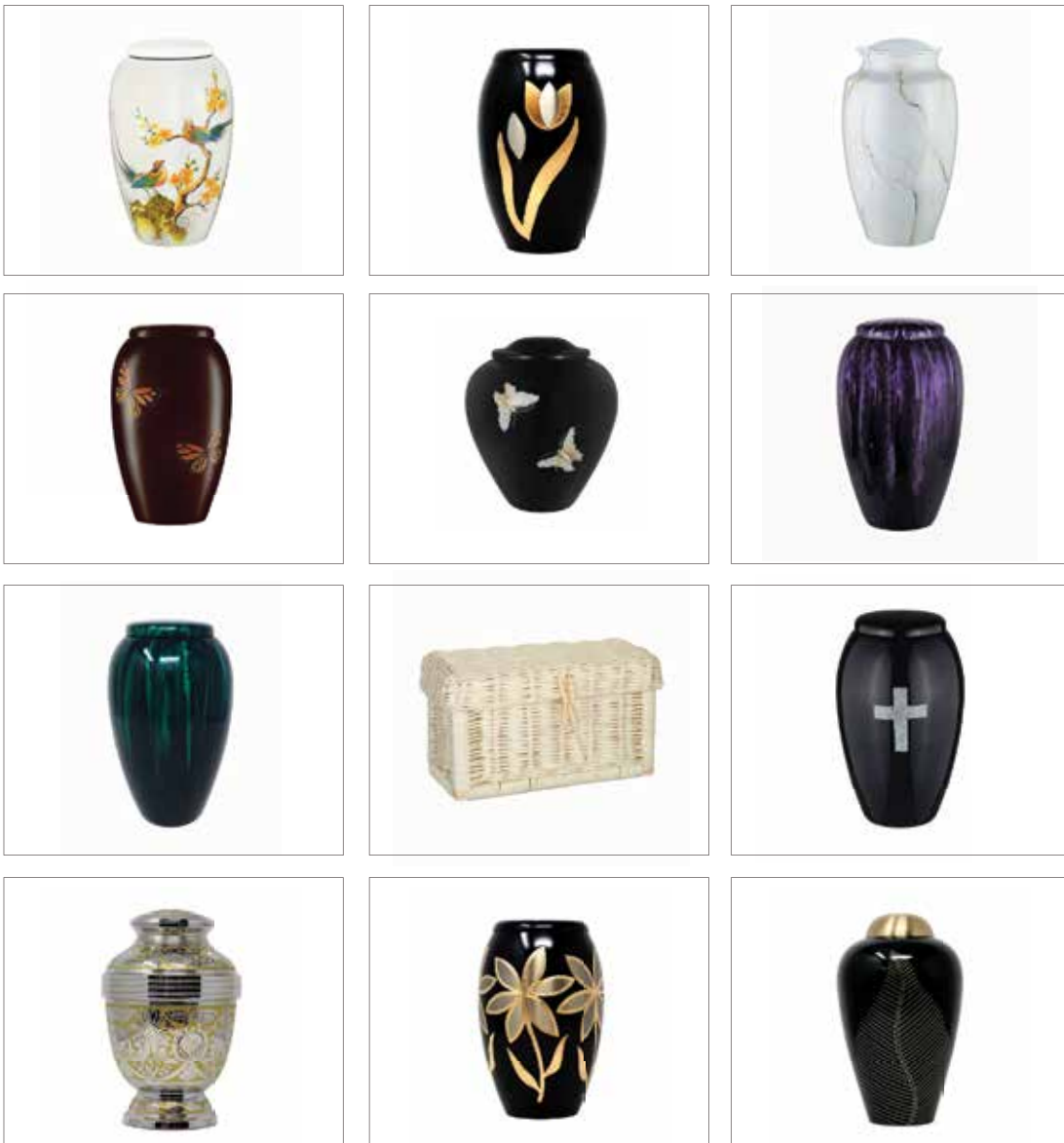
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Countdown TO TORONTO

FSAC'S JUNE CONFERENCE PROMISES ENRICHMENT,
ENGAGEMENT AND RESULTS

by Lisa Johnston

As each day draws closer to the Funeral Service Association of Canada's (FSAC) first in-person conference in over three years, delegates from across the country are gearing up to make the trip to Toronto. Taking place June 7-9, 2023 at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel & Conference Centre in the revitalized waterfront district, the event promises engagement, education and a road map for the future.

"The whole focus from the get-go has been to envision the future, engage with others and deliver results," says conference chair Ray Fournier. "We haven't had the opportunity in quite some time to network with others and focus on how we can deliver results – not only in terms of hosting a robust conference but also in how it relates to customer service with the families who are served by death-care professionals across Canada. Whether we are funeral directors, cemeterians, crematoria operators or suppliers, we all work in collaboration. The best way to predict the future is to create it."

With approximately 28,000 square feet of exhibits, four keynote speakers, three expert panels, a bear-pit session and numerous social events, the 2023 conference promises to be a return to the bustling get-togethers of the past – with something for all segments of the profession.

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"I don't think anybody knew back in 2020 that we'd be on a three-year hiatus, and we've been storing up the excitement for exactly this event," says FSAC president Allan Cole. "Extraordinary effort has been put in by a lot of people to ensure this isn't a regular conference; this year is something special. The speakers have been hand-picked for their dynamic material which will include an unprecedented in-person appearance by a former governor general."

Seeing that FSAC missed celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2021, centennial festivities will be intermixed throughout the

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conference. Following the AGM on the first afternoon, the trade show will open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Once inside the large event space, delegates will have over three hours to peruse supplier booths from across North America while enjoying food stations representing cuisine from the different regions of Canada. In addition to a wide selection of caskets, cremation products, urns, stationery, funeral cars, jewelry and pre-need planning solutions, delegates can take a trip down memory lane, visiting the antique cars and other historic displays before moving into the future to check out the 2024 Cadillac Lyriq EV.

“The whole idea is to create as much networking as possible, especially as we have not had a national conference in over three years,” says Fournier, adding the trade show will remain open throughout the three-day event. However, before delegates settle in their rooms for the evening and the upcoming educational sessions starting the next day, they will be invited to take part in a scenic boat cruise around the Toronto Islands.

“There will be a DJ on the boat, some appetizers and a bar,” notes Fournier. “In my opinion, there is no better place to view the city from than on the lake. It’s a spectacular view of the skyline and how it has evolved in the last decade.” Even those not registered for the conference can join this social event with the purchase of a separate ticket.

With Toronto in close proximity to a large population of death-care professionals within a three-hour radius, members and non-members can register for one, two or all three days of the conference. Based on how early delegates register, they will be entered to win one of three great prizes – a Tim Hortons package, tickets to a Blue Jays game with swag, or complimentary registration to the 2024 conference in Winnipeg.

Designed to offer a full slate of continuing education credits, the conference will be headlined by four keynote speakers: disruption expert Jim Harris, customer service guru Tony Chapman, lawyer and funeral director Poul Lemasters, and Michaëlle Jean, the former governor general of Canada.

“These are all top-notch speakers who will enlighten those in attendance,” says FSAC executive director Pam Moss. “A lot of thought and insight is being put into these presentations. As an example, Tony Chapman will be interviewing different types of death-care businesses to bring out the challenges we are facing and will build his whole presentation around the feedback. It will not be a canned speech but deliberate in its relevance to the profession.”

Back by popular demand, three expert panels have also been slated into the agenda. Experts from both inside and outside the death-care sector will be speaking to ways death-care professionals can create memorable experiences through



Michaëlle Jean



Tony Chapman

Designed to offer a full slate of continuing education credits, the conference will be headlined by four keynote speakers: disruption expert Jim Harris, customer service guru Tony Chapman, lawyer and funeral director Poul Lemasters, and Michaëlle Jean, the former governor general of Canada.



Poul Lemasters

customer service. The tech panel will focus on online marketing and brand awareness while the human resources panel aims to cover the full spectrum of people management. Every panel will end with a question-and-answer session, allowing for full participation of everyone in the room.

“We’ve done it differently than in past years where we used to break out into smaller rooms,” says Fournier. “When we started the panels for virtual conferences during COVID, we had an ‘aha’ moment. It is way more engaging for us all to stay together and attend a panel discussion.”

The famous bear-pit session is the place to be to hear what other funeral directors are facing in an open forum discussion. Fully guided by the attendees with no set agenda, the bear pit allows for important interaction with peers to talk about the issues that really matter and to learn about upcoming trends.

