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Christie Doyle

ON THE COVER:

- 6 What's Old is New Again
Christie Doyle has found the perfect balance
by Lisa Johnston

FEATURES:

- 10 How Does Your Funeral Home Arrange the Three Ps?
by Michael Brooke
- 12 Mind the Gap
by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP
- 16 Try to Remember
by Dr. Bill Webster
- 18 OFSA's Condensed Conference a Win for All
Highlights from Hockley Valley
- 22 NFDA Convention Highlights
- 27 Funeral Director Shortages
by Michael G. Sheedy
- 33 NETWORK

REGULARS:

- 32 Upcoming Events
- 45 Buyer's Guide

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself
in the service of others." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

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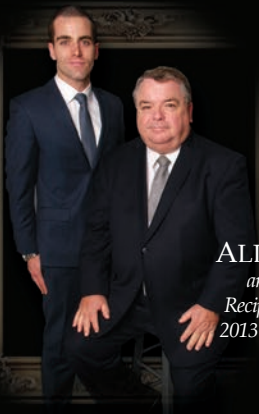
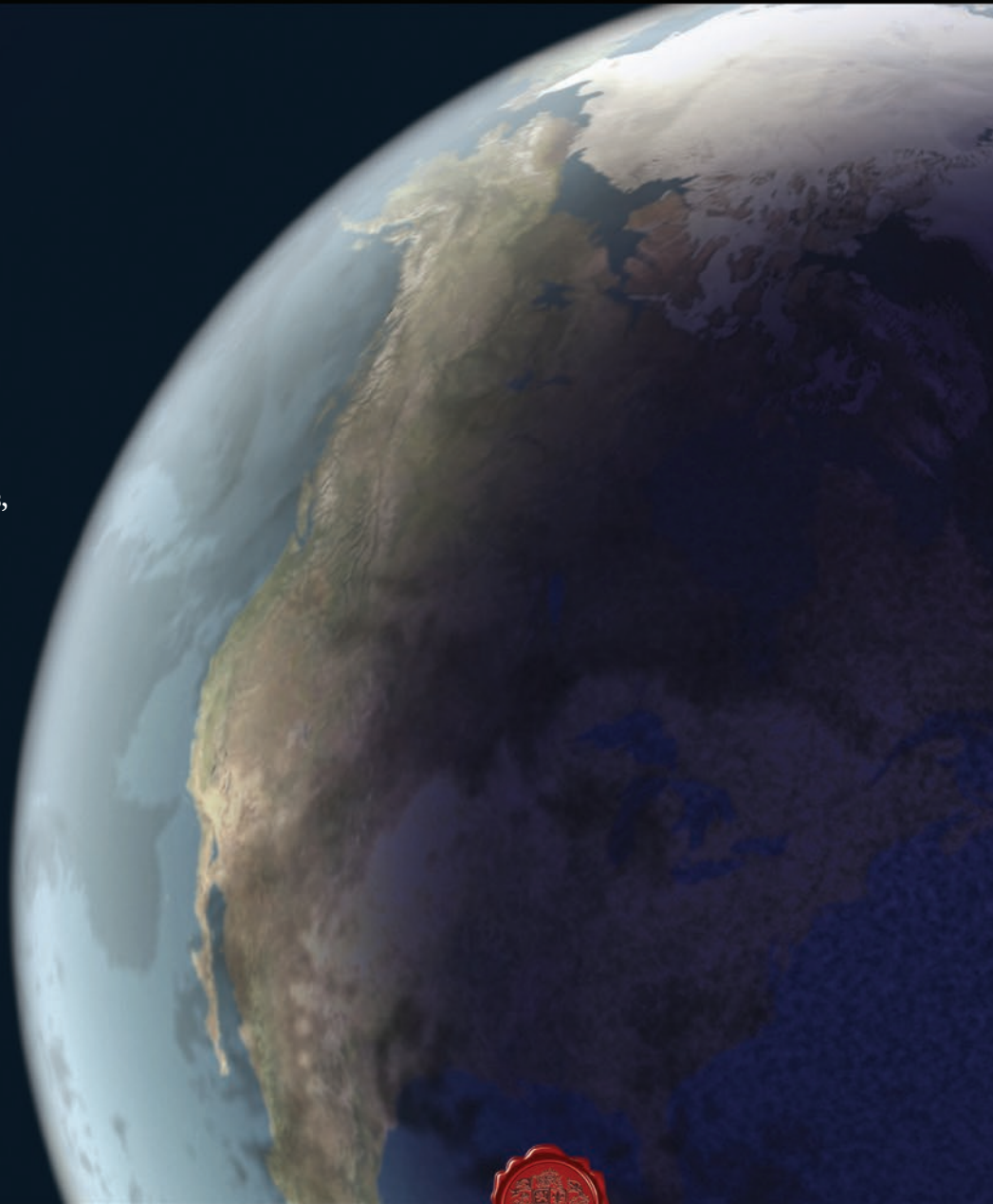
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Pat Ottmann

GREAT ADVICE

by Pat Ottmann

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

Through our other publications, we have the honour of being involved with the good people at Junior Achievement. For those not familiar, the Canada-wide JA Company Program teaches Grade 10 to 12 students about running a business. Each group of students forms a company that encompasses all the positions from CEO down. Then they develop a product and take it to market. There are real sales and real outcomes and these young people learn a lot about the many aspects of running a business and working with people.

Each year, JA hosts a gala where they recognize four business people. These individuals have been successful in their chosen fields while also giving back to their communities in significant ways.

This year's gala honoured a gentleman named Lou MacEachern, originally a P.E.I. boy who moved west and started a business in 1964. Since then, he has done great things in the business world and has given away millions through his philanthropy. Lou is now 90 and sharp as ever.

As the awards were presented, the organizers asked the recipients to impart some advice to not only the students in attendance but to the crowd of over 800 business colleagues. Mr. MacEachern has never been one to mince words which was likely a big part of his success. In what I can only call a mic drop moment, he imparted years of business experience into one statement: "Don't let the bastards grind you down."

I believe he spoke to everyone in that room on some level. The response was a standing ovation and his words remained a topic of discussion for the rest of the evening and over the following days. We all have a few of those people who would like to grind us down. I'm confused by their intended outcome, but we all need to deal with them.

This thought should be projected to whatever level of position we hold as managers, owners and directors. I have seen great people leave the funeral profession because they have let the bastards grind them down. They have allowed the grind to get to them and while I don't want to oversimplify the challenges and tasks we all have, I do believe in awareness and introspect. Who is doing the grinding? Why? And is it truly important enough to get to you?

We all know suppliers and funeral home owners who got out of the business early and retired. When we actually get to the why, it is because they were ground down. The core of the service, product and position in the community fulfilled them, but the factors that emptied their tank on the other side proved overwhelming.

So, what to take from this? Mental toughness and awareness as to who is doing what to you and why. In our little firm, we do have companies on the "do not call" list ... it's just not worth it. We all need business but we don't need to catch every raindrop when it rains, so it's OK to let a few go. If you dread the moment certain families walk in, if you dread making a call to a certain customer, maybe it's time to re-evaluate. The alternative is just a frame of mind where they can bark and grind all they like and the proverbial water off a duck's back ensues. Take the business, just don't take the abuse or the "grind."

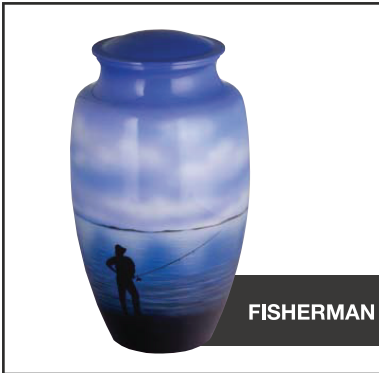
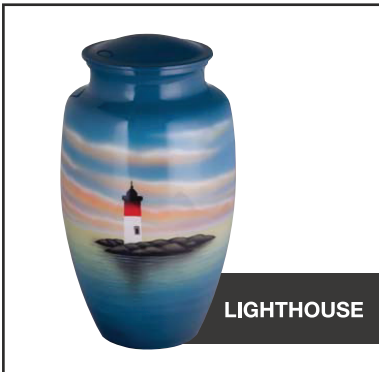
Follow the advice of a 90-year-old who has built companies and communities through his philanthropy: "Don't let the bastards grind you down."

I learned a lot from this statement. Hopefully, it will give you some perspective and allow you to enjoy the core of what you love.

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Camilla Moritz and Christie Doyle.



WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

CHRISTIE DOYLE HAS FOUND THE PERFECT BALANCE

by Lisa Johnston

Embracing the traditions of the past with the ceremonies of the future has secured Christie Doyle a unique niche in British Columbia's funeral service marketplace. The owner of Haywards Funeral Services on Salt Spring Island and H.W. Wallace Cremation & Burial Centre in Duncan is serving up a perfect blend of old-fashioned hospitality with the right combination of modern touches.

Born and raised in Airdrie, AB, Doyle experienced funeral service for the first time while working part time during her post-secondary studies. Recognizing the nobility of the profession, she changed gears to pursue her funeral director and embalming licence through Calgary's Mount Royal University. After graduating in 2003, she spent the next 10 years serving families in Saskatchewan at SCI Canada facilities and independently owned funeral homes. Her goal from the start was to buy her own business but no opportunities panned out in the Prairies.

"I was chasing the dream and willing to go anywhere," says Doyle. "I tried to buy a number of different funeral homes in Saskatchewan but timing was never on my side. So, my partner (Camilla Moritz) and I packed up our family and moved to Salt Spring Island with the promise of free childcare from my mother-in-law so I could continue pursuing my dream."

This time, circumstances played in her favour while landing her in one of Canada's most beautiful places. Doyle secured an on-call position at Haywards, Salt Spring Island's only funeral home. She worked consecutive years for then owner Harold Wallace, who was gradually taking a step back from his business with the goal of future retirement. When Wallace was ready to transition the long-standing business, Doyle was in the perfect position to continue his legacy.

"Harold and I just really connected on the fact that we shared the same vision for the funeral profession which is to make



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The H.W. Wallace care team: Tavia Agnew, Laura-Lee Parris, Christie Doyle and Summer Vosburgh.

things as easy as possible for the families,” says Doyle. “We want people to be able to just drop in knowing the door is always open. We want people to get an actual person when they phone. If they want to make a payment, they don’t have to go through four departments. The whole concept is to keep it old world while still being progressive in the way of accessibility and simplicity.”

With the papers signed, the funeral home switched ownership in 2018. Doyle assumed the full-time funeral duties while her partner and co-owner Moritz managed administrative tasks. Running the small business was a good start to see if they were ready to take on a bigger challenge – ownership of Wallace’s much larger second facility located a ferry ride away in Duncan on Vancouver Island.

“I wanted to make sure I could actually do this and then, me being me, I wanted more, so I approached Harold about buying his funeral home in Duncan too,” says Doyle. “I was con-

None of this would be possible without a strong team behind her. Doyle is quick to praise her dedicated staff in both Duncan and Salt Spring for their support as they hold down the hatches when she is busy elsewhere and always rise to the occasion of giving the community the best care possible.

fident in our abilities and our acceptance from the community, but I have to admit, being a small business owner is no joke. I’m a funeral director, not an accountant. We’ve had to learn a lot of human resources and accounting policies and

procedures. As Camilla and I look back on the last five years, we are really proud of what we have accomplished.”