Fournier is excited at the prospect of seeing death-care professionals from coast to coast converging in Toronto. “Pre-pandemic, a lot of conferences were losing attendance and were not as robust as they were a decade ago. We want to get back to that buzz. We want to make sure when we put together a conference, that it is a real barn burner like no other. One with not only great educational content and learning, but also one with great networking. It doesn’t matter what part of the death-care profession you come from, you will benefit from making the trip.”

Cole concurs, “I think we are at a real turning point. The return to regular service following COVID has represented an enormous change in funeral service with the introduction of technology, new consumer preferences and human resource

considerations. With all of those being remarkably different since 2019, this conference offers the first opportunity on a national scale to get together with like-minded professionals and take advantage of new information to help deal with that. We are very pleased with the response so far from both the supply side and attendees. It is going to be a great conference.”

SPEAKER SESSIONS

Michaëlle Jean

An Inspiring Hour with FSAC’s Honorary Patron

Michaëlle Jean served as Canada’s 27th governor general and is the first honorary patron of FSAC. A woman of action, humanistic values, courage, optimism and creativity, Jean will bring an inspirational message centred on compassion benevolence.

Tony Chapman

Enhancing Your Brand & Customer Experience

Tony Chapman is one of North America’s thought leaders on topics such as customer engagement, consumerism and the future of marketing. He will be tailoring his presentation to the death-care profession as he shares inspiring stories that celebrate positivity in challenging times.


Poul Lemasters

Cover Your Ass

Join well-known attorney and funeral director Poul Lemasters as he delves deeper into all the things that make the death-care profession uncomfortable – firing people, handling employee confrontation and solving ethical dilemmas. Delegates attending this session will learn how to get comfortable in uncomfortable situations.

Jim Harris

Market Trends & Potential Disruption

As a leading disruptive innovation speaker and one of North America's foremost management consultants, Jim Harris is known for his thinking into the future and business transformation. Delegates will learn how to prepare for today's fast-paced environment and what to do when competitors disrupt the marketplace. 



Jim Harris

Schedule of Events (subject to change)

Wednesday, June 7, 2023

9:00 am – 5:00 pm	Registration
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	AGM
3:00 pm – 3:30 pm	Dedication Service, Ribbon Cutting & Expo Opening
3:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Trade Show & Welcome Reception
8:00 pm – 10:30 pm	Harbour Cruise

Thursday, June 8, 2023

7:30 am – 8:45 am	Past Presidents' Breakfast
7:30 am – 8:45 am	Trade Show & Continental Breakfast
9:00 am – 5:00 pm	Registration
9:00 am – 10:00 am	Keynote: Tony Chapman
10:00 am – 10:30 am	Refreshments & Trade Show
10:30 am – 12:00 pm	Human Resources Expert Panel
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	FSAC Honorary Patron Michaëlle Jean
2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Customer Service/Hospitality Expert Panel
3:00 pm – 3:30 pm	Refreshments & Trade Show
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm	Keynote: Poul Lemasters
4:30 pm – 5:30 pm	Trade Show
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm	President's Reception
7:00 pm – 10:30 pm	President's Banquet & Entertainment



Dave Hemstad, MC

Friday, June 9, 2023

7:30 am – 8:30 am	Trade Show & Continental Breakfast
8:00 am – 12:00 pm	Registration
8:30 am – 10:00 am	Technology Expert Panel
10:00 am – 10:30 am	Refreshments & Trade Show
10:30 am – 12:00 pm	Bear-Pit Session
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Closing Lunch
1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Closing Keynote Speaker: Jim Harris



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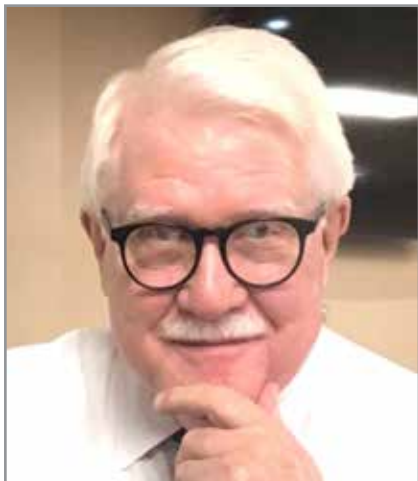
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Todd Van Beck

FUNERAL FLOWERS

by Todd Van Beck

The most ancient tribute people use when someone dies is the presentation of flowers. The following article is an account of the roots of funeral flowers, their meaning and how they have impacted funeral service in communities around the globe.

The Most Ancient of Human Activities

The oldest tribute, the oldest form of memorialization, the oldest act of mourning, is the arrangement and placement of flowers around the dead. This ancient activity was well documented by Dr. Ralph Solecki in the famous excavation of the Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq.

In 1951, Solecki discovered several burial sites in the Shanidar Cave. Eventually, his discovery would gain entrance into the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest form of religious activity around a human burial. During Solecki's archaeological dig, he submitted soil samples from each grave to Arlette Leroi-Gourhan, a paleobotanist from Paris, France, for pollen analysis. Under her microscope, she found pollen and flower fragments from at least eight species of flowers. These flowers represented mainly small, brightly coloured wild flowers. She recognized relatives of the grape hyacinth, bachelor buttons, hollyhock and a yellow-flowering groundsel. Leroi-Gourhan declared the burials took place in 62,000 BC and that it was no accident of nature that the pollen was deposited so deep in the cave. Neither birds nor animals could have carried flowers in such a manner; nor could they have deposited them directly on a burial site. Therefore, she concluded that someone 62,000 years ago had roamed the mountainside in the mournful task of collecting flowers for a funeral tribute.

In a Flower Garden

Throughout the ages, humankind has equated death with sleep, and this repose usually takes place in a garden full of flowers. In the Song of Roland, Turpin says, "May God receive all our souls among his holy flowers." Similarly, the ancient

figure of Roland prays that "He will let them lie in holy flowers." This ancient verse contains both aspects of the condition that followed death, namely lying down or the sleep without sensation, and holy flowers or the garden in bloom. The garden of flowers equated into visions of paradise in olden times – the images of "cool meadows" of Virgil's Elysium or from the garden that the Qur'an promised to believers.

If paradise was full of flowers and meadows, the ancient thought of hell was the opposite. In Homer's Hades, there was neither a garden nor flowers. Hades – at least the Hades in Book XI of the Odyssey – also makes quite clear the absence of floral or any pastoral comforts.

The Prayer Book of Serapion, the Greco-Egyptian liturgical text from the middle of the 4th century, contains this prayer for the dead, "May his spirit rest in a green and tranquil place."

Thus, the words designating paradise are all related to one central concept: the peaceful garden with an abundance of flowers. As we will see shortly, the funeral profession in the early and mid-20th century identified closely with this floral imagery.

Nowhere in the influential thinking of Western civilization was the ideal of linking paradise with the garden more prevalent than in the burial of Jesus Christ. Jesus was entombed in a garden, pure and simple. Our cemeteries today often resemble a garden concept like the one where Jesus was entombed. Today, people value the floral concept of the pastoral scenes of death in contrast to the mass burials that were witnessed in Nazi Germany. The power of the idea of death being linked to flowers is still easily identifiable.

Symbolism and Flowers

Through history, flowers have been used to symbolize almost every aspect of the life cycle, from birth through death. In death, flowers symbolize how the beauty of creation is temporary and, as sure as the flower must be cut from the stem,

so it is with life. We all, too, must have our life cut from the stem, so to speak.

Flowers also have a particular esthetic value in the face of death. The beauty of the flower helps balance our emotional response to the sharp contrast of the perceived ugliness of death. Flowers help soften the raw data imagery that death leaves with survivors.

The fragility of life is also symbolized by a flower. Flowers, to be healthy, require the proper conditions to grow and expand – just like human beings.

And finally, the colour of flowers has a specific symbolism, particularly in religious thought.

A purple flower is a symbol of penitence and royalty. This floral colour is used during the preparatory and penitential seasons of Advent and Lent.

A white flower is the symbol of the joyous and celebrative colour of light. This floral colour is used during the festive seasons of Christmas and Easter, and on high days during Ordinary Times.

A green flower is the symbol of nature in the freshness of growth – hence our green cemeteries. This floral colour is used, except on high days, during Ordinary Times, the seasons after Epiphany and Pentecost.

A red flower is the symbol of fire and blood and is used on the Day of Pentecost and on other special occasions when the work of the Holy Spirit or the blood of Christ or of martyrs is being commemorated.

A black flower is the symbol for Good Friday, though red flowers are also sometimes used.

Flowers, as we have just discussed, help people think in symbolic terms, which is how much of the information concerning death is communicated.

Practical Use of Flowers

From time immemorial, flowers were used to control the offensiveness of body decomposition. No doubt this was part of the reason flowers were used in the Shanidar Cave so many centuries ago.

One of the most famous funerals where flowers were used to mask the odour of decomposition occurred in 1875 when President Andrew Johnson was buried. His body was not embalmed, and by the day of the funeral, it was in such a foul condition that undertaker Lazarus C. Shepard closed the casket and heaped loads of fragrant flowers on top and around the



burial receptacle. The fragrance of the flowers hid the odour long enough for the funeral to take place.

In the Garden Movement in Funeral Service

In 1912, C. Austin Miles wrote the famous funeral hymn *In the Garden*.

*"I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses."*

Refrain:

*"And He walks with me, and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own..."*

The hymn stormed the country and became one of the most frequently sung songs at funerals in the United States. The hymn also began a movement in funeral service whereby the mortuary practices of the country would revolve around the body reposing in the garden.

In fact, the movement in Protestant funeral practices to use the *In the Garden* theme was so strong that funeral homes began to develop facilities that used an indoor garden as the backdrop for where the body would repose.

The chapels were solariums with waterfalls, plants and flowers, and even live birds flying around inside. Many funeral home ads of the '40s and '50s also used the *In the Garden* name.

Continued on page 96



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



FAT 'N HAPPY?

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Life is pretty good around these here parts. I'm sure you've noticed. Fat 'n happy! That's what they call us, right? According to most of the alphabet agencies, WHO, CDC, Statistics Canada et al., one-third of all adults are now considered to be the big "O." Overweight? No, that's the small "o." The big "O" is obese. Class III obesity, as it is now called. That means a BMI over 35.

There are no value judgments here, so we can all relax, exhale and let our tummies bulge out while we consider the business implications of one-third of our customers being plus-sized models. The way I see it is these guests will no doubt require significant extra time, care and attention.

This is not just a short-term trend either. This is the physical reality we will be working in for the next 20 or so years. Having said that, it seems timely to ask ourselves, are we being innovative and creative in crafting workflows and comfortable viewing environments for our plus-sized folks?

There is a place in the United States, just south of the rust belt and a bit north of the Bible Belt, that I like to call the buffet belt. In fact, according to government statistics, this region places first or second as the fattest or most overweight place in America. A number of years ago, I visited a client there that serves a rather large population of rather large people. They noticed families seldom seemed pleased with the outcomes when the remains was over 350 pounds. They experienced a lot of purge, a lot of back flushing of faces and a lot of comments from families on how uncomfortable the deceased looked in the casket.

I spent a few days with the team on managing bariatric cases from first call through embalming and clinical care, and finally setting up for more comfortable viewing experiences. Here are some of the takeaways.

Let's start with how we moved our supersized guests. It can be a challenging task that requires careful planning and proper

equipment to ensure the safety of the caregivers. Tip one, choose the right equipment! I have two magic words to share. Not abracadabra or hocus-pocus, but "soft stretchers." Yes, soft stretchers. These handy devices are foldable, reinforced oversized sheets with lots of handles. They can be rolled and tucked under a remains in any position and the numerous handles allow several people easy access for lifting and carrying through tight spaces.

My personal favourite is called a MegaMover. They come in two styles, a sheet and a "chair." The sheet style is pretty self explanatory and easy to use. They are rated for 1,000 pounds, are very inexpensive and easy to deploy. The chair style is quite different and we will discuss its role later.

Let's talk about some other devices that will make your life easier. Ferno has a product called the Model 132 Manta. This specialized transfer sheet is rated for 800 pounds (that's about 363 kilograms) and is great for confined spaces.

While on the topic of transfers, let's talk about cots for a moment too. Lots of folks out there are familiar with the Ferno 24 MiniMAXX. It has been around for quite some time and is popular because it is rated for 1,000 pounds and you can fit two cots in a transfer van. That is well and good but consider that size matters. The width difference between a standard Model 24 cot and the MiniMAXX is 2.5 inches. The difference between the standard 24 cot and the MAXX is five inches. Once the remains is over 180 kilograms, that extra 2.5 inches is really noticeable. I suggest that a MAXX will fit perfectly beside a standard 23 or 24 cot in most vehicles whereas two MAXXs will not.

Make your MAXX experience even better by adding a couple pairs of side lift handles. These make light work of roadside calls, stairs and grades because the handles project at 90 degrees for easy grasping. Six people can share the weight when carrying. Side arms are another great addition for stability

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“A tool is not necessarily better because it is bigger. A tool is best if it does the job required with a minimum of effort, with a minimum of complexity and with a minimum of power.” - Peter Drucker

and safety. I've had a number of calls over the years from folks who turned a corner a little fast and the cot flipped over as they became off centre. These side arms prevent the remains from spilling over and there is much less chance for these kinds of mishaps.

There are a couple of other inexpensive tools to help keep large folks in place on the cot. I like the model 414-OL “over-the-lap” wrist restraints. These handy straps attach to the cot frame and hold the decedent's wrists on their lap. Each side is adjustable so it is easy to centre the wrists over the midline of the body. Ankle restraints, model 415-AR, are a big help in reducing leg splay and hold the legs firm in position during lifting, grades and for driving stability. Keeping the arms and legs stable is super helpful in creating a safer process when caring for big folks.

Keeping the cot secure in the vehicle is critically important to employee health and safety. A sudden stop or collision will send several hundred pounds of cot and person forward or back with great force. I've seen drivers get crushing injuries and more than one guest of honour ejected from the vehicle's rear or side doors in a crash. A model 5 fastener is a must to keep the load safe and secure.

Once we are back to the care centre, there is no easier way to lift heavy folks than a Model 4000 Ultra Care Lift. This electric, battery-operated, remote-control lift can raise 750 pounds up to 77 inches. Perfect for moving remains to and from the table, for casketing or for positioning in a recliner. Yes, that's right, like a La-Z-Boy recliner.

Remember the buffet belt? That firm purchased a number of oversized electric massaging recliners with standup boosters to help big folks get out of the chairs easily. They had them deployed in the viewing rooms for families to use and enjoy while they were attending wakes and visitations.

A family came in for a service because dad loved sitting in the massage chair for previous viewings. Dad fell asleep in the chair around lunchtime. When they tried to wake him, they realized he was dead. He looked so comfortable, his daughter asked if they could simply have their viewing in the chair? The relatives were already there and his wish was to be cremated so the firm agreed. They did a minimal feature and hygienic treatment in the chair followed by an afternoon and evening of viewing in the recliner.


When they told me about the recliner story, I suggested a new viewing package for the larger crowd. We went online and found some waterproof slipcovers that fit the chairs perfectly. These chairs were rated for 500 pounds and are quite wide in the seat and robustly powered for raising heavy folks.

This is where the MegaMover Chair lifter comes in. It is cup-shaped and has numerous handles similar to its sheet style sibling. It is so easy to lift and lower a large person into the chair and then adjust the chair for the perfect, comfortable looking position. The MegaMover can be tucked under the remains and then, after viewing, the straps can be hooked to the handles and the remains lifted without effort for placement in a casket or cremation container.

It can be difficult to make big folks appear comfortable when flat on their backs which brings me to another magical product – swimming pool noodles. You know, those brightly coloured foam floatation devices? They come in various diameters. The smaller are about three inches wide while the larger ones are about six inches by five feet long. These foam noodles are super adaptable as positioning devices. Really big folks require some bolstering between the shoulders to reduce the slumped look, smooth out neck puffiness and position the head more naturally and comfortably. They are cheap and easy to dispose of when they are contaminated. They can be cut to length and tapered into a wedge shape depending on the degree of kyphosis or folds of the neck.

The noodles can really create comfortable looking postures on the care table and can be left under the remains during casketing or placement on other viewing platforms such as the aforementioned recliners.

The last tip for oversized success is a Ferno 101-H table with wings. By wings, I am referring to the side extension panels that mount on the table effectively doubling the width of the table when needed. These stainless-steel reinforced wings are angled down towards the table gutters preventing gutter blocks and floods and make positioning the hands and arms easier.

A famous management consultant Peter Drucker once said, “A tool is not necessarily better because it is bigger. A tool is best if it does the job required with a minimum of effort, with a minimum of complexity and with a minimum of power.” Could investing in the right tools combine “fat and happy” in your clinical care suite? 

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



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Dr. Bill Webster

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by Dr. Bill Webster

As I entered the office building, I noticed a plaque on the receptionist's desk that read: "Director of First Impressions." Impressive!

Unfortunately, she did not live up to her billing. After a few moments of being ignored, I apologized for interrupting her texting session, and told her who I was there to see. Without even inquiring who I was, she reached for the phone and simply said to the person on the other end, "There's someone here to see you." She didn't invite me to sit down, or offer me coffee or water; just a simple, "He'll be right out," and returned to the apparently more interesting task of social media.