The journey wasn't without obstacles as COVID-19 impacted operations soon after taking ownership of the Duncan location in January 2020. Then, only months later, Doyle learned the lease on H.W. Wallace was not being renewed which meant modernizing and adapting a 5,600-square-foot commercial building into a new funeral home. All the while, Doyle was connecting at a personal level with the community, and learning that life – and death – on the island differed vastly from what she experienced in the Prairies.

“Before this, I had only worked in Alberta and Saskatchewan and I had always thought funeral service was the same across the country but it is an entirely different animal on Salt Spring. We rarely do traditional services. It's mainly cremation and green burials and intimate home celebrations. There's lots of ritual washings, chanting, singing and drumming and tucking people into the forest in shrouds with cedar bows.”

The Salt Spring operation is also unique in that it largely operates as a rural funeral home, where the on-call funeral directors do everything. “I set markers; I go to the cemetery and dig the cremation plots; I do a lot of home transfers because we have the coroner contract, and our health-care providers are encouraging people to die at home and there is no transfer service. A lot of these properties are on steep hills with lots of stairs, so it is a hard level of work and commitment.”

Things are different when she spends time at the Duncan location or at the nearby Cowichan Valley Crematorium, the third business that was added to their ownership group in mid-2020.

“It is two whole different worlds and I enjoy them both because it makes me a well-rounded funeral director and embalmer. I learn so much at both sites and when I'm working at my home base in Salt Spring, I get to connect with people in really salt-of-the-earth ways and when I'm in Duncan, it's fast and busy and diverse and more traditional.”

None of this would be possible without a strong team behind her. Doyle is quick to praise her dedicated staff in both Duncan and Salt Spring for their support as they hold down the hatches when she is busy elsewhere and always rise to the occasion of giving the community the best care possible. H.W. Wallace is the only independently owned funeral home in Duncan while Haywards is the only funeral home on the entire Salt Spring Island.



Camilla and Christie with their children Nola, 8, and Milo, 11.


“I'm really lucky because I get to go to work every day with my best friends,” says Doyle. “I am so happy we get to do this meaningful work together. Because of them, I am living my dream.”

Doyle is not finished yet. Together with Moritz, she has goals for continued expansion, whether that means purchasing another funeral home farther up island or casting wider nets with online technology.

“I'm very ambitious,” says the 41-year-old. “I want to continually grow. I'm not trailblazing new paths here but everything is seemingly going online. I think it would be nice to have more funeral service apps that would be accessible from phones, so that is something we'll be working on in addition to taking the website to a new level.”

In addition, she would like to offer more help aids to the community. “We are providing great service, so why not branch off to help a senior dealing with loss clean or downsize their house or long-term care rooms. Assist with disposing of belongings or simple chores that might be overwhelming. These are types of secondary businesses that can help people achieve the tasks that seem overwhelming when dealing with loss.”

Doyle recounts the story of a woman who spent over 30 minutes on the phone at H.W. Wallace trying to get through to her credit card company. “I feel all this automation in the world is great, but it is also creating barriers to providing simple service. We want to return to the days where the door is always open to assist with any task to make their day a little easier. It was important for Harold, and it's important for me.”

It is this neighbourhood motto of “if you need it done, we will do it” that will help Doyle and her team continue to flourish with the perfect mix of old-world values and new service offerings. 



Michael Brooke

HOW DOES YOUR FUNERAL HOME ARRANGE THE THREE PS?

by Michael Brooke

As a consultant to the funeral service profession, Codi Shewan's mission is centred around putting people first. It's the critical first step in the theory he's developed, which he deploys in his work with clients: people, process, profit. Shewan asks, "In what order does your business put these three Ps, and how does it all relate to an overall sense of the fourth P – purpose?"

For many organizations, including funeral homes and cemeteries, examining the order of what Shewan refers to as the "CORE 4," and considering the interconnectivity of the four Ps, is not always easy. But Shewan has been helping funeral homes deal with these challenges for many years. He is relentlessly focused on ensuring that funeral homes don't just survive in this era but thrive.

As both an agent of change and a visionary, Shewan is not afraid to speak bluntly. In a blog post on his EverLearn Associates website, he addressed the complicated subject of staff shortages at funeral homes. "I was a bit trepidatious about putting out that piece," he admits. "The challenge I have with the post was that I knew there would be people who would read it and react logically to the reality that many funeral homes are facing: being deficient in their staff complement, and not consider the elements that bind or attract team members as a critical and essential piece to evaluate."

As Shewan explains, funeral homes that create cultures where people feel valued and believe they are making a meaningful contribution are magnets for attraction. He's the first to admit that this can be somewhat counter-intuitive, but he stands on putting people first. In the blog post, he writes:

"Putting people first means fostering a culture that values and respects its employees, acknowledges their contributions, and encourages personal and professional development. When employees feel valued and appreciated, they're more likely to be engaged, motivated and loyal to their organizations.

"It starts with understanding that your employees are more than just their job titles. They're individuals with unique strengths, aspirations and life circumstances. Treating them as such requires flexible policies, work-life balance and opportunities for growth and development," says Codi Shewan.

"It starts with understanding that your employees are more than just their job titles. They're individuals with unique strengths, aspirations and life circumstances. Treating them as such requires flexible policies, work-life balance and opportunities for growth and development."

Shewan tells me that many funeral home owners find themselves in a logistical conundrum of insufficient people interested in working in the profession. "We've operated in the same way for decades. Ultimately, something will have to give. Funeral homes are on call 365 days a year, and we are one of the last remaining services that do this." His focus is on how funeral homes structure their days. "I am starting to see a change in how homes schedule their funerals, recognizing there is so much capacity for their team members to manage."

He continues, "The crucial thing to recognize is that everything is so interconnected. As a profession, we sometimes have difficulty with what's right in front of us because we are so close to things. Owners and stakeholders must have a sense of elasticity because it's the very thing that will give them perspective on where they are versus where they need to be."

In his work with funeral homes, Shewan enables management to see all the pieces they may be blind to or may have never considered.

“Inevitably, with any organization I’ve worked with that has been successful, it’s always begun with starting at the top. Behaviours at the top are accepted throughout the organization.” As Shewan explains, it starts with evaluation and asking, “Where do we want to be?” It’s about what matters not only to the owners, but the entire team too. “This means it’s more important than ever to listen to the people on the front lines of the organization and thoughtfully consider their input.”

Shewan states this in his blog post in a succinct way:

“Cultivating a strong culture starts from the top. Leadership must embody the values and behaviours that define your organization’s culture. But it isn’t only about setting an example. It involves creating a work environment where those values can thrive.

“This process begins with understanding what your organization stands for and consistently communicating these values to your team. Your values should be more than just words on a wall. They should be reflected in your policies, decision-making and everyday interactions. Everyone in the organization, from leadership to entry-level employees, should understand and live these values.”

So often, organizations get the four Ps out of whack. They put profit first, then figure out how and what they need to do, and then think about who will do this work. “Sometimes, they believe the process is most important because they feel they need to chart a map before they take a journey to get to the profit. It is my submission that you should always start with people. They’re a key piece to steering the process and their ideas and experiences are invaluable.”

Shewan points to the fact that leadership must consult and work with those people on the front lines of the organization. “Not involving these people risks a brilliant idea or a new process failing. When you follow up a few months later and discover things were not implemented, it’s often because the team of front-line employees were not initially involved in the consultation process. But leaders get even better ideas and results when they go to their people first.”

When Shewan gives presentations to organizations and businesses, the one rule he brings up is something he calls adapt,

adopt or dismiss. “You either adapt something you are doing, adopt an idea or dismiss an idea because it won’t work for you.” As he explains, any decisions are correct if the organization is consistently trying to evolve.

For Shewan, the answers to many of the problems facing the funeral profession revolve around opening the lines of communication and having thoughtful discussions with the people who make up the organization. “If we don’t have people to staff our businesses, we just wind up with many solopreneurs who operate in silos. But funeral homes can only handle so much call volume.”

As our conversation continued, we started to discuss the idea of creativity. “The single biggest contributor to innovation is creativity,” explains Shewan. “However, creativity is the first thing that stress smudges out. When we are stressed, it removes our ability to be creative. But stress also limits our ability to be proactive, and this means we are also in a constant state of reacting.”

So, what is the antidote to some of the complex challenges the funeral profession faces? Shewan believes it lies in being curious. “Having curiosity means asking questions like ‘have we evaluated our process?’ and ‘have we brought someone in look at what we’re doing and how we’re doing those things, as a sober second thought?’” He candidly acknowledges that when he first launched his business, he wondered how receptive funeral and cemetery operators would be to outside opinions, consultatively. “It turns out I had nothing to worry about. Owners and operators are more open now, perhaps more than ever, to external opinions on their business.”

Shewan tells me that A-game players are bringing him in to ensure their Ps are lined up correctly. “Just like successful coaches have coaches, the A-game players know that support comes not only from their minds, but those with an outside perspective too.”

At the conclusion of his blog post, Shewan writes that creating a solid company culture isn’t a one-time task – it’s an ongoing commitment. He explains that it requires dedication, persistence and a willingness to invest time and resources. But most importantly, it needs authentic leadership, consistent communication and a genuine appreciation of the human element in our organizations.

My key takeaway after spending time with Shewan?

Good things happen when you put people first. 

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



MIND THE GAP

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Ever been to London and rode the “Tube”? Then you’ve heard it loud and clear. Mind the gap! Since 1968, at any station, you will hear the announcement: “mind the gap!”

It originated as a safety message to warn passengers to be aware of the space between the platform and the train until the train has come to a complete stop. Due to the train’s suspension components and slight imperfections in track alignment, trains rock, roll and sway a bit. If you are a little too close to the gap, you may just take a glancing blow by a train car or slip between the train and the platform as it tilts slightly off-centre. I am sure you get the picture and my point.

With constant announcements for over 55 years, you’d think there would be few injuries today, but the plain truth is: after a while, people don’t really hear announcements anymore; they become part of the din.

Injuries are still common because that warning is background noise, especially when English is your second language, you are wearing earbuds, you have a hearing impairment or you are intoxicated by drugs or alcohol. Hence the constant reminders to mind the gap.

Remember the generation gap? I am not talking about your recalcitrant teenager years and your overbearing parents. Nor am I referring to embracing cool new words, music and fashion trends either. The truth of the matter is that age gaps between managers and their reports or between customers and service providers can really influence the level of respect and cooperation they give one another.

People are now living longer than in any time recorded in human history. That means we have more generations coexisting and working together, but also more potential for future conflict and bias to develop. Add to that most funeral businesses are family businesses and serve families, and all families have generational gaps too.

When people are unable to fundamentally relate because of large generational gaps, they often default to using harmful stereotypes that blame one another for problems that cause the gaps to grow. Productivity and performance suffer. It can be even more evident when the “managers” are much younger than the seasoned and experienced staff. Or when the clients are much older than the arrangers and directors.