I was singularly unimpressed. She made me feel like my presence was an inconvenience and my business unimportant. And perhaps because I was disappointed about my first impression, the interaction with her boss didn't seem to go much better!

You only have one chance to make a first impression, and she blew it. I do understand that people can have a bad day, but her attitude left a lot to be desired, and in my view, she failed completely in fulfilling her role as a director of first impressions for that company.

First impressions are important because they happen so fast. We make judgments about other people and different situations in a split second. And once that impression is formed, it can be tough to change it. In business and in life, your interactions and relationships will be a lot easier if you're able to start off strong.

For one thing, the other person is more likely to assume the best based on that first impression and you may get the benefit of the doubt if you say the wrong thing or make a mistake. In simple terms, a strong first impression gives you more leeway to be human.

First impressions are important because they happen so fast. We make judgments about other people and different situations in a split second. And once that impression is formed, it can be tough to change it. In business and in life, your interactions and relationships will be a lot easier if you're able to start off strong.

The goal of any business is to show that you understand the problem the client is trying to solve, and how your skills put you in a position to help. But how you communicate that obvious truth will ultimately be the determining factor. Here are some suggestions:

Build relationships

Relationship marketing theory proposes that as a company delivers value to their clients, the strength of their relationship will improve and thus increase customer retention. When a business prioritizes their connection with the consumer over all other aspects of the sale by creating the impression that "we care," trust is developed before attempting to close the deal. People respond better when they are dealing with someone they can trust and someone who actually cares.

Be aware of body language

But before you even say a word, people get a positive or negative message from your body language, which should be both confident and comfortable. It's normal to be nervous when meeting someone new or when in an unfamiliar situation, but don't

let your anxiety show. A welcoming or empathetic smile as you shake a hand or say your first words creates a positive attitude.

Have friends and colleagues help you understand how you come across to the world. Invite them to point out how you can improve your delivery. When they compliment you, don't dismiss that as something that "just comes naturally." In fact, these are the very things you're best at and what you should highlight when you're trying to make a good impression.

Be engaging

The most common mistake people make when trying to make a good impression is thinking they have to impress others with their vast knowledge. What a turn-off that can be! Your goal is not to "wow" them, but rather to create a conversation that's memorable and engaging.

So, try to draw out the other person. Keep in mind that grieving people love to talk about their loved ones. Therefore, ask thoughtful, open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about what made them special." Listen carefully and watch body language. The better you make the other person feel, the more they'll be inclined to have a positive impression of you.

Sense and sensibilities

Movie star Burt Lancaster once famously said, "I judge a restaurant by the bread and by the coffee." Most people would have expected him to make his assessment by the quality of the main courses or its desserts. But his point was that if people look after the "little things" well, the big things will take care of themselves.

Think about it. The very first impression people get may not be how they are greeted or by the service offered. It may actually be in the "little things."

Did you know the most predominant sense in creating feelings both positive and negative is our sense of smell? What hits the nostrils of people as they enter your establishment? Is it clinical, relaxing or something else? I am no expert on this area, but it is crucial to assess this aspect of your environment.

What about the ambience you create? How do people respond to the background music, the lighting or the colour scheme? Do you serve good coffee and snacks or refreshments to your families? Are they impressed by the "atmosphere" of your environment?

We are all biased about our own locations, so maybe get a "mystery shopper" to come in and accurately capture observations for an assessment of their experience.

Follow up

Even when the conversation or appointment is over, your job isn't done. To ensure your first impression sticks, follow up in some way, maybe with a personalized note or text of sincere appreciation. Invite them to connect on social media or send them a weblink to a resource or an article that would be helpful in their situation.

Make every one of your employees a "director of first impressions" and help them to understand both the skills and the importance of their role. 

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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Continued from page 4

In northern Ontario, funeral directors have recently told us that:

- They are often on-call 24-7
- Vacations can be difficult to schedule
- The hours at work are long each day
- Days off are rare, especially for FDs who own funeral homes
- This all leads to great burnout

They are also telling us that there appears to be a generational change occurring with the younger generation not as interested in taking over the family business.

Addressing educational needs

The BAO recognizes this growing need, which connects to key elements of our mission to support the development of a strong and diverse sector while responding to changing needs.


We are working with our partners in the sector to address educational and other factors that will improve the situation for funeral homes.

We have started discussions with:

- Licensees
- Collège Boréal in Sudbury
- Humber College in Toronto
- The professional associations



Jim Cassimatis

Together we will address how to increase the number of licensees across the province. This is not the end of the discussion on this matter. 

BAO | Letters to the BAO

LETTERS TO THE BAO

SUBJECT: NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO ISSUES/RECENT LIFELINE EMAIL - LETTER ONE

Dear Mr. Cassimatis,

It was nice to read in the 31 March Lifeline that the BAO finally and publicly acknowledges the shortage of licensees in northern Ontario. I also appreciate your last statement: “this is not the end of the discussion on this matter.” However, beyond that, your comments on our situation were nothing more than ongoing useless rhetoric.

Your statement that in five years, Ontario as a whole “has one less funeral home and 7.7 per cent fewer licensees” is meaningless to families in northwestern Ontario. What does matter is that from

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Wawa to the Manitoba border, a stretch of about 1,300 kilometres, there were 17 funeral homes a year ago, and today there are 15, with two or more closures on the horizon. That is potentially a 25 per cent loss of funeral homes in the northwest region!

By my count, a year ago there were roughly 33 licensees in that same 1,300 kilometres. As of today, we have lost 10 to 12 of them with another two or three retirements in the near future. We have gained a couple of interns and new licensees, but the net loss is still 35 per cent or more – NOT just 7.7 per cent! AND that number is rising and will gain momentum if we don't do something NOW!

This is not Toronto or even southern Ontario. We simply do not have support services (i.e.: removal services) or where families have the option to find another provider a few miles down the road! We are providers with service areas that are already two to four hours in every direction. Families are already faced with travel distances, wait times, and not to mention, mileage costs.

Likewise, we are the ambulance service for the dead. We are the ones who help reopen the highways after a fatal crash, and attend to sudden deaths in the home at all hours of the day and night. Two nights ago, two of my staff responded to a house call in Atikokan, 210 kilometres away, in a white-out spring blizzard. That 420-kilometre round trip took them nearly seven hours in four-wheel drive. Who is going to take over when we run out of licensees? Under the legislation, it takes a licence to operate.

In Lifeline you also state:

“We are working with our partners in the sector to address educational and other factors that will improve the situation for funeral homes. We have started discussions with: licensees, Collège Boréal in Sudbury, Humber College in Toronto, the professional associations.”

I am really curious as to which partners and licensees you have had discussions with? As the primary “noisemaker” in the north, you certainly haven't spoken to me. In fact, I rarely even get the courtesy of a response from the BAO. Nor am I aware of any of my northern contemporaries who may have been consulted as of this time. This is a northern problem and needs northern solutions!

As for Collège Boréal, they were totally surprised by the severity of the situation when I spoke with them just a few weeks ago, and I am not sure what the professional associations can add to the equation. For a number of reasons, very few of us in the north are members. Unfortunately, they are only interested in their own members and agendas – not the profession as a whole.

Ultimately, we do not need a long discussion and consultation process. We need solutions and we cannot wait any longer. Humber College (and Toronto) has always been a challenge if not a barrier for northerners. We simply need to have a way to make the educational and licensing system more user friendly – especially to mature students and residents of the north. That system already exists in many other workforces, including funeral services in other provinces – it's called an apprenticeship program. We do not need to reinvent anything, we just need to implement it.

If we adopt the playbook that already exists elsewhere, funeral homes can enrol some of their existing employees into a three-year apprenticeship with online assignments, etc. (much like my current intern did during the pandemic). They don't lose staff members for a year of school; they instantly gain an employee who can legally do more as an apprentice; the profession gains mature funeral director candidates who already have experience; and hopefully the staff retention rate will increase.

Likewise an apprenticeship program opens up our profession to second- and third-career adults with families, who may have an interest in funeral service, but simply cannot afford to go without an

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income and uproot themselves to Humber for a year. The entire concept is a win-win for the profession and the families we serve – especially in the north.

Part two of the solution is allowing understaffed funeral homes to bend the rules occasionally in order to properly serve families. I am referring to non-licensees arranging and directing when needed. Maybe breaking the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. In my 44-plus years, I have seen some totally incompetent licensees, and many non-licensed support staff who could easily arrange and direct if needed. I agree with licensing, but I am more concerned about families being able to access care and the quality of that care, than whether or not someone has a piece of paper.

Currently you have several northwestern Ontario firms, serving 200-plus families a year, with only one licensee – by circumstance, not by design. Obviously that one licensee cannot be everywhere, and is likely already bending the rules out of necessity. But what if they are suddenly injured or have a heart attack? Is that funeral home going to be closed by the BAO? Are you going to tell those 200 families they need to drive another two to four hours away for service? I already provide support/trade services to these firms, but I am not in a position to dedicate a licensee elsewhere.

These are very real possibilities, especially when you consider the workload and the distances we travel in all sorts of weather. It would be nice to have an idea of what the BAO would do in a situation like that. I understand that a number of your staff are licensed ... maybe you could send them up here on locums as respite for some of the operators.

Thirdly, financial assistance for funeral homes in under-served areas to help them to hire/train apprentices, and/or financial incentives for licensees to relocate to under-served areas. This is already done with nurses, doctors, paramedics, etc. In essence, we are the back end of the health-care system. Why does the same concern, support and sense of urgency not apply to us?

I also need to make comment about your statement on the BAO website: “My focus is protecting families.” Many of us in the profession take offence to that sort of mantra, because the implied rest of that statement is “from funeral directors.” That is exactly the mindset and the culture which is partially to blame for our current situation. It puts us in an adversarial position, and we can’t solve a problem when we are on opposite sides. Frankly, many funeral directors are totally frustrated and fed up with the attitude and treatment of our profession by the BAO. Funeral service can be a very rewarding and satisfying career, but not under a totalitarian regime like we have been for the last number of years.

For over 140 years, my family’s focus has been to care for families when the inevitable occurs. As part of that commitment, we have been involved in implementing education and legislation, as well as reform of education and legislation for our profession. For many years, I myself have been openly critical of Humber College and the current system being the one and only option in Ontario for licensing. I have also preached about the upcoming shortage of licensees, especially in the north – but nobody listened, yet here we are.

The current legislation, the BAO administration of that legislation, and the current educational system is totally counterproductive to your focus of “protecting families.” We cannot instantly change the legislation, but we can soften our interpretation of it, and focus more on its intent rather than specific words. Maybe that way we can work together and deal with our present crisis – while we still have licensees for you to regulate.

Lastly, I have stated numerous times that I don’t have all the answers, but I am willing to participate in the solutions – as are many of my counterparts across the northwest. Just don’t wait too long.

John-Bryan Gardiner/President, Everest of Thunder Bay



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SUBJECT: NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO ISSUES/RECENT LIFELINE EMAIL - LETTER TWO

John-Bryan; (Mr. Cassimatis),

Thank you so much for addressing the current situation! You have taken all of my thoughts and concerns and put them to paper!

I am one of those players that you speak of – I own the funeral home in Wawa. In June of last year, my licensed son left the business, leaving me as the only licensed funeral director. It was thought he would take over the business in the next five years or so as I am gearing towards retirement. (I have been licensed 31 years this year). This forced me and my husband to make life-changing decisions. My husband quit his full-time job to be my right arm. We are 51 and 58 years old. Not exactly our succession plan to say the least. On a side note, he would be interested in an “apprenticeship-type program” to become licensed. Obviously, I cannot logistically afford him to go to Humber for a year!

At Christmas 2022, I came damn close to a breakdown. (Thankfully, I have an amazing husband and family who stepped up to support me.) Never in the nearly 14 years of ownership have I been so busy. We did 112 at-need calls January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022; this does not include any coroner’s work. Six months of that time period, I was the only licensed director. Thank goodness for the increase of non-service cremations! Isn’t it sad when the phone rings that the funeral director/owner wishes the family that is calling is wanting a direct cremation with no service?

Now, it may seem minor to the folks to the south of us, however as you mentioned, our service area is anywhere from two to four hours away. Also, I run my business in such a way that I go to the family home to make the arrangements, alleviating the family from having to make the trip to Wawa. (Additional time and mileage falling upon myself.) The crematorium is 2.5 hours away, autopsies in Sault Ste. Marie (2.5 hours) or Sudbury (6 hours) or Toronto (a solid 11 hours). Those are one-way distances in good weather! (Inserted for the BAO’s attention.)

I could continue on and on but you have summarized it amazingly. The only thing that you forgot to mention was the fact that the “old dogs” are all aging! We are tired!

Lastly, I too take huge offence to the phrase “protecting families”! I thought the BAO was also there to protect the funeral homes and funeral directors from the public? I actually laughed as I typed this; there is zero support from the BAO for funeral directors/homes. The BAO just collects fees. It is in my opinion that the BAO truly believes that they must protect the public from all of us “terrible funeral directors” that take advantage of the public at one of their lowest and most vulnerable times. (I may be opening myself up for an inspection, but bring it! I have nothing to hide. Please though, if you’re sending an inspector, have them be a licensed person so they can pitch in for a few days/weeks)!

Again, J.B., I thank you for speaking up. You are representing us in the northwestern region well! If you need any “backup,” call upon me at any time.

Respectfully and hopeful for change,

Valerie Kerry

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FSAC THROUGH THE AGES

THE COLLECTIVE VOICE OF FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS
FOR OVER A CENTURY

by Lisa Johnston



For over 100 years, the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) has provided professional development, government relations, public awareness and membership benefits through the unification of Canada's death-care sector. Whether lobbying the government, staying ahead of consumer trends or offering guidance through the more recent COVID-19 pandemic, FSAC has been there for all funeral professionals.

The roots of the national funeral association date back to 1921, when the Canadian National Funeral Directors Association was founded. Its first gathering was held that same year in Toronto. National representation of funeral professionals was further strengthened in 1954 with the establishment of the Funeral Directors Association of Canada.



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Early objectives of the association were to promote the common interests of its members and to foster among them high professional ideals of public service. All the while, it sought to enlighten public opinion in relation to funeral service and the need to enforce proper, just and uniform laws pertaining to funeral directing and embalming in Canada. The association, whose national board was comprised of representatives from provincial funeral associations, helped establish a foundation for a strong national voice for funeral professionals across the country. In 1978, that national association was renamed the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC).

According to past FSAC president Kent Milroy, FSAC unified funeral service across the country, providing a place for discussion and professional development.

“It’s been the unifying voice of funeral service in Canada over the years,” says Milroy. “They have been the one that carried the flag. It’s changed now, but when I was president back in 2010, the differences between the jurisdictions were startling. In B.C., it was all about cremation and it was just breaking into Newfoundland. It was really a matter of keeping an eye on the West to see what was coming in the East ... it was the place where we could all learn from each other.”

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Over the years, FSAC has been at the table for consultations with the federal government departments of Veterans Affairs, National Defence, Indian Affairs, Consular Services and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These consultations addressed several issues affecting the death-care profession and the Canadian public. One such effort was the decade-long debate to raise the amount paid for funerals of indigent veterans. The result was a huge victory as then finance minister Jim Flaherty announced a doubling of the federal funding to an additional \$65 million investment.

“FSAC has had a successful history in Ottawa,” notes Milroy. “The government has always been receptive to us, and through that, I think we have been able to stabilize many ships. I am not that involved with FSAC today, but I can still see the work current president Allan Cole is doing and the connections he has made. Whether through Highway of Heroes or the more recent COVID-19 mandates, Allan has used these connections for the betterment of funeral service across the country.”

Charlottetown, P.E.I.’s Faye Doucette has committed many years to the FSAC board, including serving a term as president in 2013.



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“I have always felt the need to contribute wherever possible,” says Doucette, past owner of Belvedere Funeral Home. “In addition, I have always had the drive to improve myself and I felt FSAC was the place to obtain new information and meet professionals who would contribute to my growth and thus help me better serve the families coming to Belvedere.”

She is thankful to everyone who has been a part of that experience and the connections she has made along the way. “I came to FSAC as a very recent widow, and was given so much support and help from this organization and its members – I am forever thankful for each one. FSAC has given me friends across Canada from one coast to the other.

“It also gave me the opportunity to meet my successors for Belvedere. I met both Bill and Paul through FSAC – Bill in 2003 at my first convention in Charlottetown where, out of his kindness, he would not allow me to go to the parking garage alone to leave the building. I have never forgotten that experience and now the people of Charlottetown are recipients of that same kind outreach through Bill Sampson and Paul Daigle as the new owners of Belvedere Funeral Home. Throughout many chats with Paul at conventions, it became obvious we share many of the same values with respect to funeral service. I am so happy to have them as the new caretakers of ‘my baby’ and without the experience of FSAC that may never have happened.”