To get some strategies on how to move past this kind of awkwardness and enjoy the many benefits of having a cross-generational team, I spoke with some multigenerational family businesses leaders.

One firm had five generations actively engaged in the business together. The youngest member, born in 2005, was just starting her apprenticeship and the eldest member, born in 1939, was just about to retire. The opening question: “You guys get along so well! How do you suggest we improve collaboration and build appreciation of the unique preferences, habits and behaviours of colleagues and customers alike who grew up in a different time than each other?” Following is some of the feedback.

A common starting point shared was to clearly identify and define the negative stereotypes and age biases so they can be eliminated. I asked members of these firms to stereotype or self-describe their generations. Then I asked them to stereotype the others.

The silent generation (born 1925-1945) are self-described as loyal, traditional and like to pay their own way. They give people the benefit of the doubt and like to live and let live. Sounds great, right? Those same folks in those same firms were negatively stereotyped by other generational colleagues as inflexible, afraid of technology and heavily biased against people who have tattoos, piercings or revealing clothing. Can both be true?

The baby boomers (1946-1964) both self-described and were stereotyped as punctual, helpful, optimistic, collaborative and



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The patriarch of one firm shared, “To challenge harmful stereotypes, we first need to recognize them, then we can shatter them and replace them with our type of people and care; that’s branding, that’s people management.”

prideful in their personal appearance and that of the facility, their colleagues and vehicles. Their negative reviews included being overly reactive to any kind of change, like revisions to schedules and substitutions of products. They were also obsessive about tardiness and sloppy hair, clothing or shoes.

Generation X (1965-1980) self-described and were stereotyped by the boomer and the silent generation as independent, productive and agreeable but often possessed a bleak outlook.

Next, we have the millennials (1981-1996) who self-described as driven to succeed, embracing of technology and seekers of consensus and harmony. To the old-timers, they have a strong sense of entitlement and poor work ethics.

Last up, the gen-Z crowd born from 1997 through 2012. These folks are self-described as positive, progressive and creative. They are peer stereotyped as being picky and selective of tasks, duties, co-workers and schedules. Older members categorized them as easily distracted, transactional and disloyal.

The patriarch of one firm shared, “To challenge harmful stereotypes, we first need to recognize them, then we can shatter them and replace them with our type of people and care; that’s branding, that’s people management.”

Don’t get me wrong. I am not advocating the use of generalizations or stereotypes as a management tool – that can be problematic. I am, however, advocating that these discussions are essential to have to develop service members and build a team of respectful professionals. Self-awareness is, after all, not universal.

Many generational conversations on the web today rely on click-bait headlines. Rather than taking the time to understand the important differences that are a part of our generational identities, they assign negative or overarching characteristics to each group, thereby implying their values, beliefs and goals are fundamentally wrong or flawed.

In reality, what we value as individuals is often influenced by events which ultimately helped to shape our sense of purpose, our preferences and our motivations to succeed.

Managers or funeral arrangers who value educating themselves on the realities the different generations have faced throughout their lives and understand these nuances are more likely to enjoy happier staff who give better service.

Here are some tips that came from these discussions.

1) Communicate through multiple channels.

Not everybody uses or likes social media, messaging, email, faxing, telephone calling and group meetings. These folks recommended talking openly to one another about preferences, particularly when it comes to methods of communication.

Boomers have decades of work experience talking to customers and colleagues on the phone and meeting with them in person and in groups. They understand the importance of building personable, long-lasting relationships.

Millennials and gen Z spent their formative years communicating through social media, text messages and emails. They find the format quicker and more efficient and do not seek the same close relationships with peers and clients.

Managers of multigeneration teams can set the example by asking direct reports who are both older and younger what kind of interactions feel most comfortable to them. It demonstrates that they are willing to step out of their comfort zone and routine to meet people halfway. Compromise, after all, is a key to finding middle ground and that is a good place to start.

2) Talk about preferences only.

Diversity and inclusion require us to consider some important moral, legal and strategic perspectives. Every person in the organization doesn’t have to agree or share the same viewpoints, but it is important for them to understand what and why the organization places a high value on specific matters.

There is no right or wrong work style anymore. Rather, there are standard operating procedures, compliance protocols and customer service objectives that need to be woven into client care. In other words, show your people what you would like to see rather than tell people what you did not like seeing.

3) Respect boundaries.

Broad age groups have different beliefs and values that they bring to work with them. It’s important to remember that how your employees feel about these topics is going to vary. Taboo lunch room topics of the past – like what you did on the

weekend, individual mental health and progressive social issues – are now widely discussed at work.

Some HR experts call this type of conversation harassment, bullying and swarming of the person(s) whose opinions happen to be least popular while other HR experts say this results in decreasing the stigma traditionally surrounding these topics at work. Can both be true?

It's not necessary for every person to agree about all topics, but it is important for them to understand why the organization places a high value on issues being discussed or not being discussed.

In order to create the kind of environment in which every person feels willing to ask for help, share their best ideas and take risks requires psychological safety. When navigating these challenging topics, it can be helpful for managers to frame the conversation in a discussion of how these issues are relevant

to the client families, the organization's values and the overall mission to serve and care.

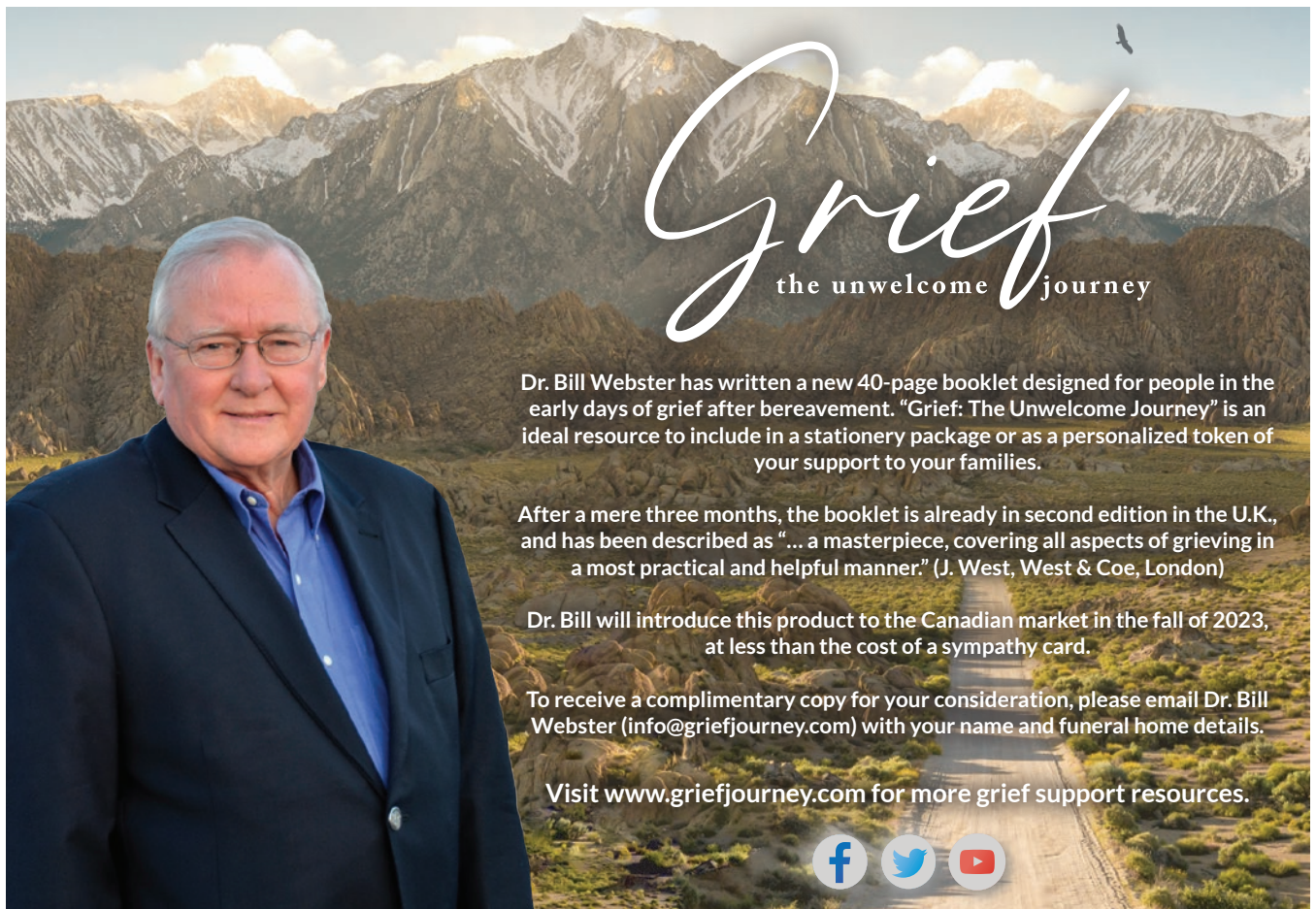
4) Do not play favourites!

Rather than defaulting to the way things have always been done or favouring the preferences of one age group over another, creating change at the organizational level occurs by developing initiatives that encourage both older and younger generations to connect and share their expertise. I like to think of it as a mutual mentoring program.

The way to bridge the generational gap in any firm begins with good communication, and the belief that we are fundamentally different but equally valuable in contribution to the mission. It ends with mutual respect, cooperation and harmony.

May I ask, are there any gaps to mind in your firm? 

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



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

TRY TO REMEMBER

by Dr. Bill Webster

They say that two things happen as you get older. First, you start to forget things. Second ... the second ... wait a minute, now ... let me think ... what the heck is the second? Oh well.

I naively used to think memory lapses were for the hopelessly disorganized. But for me, I have developed a system. I have a “to-do” list. My keys go on the hook in the kitchen. I make a list of what I intend to buy from the supermarket. I write everything in my day timer rather than on a mountain of scrap paper or the back of envelopes. Yes, friends, I’m organized. Or so I thought!

So imagine my consternation when last week it took me three trips between my home office and the kitchen before I remembered why I had made the journey. (Oh yes, to find my day timer and the “to-do” list.)

A lot of us – when faced with brain freeze – worry that dementia is just around the corner. But experts are reassuring. Memory lapses, they tell us, are often part of the normal wear and tear of middle and older age. Must remember that!

Actually, no one is exactly sure why memory goes downhill. It may be we lose brain cells as we age and/or the remaining cells don’t communicate with one another as well as they once did. But the result is well known: mental gaffes and forgetful lapses, ranging from inconvenient to downright embarrassing.

However, the most accepted theory (and maybe most acceptable) is that our modern world suffers from “mental congestion.”

Modern life is complex with every day filled with multiple activities. Multitasking makes it difficult to commit things to

One of the reasons we blank on names is that we know too many of them. The older we get, the more data we have to sort through. We can compare the aging brain to a narrow bridge at rush hour: when you have too many cars and too few lanes, nothing can move.

memory. When we are bombarded with information on TV screens and social media, we cannot depend on recall skills. If the information isn’t absorbed in the first place, forget trying to save it and access it later. Attention is the gateway to retention. As someone said, “The worst pencil is better than the best memory.”