For Nova Scotia funeral director Lewis MacIntosh, FSAC is all about people and connections. After obtaining his licence in 1992 and joining G.W. Giffin Funeral Home, MacIntosh attended his first convention with his late father in Montreal. That was almost 30 years ago and although his father had no professional connection to the death-care sector, the duo attended every convention together until his father’s passing in 2016.

“Over the years, we travelled to many places and I recall quite vividly meeting Lloyd and Janet Mallory, who at the time owned Tuttle’s Funeral Home in Moncton. There was Floyd and Marjorie Childerhose from Outlook, Saskatchewan, and Wendell and Judy Flewelling from Nackawic, New Brunswick. These were friendships made back in 1994 that lasted through the years.”

According to MacIntosh, it was all about being together in one room with like-minded, passionate people. “We are very fortunate to have had such capable leaders and volunteers who have stepped up to the plate to serve on the board and various committees. Over the 30 years I have been going, there are still people who haven’t lost sight of why we need such a strong national association. And I think today, we always need to speak highly about how proud we are to have such advocates on our behalf.”



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Conventions have always been a big part of the FSAC umbrella, allowing suppliers and death-care professionals to unite for education, networking and a little bit of fun. Events have taken place from coast to coast – with permanent memories etched into the minds of attendees.

“One of the greatest highlights was when we went to Whistler, I believe in 2001, and on the last fun night we were there, we went right up to the top of Blackcomb Mountain,” MacIntosh fondly recalls. “There was still snow when we got off the lift, and it was June, but it was something remarkable.”

Many long-standing funeral businesses, such as Park Memorial, have been a member of FSAC for generations. They have backed the association through both the good and challenging times, remaining loyal with their support over the years.

“The Smolyk family has always enjoyed being a member of FSAC,” says current Park Memorial president Kirstie Smolyk. “Each association we belong to brings us a different perspective as well as access to a wider foundation of knowledge, expertise and tools, and FSAC does just that. We always look forward to the annual convention and other events, as getting together with our FSAC colleagues always reignites our creativity and passion for the funeral profession. Throughout our three generations, we have always valued being a member of FSAC.”

For over 100 years, FSAC has been providing advocacy, leadership and professional development to the profession. Today, FSAC remains a leading national association, and one that will continue to represent funeral homes, cemeteries, crematoriums, suppliers and funeral service professionals as it moves into its second century. 





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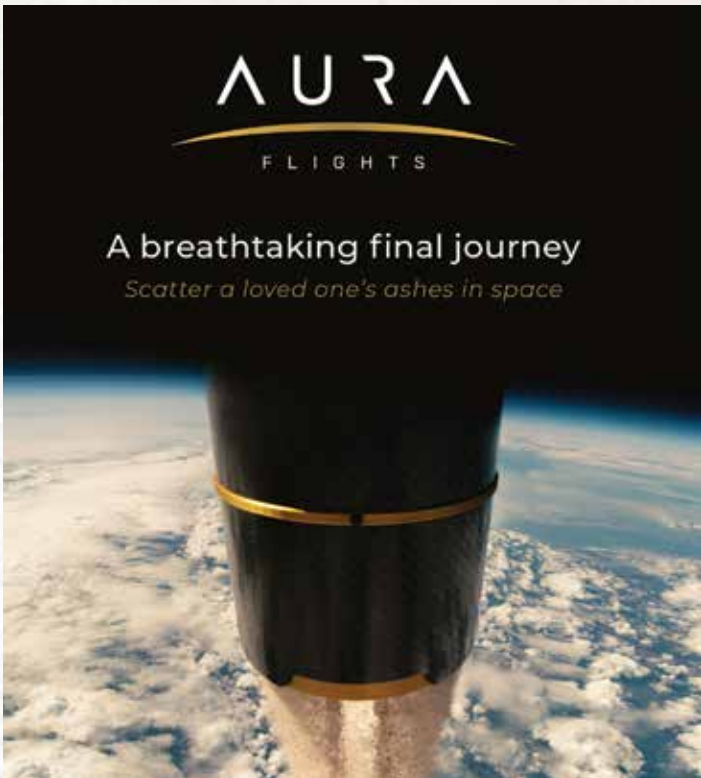
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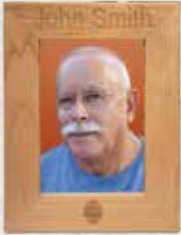
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KEEPING MEMORIES ALIVE

AION TRIBUTE LAUNCHES UNIQUE MEMORIAL PRODUCT

"When someone you love becomes a memory, that memory becomes a treasure."

We all lose loved ones at some point in our lives, but with the loss comes the treasured gift of memories – something Aion Tribute strives to preserve with their unique memorabilia collection.

Aion's keepsake medallions capture an individual in the most personalized manner, making them timeless family heirlooms that will endure for generations. These exquisitely crafted mementoes are entirely customizable through Aion's website and can be viewed at www.aiontribute.com.

According to Aion Tribute founder Timea Szabo, the funeral keepsake market has a limited number of products in the form of high-quality items that each family member can personalize and own. In addition to the high-grade stainless-steel medallion that can be also plated with gold, Aion's UV printing process allows for a photograph to be directly printed onto the units.

Families also have the option to seal a portion of the ashes, a lock of hair or any other small personalized item inside the medallion for eternity. Three-piece medallions with an ash-capsule are equipped with a snap ring that will permanently seal the unit. Enclosing the three-piece unit does not require specialized tools, and it can be accomplished by the purchaser's local funeral home or by the customer themselves. Alternatively, Aion offers a single-piece solid medallion as well for those who choose not to be cremated.

In addition to a portrait of the purchaser's loved one, these one-of-a-kind keepsakes are personalized with the name and date of their passing, as well as a meaningful message or quote laser etched on the keepsake.

Approximately the size of your palm, these mementoes have a diameter of 65 millimetres and a height of 15 millimetres. The weight is 150 grams for a three-piece set and 375 grams for a solid piece set. Cost of the medallions varies from \$349.99 to 449.99 for stainless steel and 449.99 to 549.99 for gold plated.

Aion plans to add new additions and upgrades to their collection in the near future, including precious stones as an optional accent.

Additionally, the company has developed a beautiful display case that encloses the medallion within an acrylic display



In addition to a portrait of the purchaser's loved one, these one-of-a-kind keepsakes are personalized with the name and date of their passing, as well as a meaningful message or quote laser etched on the keepsake.

panel atop a ceramic base. (It is anticipated that the ceramic base will be upgraded to resin due to its durability.) With the consistent high quality of the brand, more display options will eventually become available to satisfy the style and preferences of the customers.

Aion Tribute is a proud Canadian company based out of Regina, Saskatchewan.



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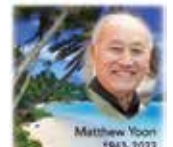
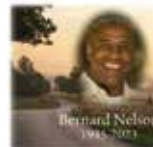


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Szabo was able to refine her product and its production through the use of various prototypes prior to establishing the present production process. Currently, her company can produce approximately 3,000 units each year through its own manufacturing facilities, but she plans to increase production as sales increase.



The founder, Timea Szabo, was born in Romania and grew up in Hungary before immigrating to Canada at 16 years of age.

She became an entrepreneur at the age of six by selling over-sugared lemonades to innocent passersby. In the years since, she has ventured into several small startups and learned that challenges are inherent in the process of building a company and to not let any self-doubt limit her ambitions.

“It is my firm belief that the key to success as an entrepreneur is to surround yourself with people who share your vision, and have the ability to turn an innovative idea into a viable business opportunity. Being able to nurture new talent and getting the best performance from your colleagues is one of the most rewarding aspects of being an entrepreneur.”

Szabo’s grief led her to seek ways to preserve and honour her family member’s memory.


“It was a loss of a close relative in 2014 that inspired the concept of a commemorative medallion. As a frequent traveller, I have collected rare coins and medallions from around the globe and during those trips, I observed that coins and medallions were historically used to honour individuals who served their countries and whose lives left a lasting impression. In an effort to commemorate my family member, I wanted something in the form of a medallion, but I was unable to find anything that enabled me to do so.”

When she was unable to find the perfect memento to commemorate her family member, she decided to create her own.

Initially, she did not intend to turn this idea into a business, but after some close friends suggested it, she decided to conduct research and found there was currently no such keepsake available in the funeral profession.

She was able to refine her product and its production through the use of various prototypes prior to establishing the present production process. Currently, her company can produce approximately 3,000 units each year through its own manufacturing facilities, but she plans to increase production as sales increase.

As a company committed to success, she anticipates expanding across Canada and the United States in the next five to 10 years. The products Aion Tribute offers are protected by patents both in Canada and the United States.

As heirlooms, these one-of-a-kind medallions serve as a link through generations, marking forever the imprint of a life lived that a family will cherish for generations to come. 