Interestingly though, most tend to blame age rather than busyness for their lapses, conjecturing their memory is worse than it really is. Take the common lapse of forgetting someone’s name. It happens to us all. The brain can only handle so much information, so we still remember folks we knew at school because we only knew a few. But as we get older and have more and more people to remember in our lives, it becomes more difficult.

One of the reasons we blank on names is that we know too many of them. The older we get, the more data we have to sort through. We can compare the aging brain to a narrow bridge at rush hour: when you have too many cars and too few lanes, nothing can move.

Anxiety makes it even worse, by essentially creating more mental traffic. That's why the name often pops into your mind a bit later, when the traffic flow has died down.

Anxiety makes it even worse, by essentially creating more mental traffic. That's why the name often pops into your mind a bit later, when the traffic flow has died down.

Admittedly, certain medical problems can interfere with your ability to recall, so if you are struggling, see a doctor to rule out such possible causes as depression, mood disorders or early dementia which can affect attention and concentration.

Also, when a person is grieving, memory is affected because the mind is overwhelmed trying to come to terms with what seems unbelievable. Symptoms such as lack of concentration, confusion and forgetfulness tempt the person to feel like they are "losing their mind." But in fact, it is the brain using all its capacity to process a situation that has inundated it.

So, how can we build a more efficient brain? With the right techniques, people can improve their mental agility after just a few weeks. Here are some specific strategies we need to develop and employ.

Expand Your Thinking

Crossword puzzles, sudoku or even jigsaw puzzles have long been promoted as a mental strengthener. To challenge your thinking, read more or sign up for a class to study something new to you.

Get Organized

Make lists, take notes and ask others to do the same. Nowadays, when someone asks me if I could do/send/provide something, I ask them to make sure I comply by sending me an email. If someone doesn't remind me, or I don't write it in my day timer, I will have forgotten it within 10 minutes.

Eat Better

Fish and omega-3 fatty acids really do seem to be brain food that slows down mental aging. Antioxidants, found in brightly coloured fruits, vegetables and green tea, also protect brain cells. I went on a low-carb diet recently, and while eating well, lost 20 pounds and dropped my blood sugar levels by two full points.

Get Moving

Exercise increases blood flow, which helps nourish brain tissue. Walk for at least 15 minutes after you eat. Try whatever works for you: yoga, gardening, walking. Stress, it has been asserted, makes it impossible for us to learn or remember and also takes a direct toll on the brain.

Create Connections

When you need to remember something specific, such as where you parked the car, make associations. Try to create a "mental picture" of what you need to remember. The more vivid or even ridiculous the image, the better. If you left the car at level 3, section C in the parking garage, imagine a billboard flashing "3C" in neon lights. If you've agreed to meet your spouse at 5 p.m., try to imagine them standing there impatiently, looking at their watch and holding up five fingers.

Have fun creating such images for every situation you need to remember. 

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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OFSA'S CONDENSED CONFERENCE A WIN FOR ALL

HIGHLIGHTS FROM HOCKLEY VALLEY

Close to 150 participants travelled the scenic roads to the beautiful Hockley Valley Resort on September 25 & 26, 2023, to attend this year's Ontario Funeral Service Association (OFSA) conference. The condensed two-day format featured social events, speaker sessions, the AGM and a mini-trade show.

"We had really good attendance," said Rebecca Steckly, who was announced as OFSA's vice president. "We had a diverse group of attendees from as far away as Kingston, Sudbury and the Ottawa area, so it really brought people together from all four corners of the province. It was nice to connect with colleagues we hadn't seen for a while."

Those who arrived early enjoyed a round of golf or a scenic walk in the hills before the welcome keynote address by Canadian rower Jeremiah Brown. Attendees were captivated as Brown described his roller-coaster journey while providing insights into working through uncertainty, forging self-leadership, staying resilient and blasting through self-doubt, all of which allowed him to become one of the fastest Olympians to go from his parents' couch to the medal podium.

"He was very motivational," said Steckly. "For all of us eating chips on the couch, it was inspiring to learn that you can really do anything you put your mind to."

Funeral director, speaker and author Codi Shewan presented a two-part session that helped take communication to the next level. Shewan explained the four ways that people communicate and then had attendees place themselves into which category best described them. Throughout the session, people moved around the room as they found their "true" category during this interactive and self-learning assessment.

"What you thought you were was not necessarily what you actually were," said John Rooyackers, a newly licensed funeral director with Dreisinger Funeral Home who attended Shewan's presentation at his first OFSA conference. "It was really well done and Codi engaged the audience in a way that made you want to participate. What came across was a clear message that we don't all communicate in the same way, but we need people communicating in all the different ways to make the workforce run."



Students from both Humber College and Collège Boréal participated in the conference.



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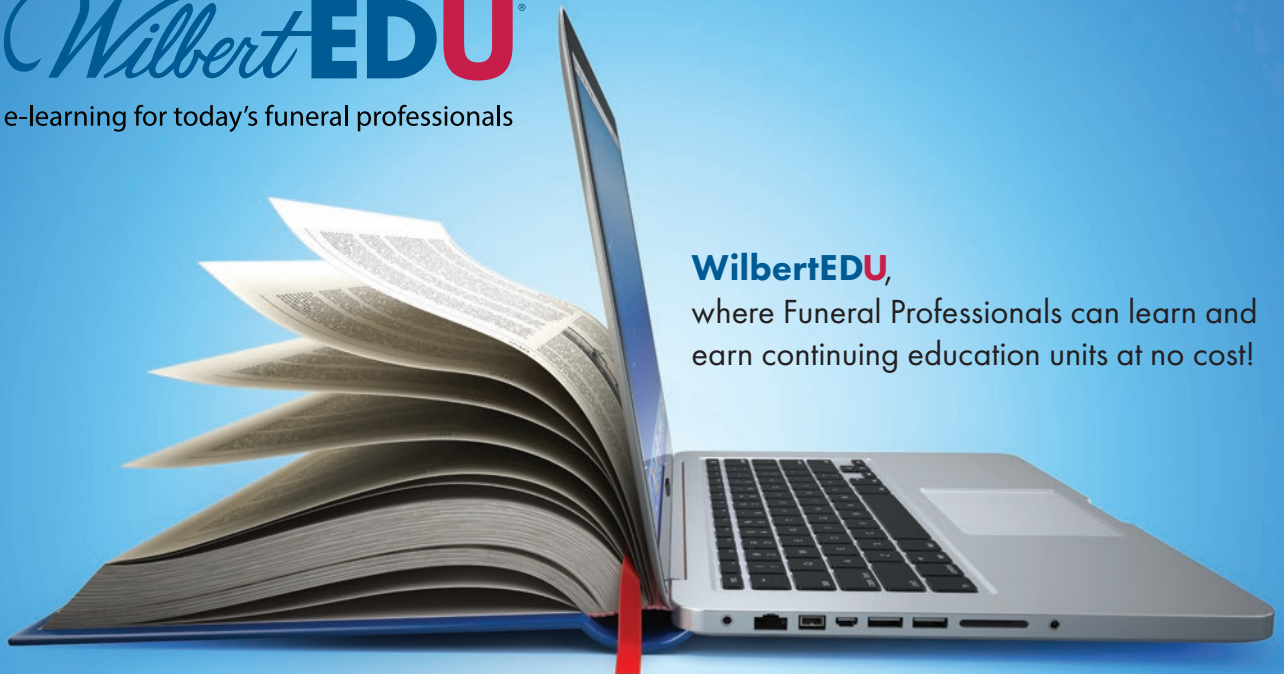
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50-year award recipients, left to right, Jeff Weaver, Eldon Smith, Wayne Heubner, René Berthiaume, Doug McBurney, Ralph Tallman and Paul Kent.

Students from Humber College and Collège Boréal were on hand for Shewan's workshop. They also had the opportunity to listen to presentations on the MAID program in Ontario and how AI can impact the funeral home environment.

"It was wonderful for the students to participate in a way that allowed them to mingle with funeral directors and funeral home owners," said Steckly. "A lot of the students are looking for internships right now, so it was a good room for them to be in. I think everyone at OFSA is welcoming and happy to speak to the students."

Similar to the conference format, the trade show was also condensed to create a more intimate atmosphere with suppliers and exhibitors. Several booths were displayed with a range of products allowing for interaction, questions and engagement.

The smaller feel also carried over to social events, starting the first evening at the Adamo Estate Winery, where dinner was served as the sun set behind the hills. The president's banquet also featured the perfect opportunity for friends and family to gather and honour this year's 50-year award recipients: René Berthiaume, Wayne Heubner, Paul Kent, Doug McBurney, Eldon Smith, Ralph Tallman and Jeff Weaver. OFSA executive assistant Jan Peer was also thanked for 12 years of dedication to the association while Byers Funeral Home celebrated 30 years of service.



OFSA's Michelle Glendinning, Scott MacCoubrey and Jan Peer.

A number of reports, including updates from the BAO, Humber College and Collège Boréal, were provided during the AGM portion of the conference. In addition to approval of a bylaw to allow business members to have a seat on the board, OFSA has made the move to a remote working environment. The new board of management for the 2023-24 year will comprise John Cunningham (president), Rebecca Steckly (vice president), Brett Denning (past president), David LaPlante (secretary/treasurer), and directors




Scott Smith, Codi Shewan and Don Smith.

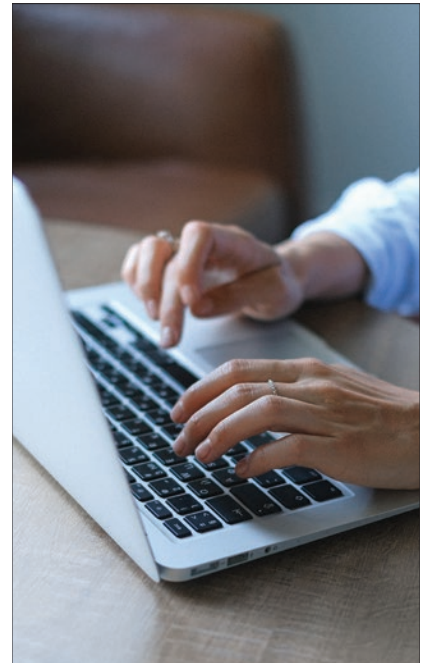


At the Gravure-Craft booth: Olympian Jeremiah Brown, front, with James Allen, Jean Vaillancourt, Kelly Murphy, Aleigha Murphy and Laura McCaffrey.

Melanie MacDonald, Michelle Glendinning and Scott MacCoubrey. OFSA has one vacancy on the board that they hope to fill at the spring meeting.

From the first speaker to the closing social, OFSA delivered on its promise to unite funeral professionals through education, knowledge sharing and networking. Streamlined over two days, the conference allowed for people to attend without being away from their funeral homes for an extended time period. And based on the positive feedback from those in attendance, the format will continue into the future when OFSA comes together for the 2024 conference at the Blue Mountain Resort.

"It was the perfect event," concludes Steckly. "The hotel was lovely, the trees were just starting to turn and the company was amazing. We were inspired after two packed days of being together and learning from the experts in our profession." 



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WHAT HAPPENED IN VEGAS WON'T STAY IN VEGAS

NFDA CONVENTION ATTENDEES LEAVE WITH
NEW IDEAS AND CONNECTIONS

Photos courtesy of the International Center for Documentary Arts



2023-24 board of directors. Front row, left to right: Dan Ford, Dutch Nie, Christine Pepper and Chris Robinson. Back row, left to right: Homer Elwood, Jack Mitchell, Steve Spann, Ellen McBrayer, Brad Walker and Chris Christian.

For the first time in 16 years, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) held its International Convention & Expo under the bright lights of Las Vegas. A lot has changed both in funeral service and in Vegas since NFDA was last there in 2007. The much-lauded September event enabled attendees to learn about these changes, while growing, connecting and returning home with a mindset to better serve grieving families and build thriving businesses.

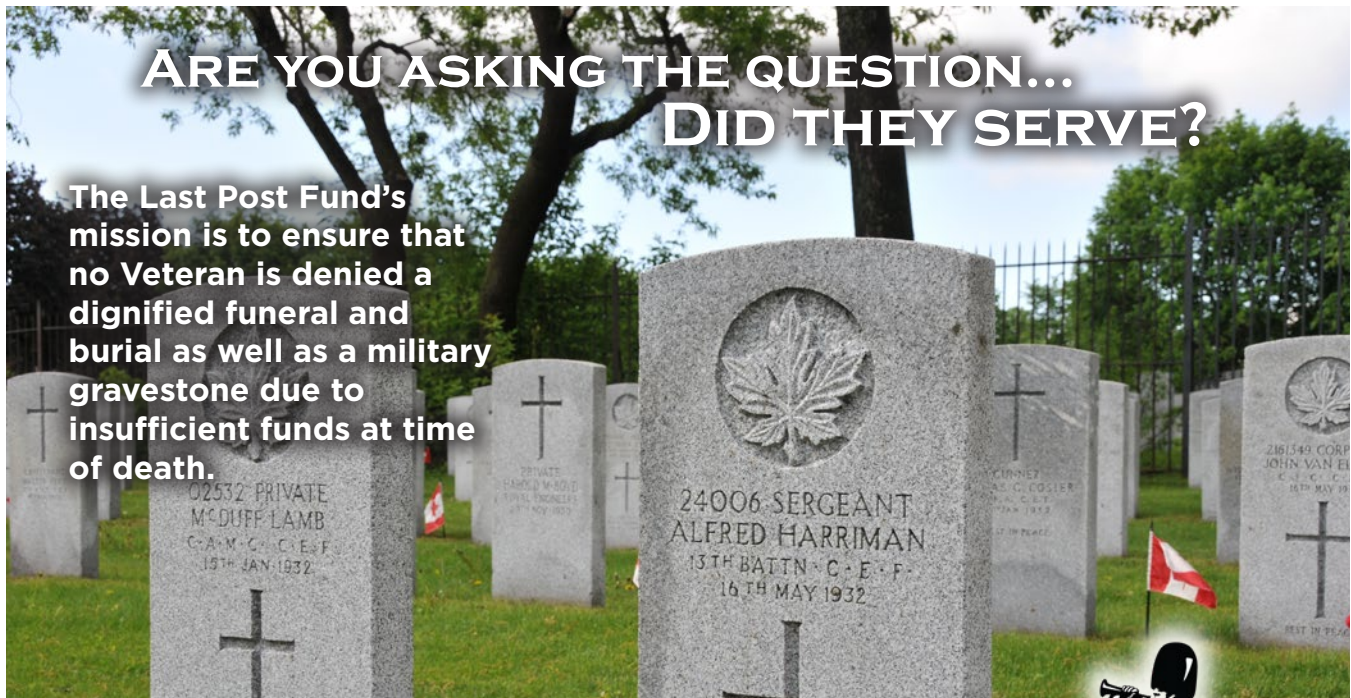
Total attendance for the 2023 convention was 5,329 attendees – a five per cent increase over last year (3,100 attendees and 2,229 exhibitor representatives). This total included 506 international attendees representing 40 countries and territories.

The convention proved to be a powerful and enlightening experience for all who attended. To build upon foundational skills, NFDA offered over 30 engaging education sessions and five preconvention seminars. The education sessions struck a balance between giving attendees the information they need for their businesses right now and the knowledge to better prepare to address the future needs of grieving families.

Education sessions explored emerging issues like new methods of disposition including alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction; how to use technology to better serve families; compassion fatigue and emotional well-being; and digital marketing. However, NFDA also devoted time to more

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At the Messenger booth with, left to right, Shannon Hutchins, Paul Ambroselli, Bill Lindley, Steve Coker, Kevin Durkan, Ron Downey, Pete Arehart, Kimball Scott and Brad Johnson.

traditional topics like embalming and restorative art, grief and cremation. Regardless of the topic, all sessions offered tangible takeaways to help funeral professionals thrive.

Additionally, NFDA featured three enlightening and inspiring keynote speakers. On Monday, author and Harvard Medical School visiting scholar Suneel Gupta helped attendees think about burnout in a new way. During Tuesday's keynote presentation, world-class drummer (and all-around cool guy) Mark Schulman highlighted how rock 'n' roll swagger can overcome obstacles, drive performance and energize work and personal life. Then on Wednesday, Dennis Yu, CEO of BlitzMetrics, demystified AI (artificial intelligence).

With an expo hall featuring 377 exhibiting companies and filling more than 93,300 square feet of exhibit space, convention attendees could find almost anything needed to improve business operations. A perennial highlight of the convention, attendees were able to connect with valued supplier partners and discover new products, services and innovations from around the world.

To honour the 22nd anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack, this year's service of remembrance took place as part of the opening general session. As attendees entered the ballroom, they were greeted by a fire truck provided by the Clark County Fire Department with the American flag suspended from its extended ladder. On display near the fire truck were the photos of the 343 firefighters killed on 9/11.

John LaBarbera, battalion commander, FDNY (Ret.), inspired attendees with stories of the heroes who put their lives on the line. As is tradition, during the service of remembrance, NFDA also paid tribute to members of the funeral service family who died during the past year. At the conclusion, a collection was taken up for Tunnel to Towers. Through the generosity of convention attendees, \$4,359 was donated to the organization.

Attendees also gave back in other ways. Sixteen volunteers – members, non-members and exhibitors – swapped their suits and trocars for jeans



Dodge's Bill Werner with Genelyn North America's Karl Wenzel in the expo hall.



Funeral Service Foundation chair Lisa Baue alongside a photo of the late Todd Van Beck, recipient of the Distinguished Service Award.



Todd Lumbard, Speers Funeral and Cremation Services, attends the donor reception with Thomas Pontone, Matthews Aurora Funeral Solutions.



P R E S E N T S

Acts of Kindness

DAVID ROOT | VOLUNTEER

David Root is part of the third generation of the Pierson family. “I’ve been around the home all my life because I was born the year it was founded — 1983,” says David.

Growing up, David didn’t immediately feel drawn to work in the funeral profession. “As a young adult, I spent two years in California as a missionary for my church. When I returned, I studied to be a pharmacist because I love math and science. I then started working part-time at Pierson’s because I got married and needed extra income.” David fell in love with the work and decided to change his major and become a licensed funeral director.

David has spent over a decade teaching funeral courses at Mount Royal University in Calgary. He is also a board member of the Alberta Funeral Service Association and serves as their President.

“My faith is a large part of my life,” explains David. “I’ve held various positions within the church, and right now, I teach 10-year-olds Sunday school.”

Every year, David’s church embarks on a gigantic food drive. “We work with the Calgary Food Bank and place a donation bag on every doorknob in the city. All people have to do is put donations into the bag and leave it on their doorstep. We collect over 500,000 pounds of food.” At one time, David’s church held the record for the most amount of food collected in one day (according to the Guinness Book of World Records).

Beyond his work as general manager of Pierson’s and teaching, David also volunteers at the Calgary Stampede. “My father was a police officer and worked with the Stampede to manage all the policing. He eventually volunteered with the committee, and I joined him in my early 20s.”

David believes funeral directors must do everything possible to help families. But he also acknowledges that it is crucial to structure a balance between one’s professional and personal life. “It is vital that we pay attention and cultivate meaningful relationships. I often ask myself, ‘How can I best serve others in my personal life?’”



If you or someone you know works in the funeral services industry and performs an act of kindness, we’d like to know about it for a future profile. Please email us at mbrooke@timeformystory.com

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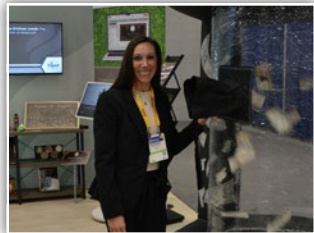


NFDA | What Happened in Vegas Won't Stay in Vegas

www.nfda.org



The NFDA Innovation Award was presented to Bluewater Voyage. Second place went to the Tug-A-Long by Mortuary Lift Company. Matan's Life Map took third place.



McKenna Hughes from Trigard.



Mortuary Lift Company's Matthew Lensch.



Sandra Arsenault and Marc Melanson, centre, from Frenette Funeral Centre visit with Ali and Tim Purves.



Janet Ricciuti visits with Allan Cole and Alex Cole at the donor reception.

and hammers to help improve and refurbish a home for a local family by volunteering at a Habitat for Humanity of Las Vegas build site. In addition, the Funeral Service Foundation's Golf Classic, which took place at Topgolf and attracted both golfers and spectators alike, raised \$170,000.



Chantelle Bilodeau-Seton, Eternity's Touch, and Alain Dumont, Victoriaville & Co., present a \$50,000 cheque to the Funeral Service Foundation and Thomas Pontone.




FSAC's Pam Moss and Janet Ricciuti at the welcome party.



New Haven Funeral Centre's Shelley Challenger, Minnelle Williams and Shari Yearwood experience the Las Vegas scene.

NFDA also presented the 2023 Innovation Award to Bluewater Voyage Buoy. Coming in second place was the Tug-A-Long by Mortuary Lift Company, and Matan's Life Map took third place. Established in 2009, the NFDA Innovation Award recognizes and promotes creativity, innovation and excellence among funeral service suppliers and vendors.

Mark your calendar for the 142nd NFDA International Convention & Expo set to take place October 20-23, 2024, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Registration and housing for the convention will open in spring 2024 at www.nfda.org/convention. Looking ahead, NFDA returns to Chicago, Illinois, for its 2025 convention, and will host its 2026 convention in Charlotte, North Carolina. 



Michael G. Sheedy

FUNERAL DIRECTOR SHORTAGES

(The opinions in this article are mine and not necessarily representative of the organizations for which I was involved.)

by Michael G. Sheedy

We are all keenly aware of the growing funeral director shortage throughout North America. Contributing factors include an aging population, retirement, a lack of younger individuals entering the field, demanding work, and the list goes on.