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MACKINNON & BOWES HOSTS STUDENT DAY

MacKinnon & Bowes was delighted to once again host “Student Day” at its Toronto facility. In total, 126 people – including students from Humber College, Collège Boréal and Collège de Rosemont – attended the March 31, 2023 event.

Put on hold for the last three years due to COVID-19, the educational event represented the 13th time this program has benefited students in the death-care profession. Invitations are sent to every funeral service educational facility in Canada.

According to MacKinnon & Bowes’ president Allan Cole, it was a great day packed with presentations which included a message from BAO’s interim CEO and registrar Jim Cassimatis; a



Allan Cole, right, presents a cheque to Alison Hughes, senior officer, partnerships, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation.



MacKinnon & Bowes' Jane Pigott discusses shipments.



Students learned about funeral procession safety from Police Constable Dawood Khurshid.



Student Day attendees taking in a presentation.



Students from three colleges were present for the educational sessions.

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The MacKinnon & Bowes facility was packed for the first Student Day since COVID-19 restrictions.

presentation on safety considerations for funeral processions by Toronto Police Traffic Services; and insight into Ontario's organ and tissue donation program by Trillium Gift of Life Network. Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital was also on hand, while several MacKinnon & Bowes staff members shared insights throughout the day.

"My primary message to the students was to keep in touch with one another, even after graduation, and to get involved with either provincial association," says Cassimatis, who spent the morning visiting educational stations set up throughout the facility. "Reaching out and continuing to network will ensure they get the most out of their career and ... that they are not alone as they embark."

Cassimatis adds he was pleased to see students and faculty from both Ontario colleges, as well as two students who made their way from Montreal. "MacKinnon & Bowes is such a unique facility. In my remarks, I encouraged the students to wander the halls and look at the incredible events that they have led and been a part of. The day and the vignettes really demonstrated what a non-traditional career in such a facility could look like." Plus, he continues, it gets the students out of the classroom and makes the profession a bit more real for them. "It was a remarkable, eye-opening opportunity for them."



MacKinnon & Bowes' Doug Kennedy with Camille Lemieux, professor, Collège Boréal.



Members of the Toronto Police Traffic Services unit.



Doug Kennedy addresses attendees.



Demonstrations took place throughout the MacKinnon & Bowes' facility.



Nataniei Trottier and K arla Letelier-Girard from Coll ege de Rosemont thanatology techniques program, Montreal, with Anthony Natalino, Humber College funeral services division instructor.



Toronto Police Traffic Services Constable Dawood Khurshid provides a presentation on traffic safety for the organization of a funeral procession.


Humber student Mackenzie Huggett was in attendance for the full-day event and has only positive comments about the experience. "It was such an honour to be with people who have been doing this for so long," she expresses. "The college tries to give a lot of hands-on experience, but this was next level. We were allowed to drive limousines; we did a mock-up pro-

cession with police officers – you don't get to do activities like that in the classroom."

Huggett enjoyed moving from station to station to learn about the different segments of the profession. "I think it solidified, at least for me, that this is where I want to be and these are the people I want to work with. I inspire to be like them one day and do the things that are being done. And that was something Allan [Cole] really drove home. At his station, he had a slide show of all the things he's been able to accomplish with our same education level. He said multiple times, everyone in the room can do everything that is being done right here with the right attitude about it."

Coll ege Bor el professor Camille Lemieux refers to MacKinnon & Bowes' Student Day as a once-in-a-lifetime event for students. "They had the opportunity to ask front-line specialists about repatriation, phone call etiquette, funeral directing, etc. during the organized sessions." According to Lemieux, the takeaways were enormous as the students approach the start of their one-year internships. "I commend Allan and Alex Cole and all staff at MacKinnon & Bowes for their commitment towards education. They show tremendous passion and generosity towards the students."

MacKinnon and Bowes' president Allan Cole could not have been more pleased to host the event after its three-year hiatus. "It was a great time for fellowship, a great lunch and lots of useful information," he says. "This is the only time each year when several colleges get together for a learning opportunity. It was a wonderful day and we are already looking forward to next year."

The day was topped off with a charitable initiative to support Holland Bloorview's "Capes for Kids" program. Over \$1,700 was raised to support programs that benefit children with physical disabilities. 



Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

PUTTING CLOSURE ON THE USE OF THE WORD “CLOSURE” IN GRIEF

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

“If you are seeking a time when you will be finished, you will never be done.” – Tibetan saying

In these contemporary times, you may be led to believe that you need to achieve “closure” after the death of someone in your life. As a matter of fact, you may have already experienced someone approaching you and asking, “Have you had closure yet?”

Closure as an end goal in grief is such a common misconception that many people have thoroughly internalized it. If we don’t challenge this misconception, we are at risk for considering it a given – and we will no doubt struggle when we find we’re unable to cross the mythical finish line. Why aren’t we reaching closure? Is there something wrong with us?

In our society, for a multitude of reasons – in part because of our need to try to put a happy face on things even when we should have proper sorrows of the soul; our lack of understanding of the role of hurt, pain and suffering in the healing process; a desire for instant gratification; short social norms for mourning; lack of knowledge about grief and the need to mourn; and the inappropriate application of linear time frames – we may lose patience with our grief when we really need to be self-compassionate.

For all too many people, closure means leaving grief behind and “putting the past in the past.” Sadly, it often reflects how people around you want to “move on with life,” even to the extent of inviting you to deny or ignore your grief entirely. Yet, when someone precious dies, this inappropriate goal of closure is not only impossible but, in fact, undesirable. Just think – if we so completely detached from our life losses, we would not only close the door on the pain, we would also cut off our connection to those who go before us.

No, nothing is wrong with us. What’s wrong is the goal of closure. The truth is that we as humans do not get over grief. There is no shutting the door. There is no tidy resolution or total sense of completion. There is no discrete end point. Just as love goes on, so too does grief.

While it’s true the death ends – forever – the live bodily presence of that person, our love for them and our missing them go on. As the body is being laid to rest – an event sometimes associated with “closure” – we grievers are just getting acquainted with our grief and our needs of mourning.

But there is hope! When we actively mourn – taking our grief from the inside to the outside – we are working toward healing. We are moving and changing. Over time and with the support of others, to mourn actively and regularly is to find ways to integrate loss into our continued living. Remember – our grief comes with us; we don’t “leave it behind.” There is no closure, but there is what I call “reconciliation.”

To heal in grief is to become whole again, to integrate your grief into yourself and to learn to continue your changed life with fullness and meaning. Experiencing a new and changed “wholeness” requires that you engage in the work of mourning. It doesn’t happen to you; you must stay open to that which has broken you.

Healing is a holistic concept that embraces the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual realms. Note that healing is not the same as curing, which is a medical term that means “remedying” or “correcting.” You cannot correct your grief, but you can heal it.

RECONCILIATION INSTEAD OF CLOSURE

Reconciling our grief means integrating our new reality of a life without the physical presence of the person who died. Not just surviving, but really living, even thriving. It typically takes months and years of hard work to get there. You slowly, with no rewards for speed, begin to perceive a life different from what you had planned, a life where you are able to acknowledge the death while remembering the life. We are well served to remember it is a cliché to say, “time heals all wounds.” As a matter of fact, grief waits on welcome, not time.

With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of the living. There is also an acknowledgment that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life. While it still demands your attention, you are not crippled by it.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, you will recognize that life is and will continue to be dramatically different without the presence of the person who died. We come to reconciliation in our grief journey when the full reality of the death becomes a part of us. Beyond an intellectual working through of the death, there is also an emotional and spiritual working through. What had been understood at the “head” level is now understood at the “heart” level.

The path that leads to reconciliation requires that you first descend, not transcend. You don’t get to go around or above or below your grief. You must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must also find ways to continually express it if you are to integrate it into your heart and soul.

You will find that as you begin to reach toward reconciliation, the sharp, ever-present pain of grief will give rise to a renewed sense of meaning and



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purpose. Your feelings of loss will never completely disappear, of course, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person who died will never be forgotten but that your life can and must continue. The unfolding of this journey is not intended to create a return to an "old normal" but instead a recognition of transformation; an entire change in form.

SIGNS OF RECONCILIATION

To help you explore where you might be on the path to reconciliation, I've created the following list. You don't have to check each item for incremental healing to be taking place. Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In fact, if you are early in your work of mourning, you may not recognize any of these signs. Regardless, this list will give you a way to monitor your movement toward healing and trust that if you are actively mourning, you are on the path of integrating this transformative experience into your life.

- A recognition of the reality and finality of the death.
- A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns.
- A renewed sense of release from the person who has died. You will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied by these thoughts.
- The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that are normally enjoyable.