While the shortage obviously impacts those working in the sector, it also has the potential to negatively affect those being served. Fewer professionals may result in delays and increased stress for grieving families. Even more worrisome, the shortage may lead to a decline in the quality of service provided, as overworked funeral directors struggle to give each family the attention and care they deserve.

Through awareness, education and the implementation of recruitment and training initiatives, I believe steps can be taken to mitigate the shortage and preserve the integrity of funeral service. It is crucial to recognize the valuable role that funeral directors play while inspiring a new generation to embrace this noble profession.

Now, let us take a closer look at the reasons behind the current shortage in northwestern Ontario – an area particularly hard hit by a lack of staffing – and propose potential solutions to address this issue.

One of the primary reasons for the shortage in this region is the lack of flexible training programs. In Ontario, students must register and attend school in either Toronto (English) or Sudbury (French). Perspective students are forced to travel to other parts of the province or country to receive the necessary education and training. This presents a significant barrier for many.

Another contributing factor is the aging population. Baby boomers are retiring, getting ill or dying, which is increasing the demand for funeral services at the same time the number of fu-

FAST FACTS: NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

- Area size: over 500,000 square kilometres.
- Population: approximately 250,000 people including Thunder Bay.
- Number of funeral homes outside of Thunder Bay: four (located in Kenora, Dryden, Emo and Red Lake).
- Number of funeral home staff at all four facilities: five.
- The physical landscape of northwestern Ontario is vast. Treaty 9 and the Ontario portion of Treaty 5, also known as Nishnawbe Aski Nation, is comprised of 49 First Nations and encompasses over two-thirds of Ontario's land mass.
- First Nations population in this area: 50,000-plus.

neral directors is decreasing. The tsunami is coming, but there are not enough qualified professionals to meet this demand.

To address the shortage of funeral directors in northern Ontario, several potential solutions can be explored. One option is to establish new training programs in the region or via Webex, Zoom, etc., while adjusting the requirements to meet the needs of communities. This could include partnerships with existing educational institutions or the creation of new programs specifically designed to meet the needs of the funeral service profession.

Another solution is to provide incentives for individuals to pursue a career in funeral service. This could include financial assistance for education and training, as well as job placement programs and other support. Following are some suggestions:

- Remote Canadian community grants for education.
- Local associations existing again to provide a unified voice to represent the profession and community needs.
- Sector solutions like flex schedules, compensation, time off, benefits such as daycare support, etc. Quality of life opportunities and salary and benefit ideas to gauge how we are comparing with our industry partners.
- Additional flexibility in Ontario for CE credits which now seems to be underway. It should not only be limited to four organizations as dictated by the former BAO registrar. There are some fantastic programs offered by FSAC, CANA, ICCFA, NFDA, etc. that may be more relative towards beefing up professional development. (Please note, this does not mean the current programs are not doing a fabulous job because they are.)
- Leadership restructure at the BAO. The makeup of the board as it currently stands has little to no representation from the smaller communities with none from northern Ontario. Perhaps a small but committed voice from the region would extend the belief that Ontario does not end east at Oshawa. The


former Board of Funeral Services had the foresight years ago to adjust the legislation to allow Ontario's first "visitation centre" in Atikokan to be serviced out of Fort Frances. So, there once was an appreciation for northern Ontario.

- In Ontario, a cemetery board can simply walk away from their responsibilities and hand the books over to the local municipality to foster it under a different management system. The same does not apply to funeral homes.
- Not all areas are serviced day to day (24/7) by third-party transfer support, embalming, livery support, etc. making quality of life challenges for the funeral homes.
- Pay is a huge challenge. Increases in the technology and government sectors pose a significant challenge as it relates to commitment of education for jobs, pay, benefits and quality of life. Throwing money at ever-increasing salaries may help some in the short term, but is simply not a solution on its own.
- Gather affected groups throughout North America or just in Canada to get investments from FSAC, OACFP, mortuary colleges, CANA, ICCFA, NFDA, SCI, Arbor and foundation partners to

co-develop career day presentations. Use high-quality PowerPoint, speaker notes and handouts to introduce this vocation as a possibility for respective careers. Continue to be the support mechanism for the profession. Look at the quality mortuary colleges throughout North America who have expertise in "selling ideas to future candidates." Why reinvent the wheel? Get together and just "do it."

In some areas, it is already too late; in others, we are a retirement or an illness away from another funeral home shutting down and the community left in the lurch. This is not what we are about.

While travelling, I've had discussions with the former grand chief of a Canadian First Nations (who spent much time in northern Ontario) and a former senator from northern Ontario about these very challenges and both agree that something has to be done. We cannot continue to see successful funeral businesses close because of a lack of funeral directors.

As the old Chinese proverb says, "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now." 



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2023 NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

(Editor's Note: Eva Hébert was awarded the FSAC scholarship based on the following essay submission.)

From an early stage in my life, my interests in thanatology and human connection naturally emerged. Being the daughter and granddaughter of funeral directors, I have acquired and developed a familiarity with this field. The Hébert et Fils Funeral Home, established in 1958 by my grandfather, is part of my cultural background. Having been introduced to the field by my father, I have witnessed numerous embalmings and performed various aseptic procedures even before entering college. I have been deeply fascinated by the work of professionals who skillfully combine empathy and compassion to support families during this challenging period, while demonstrating meticulousness and delicacy in their approach. It has been a fruitful experience for me, through which I discovered my calling. Recognizing the diverse challenges and opportunities in the funeral sector, I see profound humanity in the role of a funeral director, a testament to immeasurable respect.

Given my introduction to funeral services, I was primarily eager to learn more about the human being. Consequently, I pursued my undergraduate studies in psychology at Laval University to deepen my understanding of human behaviour and the various contexts that can influence it. Throughout my academic journey, I combined my passions for human beings and funeral services by completing the extracurricular course, *Intervening with the Dying*, which proved to be an asset in my current funeral services studies. My insatiable curiosity and desire to help people naturally led me to the funeral services program. It was practically inconceivable for me to work in an environment devoid of these values.

Upon entering my psychology bachelor's degree, I actively engaged with the student community, affirming my aspiration to pursue a career in assistance and support. Throughout my journey, my social and intercultural involvements allowed me to harmonize my nurturing nature with the discipline of a funeral director. Personally, it was vital for me to be involved in student association life. With versatility, I served as a member of various committees throughout my bachelor's degree. Starting with the socio-cultural committee, I had to coordinate diverse events and ensure their smooth functioning under the supervision of the AEEPUL (Association of Undergraduate Psychology Students at Laval University). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee had to demonstrate creativity in adapting activities and shift towards remote events,

continued on page 72



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

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Those who have served our country deserve recognition and respect for their dedication. The Last Post Fund is an organization whose mission is based on this principle of honouring our military servicemen and women.

The Last Post Fund was founded in 1909 by Arthur Hair, who rallied his circle of friends to raise money to provide a dignified funeral and burial for a veteran who had died penniless in a Montreal hospital.

The Last Post Fund's assistance is available to all veterans, not just wartime veterans. While a financial means test is applied to applications to determine eligibility, certain cases may be approved as a matter of right.

Today, the Last Post Fund's primary mandate remains delivering the Funeral and Burial Program on behalf of Veterans Af-

fairs Canada. The Unmarked Grave Program provides military markers for unmarked veterans' graves, and the Indigenous Veterans Initiative works with researchers in promoting and extending these programs. The Last Post Fund also owns and manages Canada's largest military cemetery, the Last Post Fund National Field of Honour in Pointe-Claire, Quebec, and participates annually in commemorative ceremonies across Canada.

A national non-profit organization, the Last Post Fund is supported financially by Veterans Affairs Canada and by private donations. Branches and volunteers in every province work to inform veterans and their families of the services available to them. Raising awareness about services is the greatest challenge.

You can help the Last Post Fund reach more veterans by talking to your clients about the Last Post Fund. 

FUN HOME

FUNERAL DIRECTOR IAN MCKECHNIE STARS IN PRODUCTION OF TONY AWARD-WINNING PLAY


A local community theatre company is mounting a production of *Fun Home*, a musical based on the bestselling graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel. The production recounts Alison’s story of growing up in a funeral home, and coming out as a lesbian to her funeral director father, Bruce Bechdel. Bruce was owner of Bechdel Funeral Home in Beech Creek, Pennsylvania an English high school teacher and a closet homosexual.

Playing the role of Bruce in the Hamilton-based production of *Fun Home* is local funeral director Ian McKechnie.

“This is a little like art imitating life,” notes McKechnie. “I am an openly gay man, who also is a funeral director, so I think I may have a uniquely sympathetic view of Bruce’s plight. This is actually the second time I’ve been cast as Bruce. Unfortunately, the first production of *Fun Home* fell victim to the COVID pandemic. I’m very fortunate to be a part of this production with a very talented cast.”

A licensed funeral director since 1994, McKechnie started working part time at Cres-

mount Funeral Home before beginning his studies at Humber College. He began his internship at Jerrett Funeral Homes in Toronto and finished at Cresmount when a full-time position became available. Today, he works as part of the team of directors and embalmers at the funeral home’s central preparation facility.

Although not a typical light-hearted Broadway fare, *Fun Home* has its joyous moments. Touching on themes such as family values, homophobia, suicide, acceptance and forgiveness, the play is showing from November 3-18, 2023, at Hamilton Theatre Inc.’s Studio Theatre. 



Ian McKechnie, top row, second from left, with the cast and crew at the initial table reading of *Fun Home*.



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UPCOMING EVENTS 2023/2024

CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Symposium

February 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)

Annual Conference & Trade Show

June 11-13, 2024

Winnipeg, MB

HUMBER COLLEGE

CE Offering: Jurisprudence 301

November 9, 2023

Online Event

CE Offering: No One Left Behind

December 7, 2023

Online Event

CE Offering: Exploring Alkaline Hydrolysis

Available Until December 31, 2023

Recorded Seminar

INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCFA)

Dead Talks

January 16-18, 2024

Park MGM

Las Vegas, NV

Convention & Expo

April 10-13, 2024

JW Marriott Tampa Water Street

Tampa, FL

ICCFA University

July 19-24, 2024

Emory University

Atlanta, GA

NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION (NFDA)

Consumer Trends Conference

February 22 & 23, 2024

Virtual Event

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 Verda Inn & Club

Ponte Verda Beach, FL

Convention & Expo

October 20-23, 2024

New Orleans, LA

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)

Webinar: An Overview of Jewish Funeral, Burial and Mourning Customs

November 16, 2023

Presenter: Howard Mammon

SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES

NextGen Seminar

January 28 – February 1, 2024

Atlantis Paradise Island

The Bahamas

Annual Meeting

September 25-28, 2024

Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa

Lake Buena Vista, FL

NETWORK

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November 2023



ALWAYS REMEMBER

Last Post Fund and Royal Oak Burial Park pay tribute to veterans with new memorial

What's Inside?

Vol. 37 No. 6 • November 2023

2 Cover Story
Always Remember

4 OACFP
Conference Highlights

11 Business Index

9 WCCA
Conference Highlights



Last Post Fund B.C. branch members with representatives from Royal Oak Burial Park.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

Last Post Fund and Royal Oak Burial Park pay tribute to veterans with new memorial

By Lisa Johnston

The Last Post Fund’s mission is to ensure that no veteran is denied a dignified burial but their scope includes the Unmarked Grave Program, the Lost Veterans Initiative and the Indigenous Veterans Initiative. The B.C. branch has also been hard at work installing a number of memorials over the past few years including its latest project at Royal Oak Burial Park.

It all started two years ago when Gino Simeoni, president of the British Columbia branch of the Last Post Fund, reached out to Lorraine Fracy, Royal Oak’s business development manager, about the possibility of installing a memorial in the not-for-profit community-owned cemetery. Located in the heart of Greater Victoria, the cemetery is home to a veterans’ section with a Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Cross of Sacrifice but had no other memorial honouring Canada’s war and peacekeeping missions.

After assisting with the recent installation of memorials in Burnaby’s Forest Lawn Memorial Park (2020) and Surrey’s Sunnyside Lawn Cemetery (2021), Simeoni was eager to bring a similar concept to Royal Oak. He started the process by meeting with the cemetery management team and after securing their commitment sought funding from Veterans Affairs Canada. When all approvals were in place, Vancouver-based Dan Bellan Design was then hired to design and build the memorial.

“As Veterans Affairs Canada only participates with funding up to \$25,000 for these projects, it is important to point out the generous contribution made by Royal Oak to bring this memorial to reality,” says Simeoni, major (retired), the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Branch with 12 Service

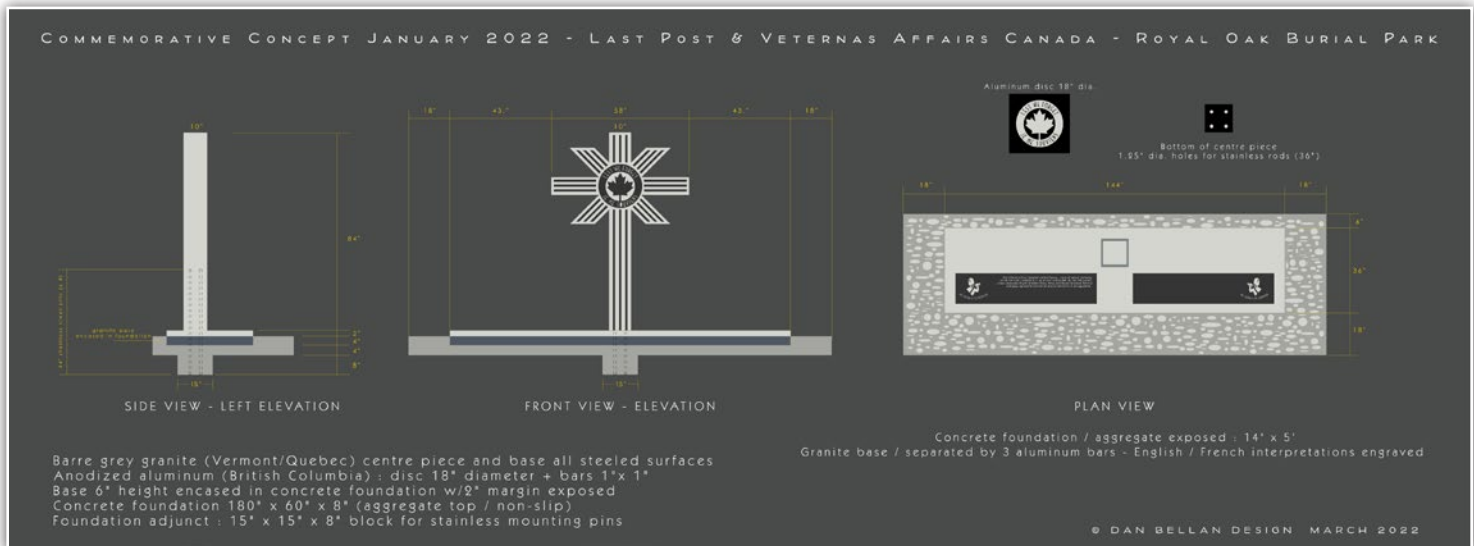


All materials were sourced from the province of B.C.

Battalion in Richmond, B.C. “Much to their credit, the cemetery donated the land, the landscaping and the plants including the preparation for the concrete pad on which the monument sits.”

Constructed in an older section of the cemetery, the memorial consists of a marble cross on a sandstone base which boasts the motto of the Last Post Fund. Eight spokes radiate in a compass shape from a central disk near the top of the cross. The stunning work of art was officially unveiled to the public during a ceremony on October 5, 2023 with Royal Oak board members, Last Post Fund representatives and Veterans Affairs dignitaries all in attendance.

“Each of the spokes represents the Canadian Forces’ willingness to go anywhere in the world to honour and defend Canada,” explains Simeoni. “The three lines leading up from



Conceptual concept of the memorial in January 2022.

the centre are also representations of the three branches of the Canadian Armed Forces: The Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Air Force.”

All materials were sourced from the province of B.C. Largely constructed with unpolished grey granite – a traditional military stone – the bright monument stands in striking contrast to its dark background allowing visitors to reflect on the past, present and future sacrifices of Canadian Forces members. The site backs onto a natural forest and indigenous plantings, including native Oregon grapes, have been incorporated around the memorial to create a beautiful backdrop that will continue to mature through the years.

“The whole purpose of creating these lasting memorials is to make sure we always remember,” says Simeoni. “I know it sounds like a cliché but when I look at the situation nowadays in Canada, we have it pretty good. It’s not just what was done in past generations but what is continuing to be done today. It is important that we say thank you and that we never forget these sacrifices.”

Royal Oak executive director Ilan Highton could not agree more. From the first moment that Simeoni approached the cemetery about building a memorial at the burial park, Highton and his team were on board to support the project.

“It is important to honour our veterans,” says Highton, “and we really liked the fact that it was dedicated to all branches of the military. As we previously did not have a veterans’ memorial in the cemetery, aside from the CWGC Cross of Sacrifice, we were happy to partner with the Last Post Fund on such a powerful and lasting project.”

Unveiling the Last Post Fund memorial also ties in nicely to the centennial celebrations occurring this fall at Royal Oak

Burial Park as the cemetery celebrates 100 years of service to the local community.

“The actual day of our centennial is in November, but we held our 100-year celebration on October 7, just two days after we unveiled the Last Post Fund memorial,” states Highton. “It was a great event that showcased the history of the cemetery. We provided refreshments, live music from the ’20s and ’30s, self-guided and bus tours of the grounds, and a mini-museum that we set up in one of our buildings. We also had the Victoria Genealogical Society onsite to help visitors track their ancestry and provided maps to the graves of the 50 most famous people buried in the cemetery.”

Royal Oak also released their 100-year anniversary book, detailing the history of the cemetery and how it has grown and changed over the years. Spearheaded by Victoria and Saanich councils in the early 1920s after learning Victoria’s Ross Bay Cemetery was nearing full capacity, Royal Oak Burial Park officially opened its gates on November 28, 1923. Soon after, operations slowed considerably when it was determined Ross Bay was only at 60 per cent capacity. The error made for a slow start, but it wasn’t long before Royal Oak established its place in the community. Sitting on one of the highest sites on the Saanich Peninsula, with views of the Juan de Fuca Strait, more than 72,000 people have been buried at Royal Oak and another 93,000 cremated on the 135-acre property. In celebration of 100 years, the new Centennial Ridge section officially opened to casket graves and upright monuments boasting a beautiful view of the entire cemetery.

Whether serving the general public or paying tribute to those who have served in Canada’s Armed Forces, Royal Oak Burial Park is steeped in history. It has even more to celebrate this fall with its 100th anniversary and the installation of the Last Post Fund’s newest memorial dedicated to all who have fought and continue to fight for Canada. **N**

Leading the Way, SHAPING THE FUTURE

OACFP delivers impactful conference

From the moment OACFP members and guests arrived at the Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville, ON, the energy started to build for one of the best attended conferences in recent years. Over 325 participants – delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors – came together for education, camaraderie and fun, all centred around the importance of leadership.

“The theme, Leading the Way, Shaping the Future of the Bereavement Sector, really resonated not only through our speakers but through all our sessions,” said Mark Richardson, OACFP’s new vice president and chair of the conference committee. “I think the panel on the last day summed it up best: everyone in the room – whether a funeral professional, cemeterian or supplier – can serve as a leader in their organization and community.”

According to OACFP executive director Darren Denomme, the event deliberately focused on combining seasoned leaders with up-and-comers. “We hosted a couple of events for younger people but I noticed a few of our bigger companies also sent some people a little further down their chain of managerial command, so they could be exposed to the great networking

opportunities available at the conference. As a result, I think we have set the stage to invigorate some future leaders in the sector which is what we were hoping to do.”

Active participation was encouraged throughout the conference starting with a ceremonial tree planting. Several board members, committee members, past presidents and representatives from the Town of Huntsville and the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary attended the event at Hutcheson Memorial Cemetery. The OACFP planted two memorial trees, one recognizing its members who have served their communities over the past year and the other recognizing the dedication of the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary to their own community since 1948. Ninety-eight other trees will soon be planted in three local cemeteries as a thank you to the host community.

“It was a really wonderful start to the conference,” noted Richardson. “Some of us arrived on Sunday evening and on Monday and you could really feel the energy building. Even the mayor spoke on that as did the Huntsville Hospital Auxiliary. They were just so appreciative of what we were doing. We had our largest turnout ever for a tree planting ceremony and that carried through the rest of the week.”





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2023-24 board of directors, left to right: Philippe Lauriault, Shelley Challenger, Caley Ferguson, David Perry, Tim Vreman, John Perrotta, Mark Richardson, Allan Job, Heather Earle and Darren Denomme. Missing from the photo: Carly Lounsbury and Sandra Aguilar.

The positive energy continued the following day with the start of continuing education workshops. First up was the sandbox session, a collaborative group discussion that tackled the bereavement sector's most challenging issues: recruitment and retention; attributes of leadership; organizational and sector silos; and preventing complaints through proactive measures.

"The sandbox was a bit of a carryover from last year," said Richardson. "At last year's conference, we ended with the sandbox where we gathered in groups and talked about concerns. We started this year as a continuation of that, all the while refreshing our minds and coming together to share what we had experienced and learned throughout the year. It was a full room and even spilled over as far as time went because the conversation was so great."

Following comments by the BAO's interim registrar Jim Cassimatis, delegates then continued on their leadership journey with opening keynote Jennifer Botterill. The broadcaster and three-time Olympic gold medallist discussed resiliency and thriving in a changing environment.

"All the sessions were about working together," said Richardson, regarding the range of speakers that graced the stage over the next three days. Jennifer started with a discussion on how a team functions while keeping a positive outlook. From my perspective, that really resonated and continued throughout the entire conference."

Also, on hand this year was Codi Shewan with his Trusted Advisor Training. Lisa Gibson presented on how to become a trusted thought leader through social media before conducting a second workshop on successful communication with the media. Andrea Love broached the topic of trusts while closing keynote Stephen Shedletzky helped leaders listen to and



Genelyn's Vicki Wenzel with Northern Casket's Caley Ferguson, Glen Miller and Blaine Kitchen.