- The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.
- The drive to organize and plan your life toward the future.
- The serenity to become comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- The versatility to welcome more change in your life.
- The awareness that you have challenged yourself to mourn heroically – and you have survived.
- The awareness that you do not "get over" your grief; instead, you have a new reality, meaning and purpose in your life.
- The acquaintance with new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey.
- The adjustment to new role changes that may have resulted from the loss of your relationship.
- The acknowledgment that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life resulting from the ability to give and receive love.

Reconciliation does not happen all at once. Instead, it emerges much in the way grass grows. Usually we don't check our lawns daily to see if the grass is growing, but it does grow and soon we come to realize it's time to mow the grass again. Likewise, we don't look at ourselves each day as mourners to see how




we are healing. Yet we do come to realize, over the course of months and years, that we have come a long way.

One of my greatest teachers, C.S. Lewis, wrote in *A Grief Observed* about his journey to reconciliation. “There was no sudden, striking, and emotional transition,” he noted. “Like the warming of a room or the coming of daylight, when you first notice them, they have already been going on for some time.”

On the path to healing, there usually is not one great moment of “arrival” but rather a myriad of subtle changes and small achievements. It’s helpful to have gratitude for every small step along the way. If you are beginning to taste your food again, be thankful. If you mustered the energy to meet friends for lunch, be grateful. If you finally got a good night’s sleep, rejoice.

Of course, you will also take steps backward from time to time on the path to healing, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Recommit each day to your quest to reconcile your grief and have hope that you can and will come to live and love fully again.

I hope you’ll join me in my efforts to put closure on the use of the word “closure” in grief. The next time someone asks if or suggests that you’re reaching closure, tell them there’s no such thing. The conversation that ensues will help both of you – and our world. 

Dr. Alan Wolfelt serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition. He has written many books that help people mourn. Visit www.centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.

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We look forward to seeing you at the 2023 FSAC Annual Conference and Trade Show.



KEEPER MEMORIALS UNVEILS TRIBUTE MODERATOR POWERED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Online memorial platform Keeper Memorials announced their ongoing investment into artificial intelligence with the launch of the Tribute Moderator powered by AI. This represents Keeper’s next step in becoming a leader in the field of AI in the end-of-life sector.


The Tribute Moderator powered by artificial intelligence is part of Keeper’s road map to further assist families, as well as funeral homes and cemeteries who utilize their online memorials. This update enables AI to analyze tributes and messages posted on a memorial page and notifies the administrator when content may be considered harmful including profanity, spam and hate speech.

The sophisticated AI system can understand keywords and the tone of the message and will flag the content with a “toxicity” rating. Administrators now have further visibility into their loved ones’ pages and can enable the Tribute Moderator to automatically remove posts that are flagged through this system.

“Keeper has always strived to create a safe space to remember and celebrate loved ones, while providing time-saving tools

for funeral professionals,” says Mandy Benoualid, president, Keeper Memorials. “Although our previous profanity filter successfully flagged profane words, Keeper’s new Tribute Moderator powered by artificial intelligence reviews the tone and sentence structure to provide a much more accurate moderation tool.”

Memorial pages are accessed by thousands of people daily. Keeper’s new Tribute Moderator will help families, as well as funeral homes and cemeteries, moderate and protect memorial pages from undesirable and harmful activity. This process will save clients time so they can focus on providing meaningful services.

Keeper is a social online memorial platform dedicated to memorializing the lives of the departed. Users can create a collaborative memorial, where friends and family can leave tribute messages, upload photos, like, share, comment, connect and remember those who are dearly missed. Keeper also partners with cemeteries and funeral homes to offer a suite of digital memorialization tools including online memorials, walk-to-grave mobile applications and kiosks. To learn more, visit www.mykeeper.com. 

TODD VAN BECK RELEASES NEW BOOK


FUNERAL CHRONICLES

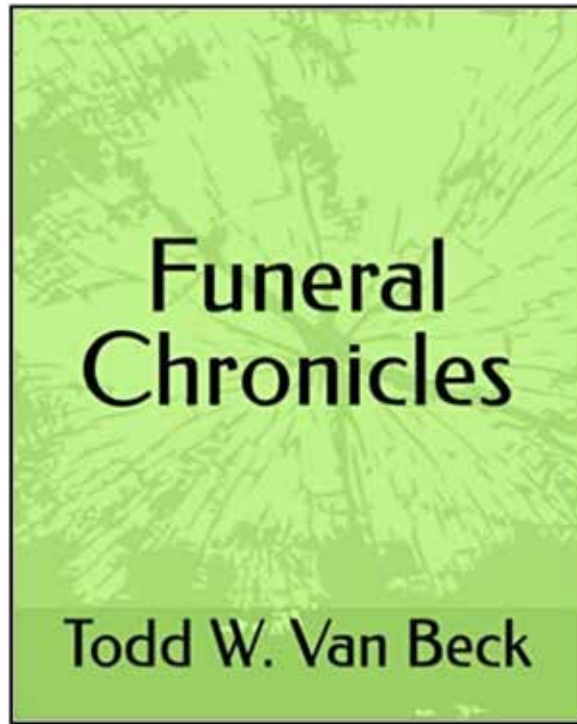
Funeral Chronicles, a new book published by Todd Van Beck, will take readers on a journey through several fascinating funeral stories.

The book begins with a chapter entitled How Can You Stand to Do That Job? Given the sensitivities of the subject of grief and death and considering the chronic death anxieties that permeate current culture, statements such as “You’re an undertaker; oh my, how do you stand doing that job?” are understandable but also indicate a fragile and anxious attitude toward the subject of death. Hence, this book begins by telling the story of how a person becomes interested in the funeral profession in the first place. Funeral professionals are a powerful symbol of death in communities across the globe and as a result, such comments are routine.

Other chapters include: The Fossores; The Sexton; From the Hearses Mouth; The Undertaker Who was a Minute-man; The Funeral Home Ambulance Service; Carpet, Cabinets and Caskets; The Inventor of the Low-Carb Diet; The Harrison Horror; The Titanic; 1918; The Artist and the Mortician; Christmas Calls; and more.

Written by a funeral professional, this book is not an exposé, or a sensational tell-all book about the world of undertakers. It was compiled to accomplish one mission: to share stories about the funeral profession that are interesting and deserve to be told.

The book is available on Amazon for US\$10. 



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Recognition & Awards Banquet

June 5, 2023
Collège Boréal
Sudbury, ON

Sixth Annual Golf Tournament

June 8, 2023
Timberwolf Golf Club
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CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Innovation Convention

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

FUNERAL AND CREMATION SERVICES COUNCIL OF SASKATCHEWAN (FCSCS)

Spring Symposium
May 11 & 12, 2023
Delta Hotel Saskatoon
Saskatoon, SK & Virtual

FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (FSAC)

Annual Conference
June 7-9, 2023
Westin Harbour Castle Hotel &
Conference Centre
Toronto, ON

INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCFA)

Annual Convention & Exposition
May 16-19, 2023
Loews Kansas City Hotel
Kansas City, MO

ICCFAU

July 21-26, 2023
Emory University
Atlanta, GA

NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION (NFDA)

Embalming & Restorative Art Seminar
May 4 & 5, 2023
Pittsburgh Institute of
Mortuary Science
Pittsburgh, PA

Professional Women's Conference

May 5-7, 2023
Westin Riverwalk
San Antonio, TX

Leadership Conference

June 25-28, 2023
Scottsdale, AZ

International Convention & Expo

September 10-13, 2023
Las Vegas, NV

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)

Dine & Discover
How Hospice Supports Client Families
Presenter: Lisa Sullivan
May 3, 2023
Highland Park Cemetery
Ottawa, ON

Day @theJays

May 16, 2023
Rogers Centre
Toronto, ON

Charity Golf Day

June 19, 2023
Richmond Hill Golf Club
Richmond Hill, ON

Educational Conference & Trade Show

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

ONTARIO FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (OFSA)

Webinar: Support Strategies Following Suicide
May 17, 2023
Presenter: Sara Murphy

AGM & Conference

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

SASKATCHEWAN FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (SFSA)

Texas Scramble Golf
May 10, 2023
Greenbryre Golf & Country Club
Saskatoon, SK

Trade Show

May 11, 2023
Delta Hotel Saskatoon
Saskatoon, SK

Annual General Meeting

May 12, 2023
Delta Hotel Saskatoon
Saskatoon, SK

SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES

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

WESTERN CANADA CEMETERY ASSOCIATION (WCCA)

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

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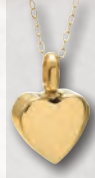
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