Paul Taylor visits with GFD's Heather Kiteley and Matt Wren.

nurture their voices in others. Throughout it all, MC Minnelle Williams kept the crowd engaged and entertained as they moved from one session to the next.

"One thing I'd like to point out is that it wasn't just leadership within the sector," said Denomme. "We also want our members to become leaders in the community so whenever there are



CFC Supply's Heidi Brown at the Kyber booth.



Rock of Ages' Kelly Conn and Jean-René Audette.



Eckels' Cam Skipper on the trade show floor.

questions regarding bereavement services, burials or funerals, they will be the go-to source. This will add to the longevity of the services we provide.”

There were no shortages of leaders and experts in attendance with the panel discussion featuring the BAO's Jim Cassimatis in addition to Woodlawn Memorial Park's Rebecca Kit, Archdiocese of Toronto Catholic Cemeteries & Funeral Services' John Huys and Mount Pleasant Group's John



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Monahan. Roundtables were also on the agenda with Shelly Challenger and Shari Yearwood (New Haven Funeral Centre) hosting the funeral director's discussion on navigating the complexities of managing multiple decedents. Amanda Gebhardt (Lees+Associates) and Amanda Pinto (Crozier Consulting) led the cemetery roundtable with the topic of cemetery road design.

Even the trade show – which featured 44 vendors, including some new faces – was focused on charting the course of the future.

“Going back to our theme, we had several new vendors who specifically focused on the future,” said Richardson. “For example, Life’s QR demonstrated how a QR code can memorialize a loved one’s life. In addition, STIHL promoted their battery-operated line of equipment as many organizations are looking to reduce their carbon footprint. So, again, it really fit well within shaping the future of the bereavement sector.”

OACFP also incorporated some fun into the three-day event with a sunset beach party, a smartphone mission scavenger hunt and the annual president’s banquet.

“The smartphone scavenger hunt was a team-building exercise,” said Denomme. “We divided the attendees into groups and they had to complete a certain number of missions while taking photos of their progress with their phones.” Antics included finding a funeral director with over 30 years of service, piggybacking hotel staff across the parking lot, and one attendee ending up in the swimming pool fully clothed.

Attendees returned to their best behaviour and their formal attire for the banquet. During the sit-down dinner, the William C. Draimin Award for Volunteerism was presented to Tim Vreman, OACFP’s longtime treasurer, while newly retired Gary Rogerson, Arbor Memorial, received the Award of Merit. David Scott and Robert Palangio were also recognized as life members.

From start to finish, this year’s OACFP conference had it all – full participation from all members right up to the final seminar. When delegates departed, they were excited to take their new leadership skills back to their operations until they meet again in Windsor in 2024.

“I think the feeling of camaraderie this year was something else,” concluded Denomme. “Whether at the sessions or the trade show, instead of encouraging to get people in, we had to encourage to get them to move along to the next sessions. It was heartening to see this sense of community amongst the members.”

“It was an overwhelming success,” adds Richardson. “Everyone participated – cemeterians, funeral directors, suppliers alike – in collectively sharing how we will form the future.” **N**



Luke Colling and Charles Benoualid at the Keeper booth.



Biondan’s Sofia Rossi, Filippo Rossi and Iole Prando.



Pyrox’s Sébastien Litalien with Carrier Mausoleums Construction’s Louis-Philippe and Richard Verrier.



Christopher Hart at the Matthews’ booth.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

WCCA gathers in southern Alberta for a successful conference



WCCA board. Back row, left to right: Lorraine Piller (WCCA administrator), Candace Rogers (AB director), Brett Shenback (MB director) and Kristy LePage (AB director). Front row, left to right: Chris Zerebeski (past president), Ray Bailey (SK director), Soraya Timmerman (vice president), Ken Munday (president), Tiffaney Byle (MB director), Brian Taylor (MB director), Leo Gingras (SK director) and Darrell Dingwall (AB director). Missing: Christine Loewen (SK director) and Larisa Day (supplier director).

Building on its recent growth and momentum, the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA) delivered one of the best attended conferences in years. The annual event happened at the Royal Hotel in Leduc from September 6-8, 2023 where 56 delegates and 19 suppliers enjoyed learning opportunities, knowledge sharing and camaraderie.

“We had a lot of compliments about the conference from those in attendance,” said Ken Munday, who will continue in the role of WCCA president for the next year. “People thought it was well organized, they enjoyed the speakers and the tours, and overall the atmosphere felt like they were attending a large family gathering.”

The event kicked off with a meet-and-greet on the first evening that coincided with the opening of the trade show. Featuring 15 exhibitor booths with experts ranging from bronze manufacturers and columbarium specialists to trust funds and software solutions, the trade show was a buzz of activity. In fact, the combined trade show/seminar space was tighter than ever due to unanticipated demand, something Munday referred to as a good problem to have.

Speaker sessions began the next morning with Ken Fry from Olds College presenting a workshop on detection, recognition and management of pests in trees and shrubs. He was followed by his colleague Jason Pick who continued on the topic of keeping cemeteries looking their best via turf management maintenance levels. Also on hand were AFSA’s Eden Tourangeau to discuss changes to the Alberta Funeral Benefits Program; Casey-Lee Cox presented on the importance of celebrants; Major George Kuhse (retired) discussed the work of the Last Post Fund; Service Alberta’s Deborah Wagar answered questions regarding the regulation of cemeteries; and Miranda Jimmy was joined by a group of women who spoke about indigenous burial sites at both residential schools and hospitals to continue the process of reconciliation in order to support those whose loved ones never came home.

Between the sessions, attendees had plenty of time to stretch their legs, whether visiting the supplier booths or participating in the tour of both Alberta Wilbert Sales and Evergreen Memorial Gardens.

“I really want to call out Alberta Wilbert Sales for everything they did for the association during the conference,” noted

Munday. “Not only did they serve us lunch on the last day, they also shut down production of the plant so we could have a tour. It really opened our eyes to what happens behind the scenes and how burial vaults are made. We then continued on to the cemetery where we toured the cremation garden to see the options available. Attendees could take a ride in the golf carts to see how these vehicles may work in their cemeteries.”

The presidential and finance reports were provided during the annual general meeting in addition to provincial updates. Munday thanked everyone, including WCCA administrator Lorraine Piller, for the support over the year in planning the conference and strengthening the association.

“We have increased membership numbers, reduced costs for the conference to help make it profitable but also to keep attendance costs low, and we are on track to make this a profitable year for the association,” reported Munday during the AGM. “We have also discussed new ideas on how to continue to improve the association.”


One of the topics discussed was the possibility of having a joint conference next year with the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) in Winnipeg. To follow up with other members who were not in attendance, a survey was sent out to the entire membership.

“We are waiting for their responses to come in and then will be discussing this as a board. It is an exciting possibility, but we do have concerns, namely the cost to our members.”

For possibly the first time ever, WCCA is operating with a full board, thanks in part to the hard work of its directors in attracting new members. The 2023-24 board has welcomed Kristy LePage, Tiffany Byle, Leo Gingras and Darrell Dingwall. During the AGM, Munday thanked resigning directors, Diane Mennie and Richard Erdmann, for their contributions to the association.

The celebrations continued into the president’s banquet which featured dinner, the entertaining antics of hypnotist Gavin Hooper and the presentation of the Award of Merit to Rick Gosselin from the City of Red Deer.

All in all, this year’s conference marked a number of wins for WCCA and their members that will add to the momentum as they continue building for the future.

Munday concluded, “People left refreshed, well-educated and excited to take everything they have learned back to their various organizations and are looking forward to next year’s conference.” 



Award of Merit recipient Rick Gosselin with nominator Kristy LePage.



Tour of Alberta Wilbert Sales.



Attendees during one of many education sessions.



Lunch at Alberta Wilbert Sales.

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continued from page 29

including those conducted on the Zoom platform. In this pandemic situation, where socialization becomes more challenging and loneliness often intensifies, it was our duty to ensure the continuous integration of the student community and promote a sense of inclusion among them.

During my university journey, I also contributed to the organization of certain events open to the general public. The Défilé des Troubles, presented in the form of parades, aimed to raise funds for organizations such as the Regroupement des Maisons pour Femmes Victimes de Violence Conjugale and Entraide Jeunesse Québec. Through my active involvement in various committees at Laval University, I have firmly believed in every individual's power to bring positive changes to their community. By participating in these committees, I have contributed to the implementation of projects and activities that have improved student life and strengthened our community. I have learned to work in a team, develop my communication skills, and, most importantly, take concrete actions in favour of the student community.

From my very first semester at CNDF, I applied to work as a family counsellor in a call centre exclusively serving funeral businesses. Within the same company, I also hold the position of removal technician. Despite my familial background, it is essential for me to fully immerse myself in funeral services.

Furthermore, my experiences in mental health as a community worker and a companion for young individuals with special needs have allowed me, and continue to allow me, to develop skills tailored to specific groups of people. It is fair to say that my intervention experience over the years has provided me with valuable communication, active listening and conflict resolution skills. I have worked with people of all ages and life situations, which has helped me develop great sensitivity to the needs of each individual. As an interventionist, I have predominantly worked with marginalized clients. In the course of my duties, I have intervened in crisis situations, showing both understanding and firmness in dealing with various challenges. I constantly ensure social cohesion by considering the particularities of each person, which strengthens my relationship with them. Through these experiences, I have witnessed the complex emotional and psychological challenges faced by human beings, giving me a profound appreciation for the importance of compassionate care.


These leadership opportunities have once again brought me closer to my desire to help others. At the end of this letter, you will find my certifications and relevant skills, demonstrating my involvement in the community over the past years. My engagement in the community testifies to my willingness to contribute to the well-being of others, and each of my experiences has developed in me a sense of empathy and active listening,

I am aware that the profession requires human qualities such as compassion, empathy and respect for the deceased and their families. These values have always been crucial to me, especially in my work in mental health intervention, where I have learned to listen to individuals facing difficulties and assist them in overcoming those challenges.

which will be assets in my professional practice. Thanks to the diverse experiences mentioned, I have gained an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and emotions, as well as skills in communication and crisis management. These skills will prove invaluable in the role of a funeral director, where the ability to listen to and support grieving individuals is essential. I am determined to continue my studies in funeral services and make a positive contribution to this profession.

I am aware that the profession requires human qualities such as compassion, empathy and respect for the deceased and their families. These values have always been crucial to me, especially in my work in mental health intervention, where I have learned to listen to individuals facing difficulties and assist them in overcoming those challenges. Growing up in a family of funeral directors has allowed me to consider the challenges and issues that this profession presents from an early stage. Being both demanding and rewarding, I am fully prepared to engage in this path and provide assistance to bereaved families.

Based on these realizations, my desire to help my community has driven me to engage in prevention and awareness efforts concerning various social issues. Therefore, my choice to pursue studies in funeral services is highly intuitive to me. It represents a continuation of my academic journey and precisely aligns with my career aspirations. My experiences and academic record reflect the acquisition of essential skills for engaging in such a program, as well as my determination and ability to continue in a program that will enable me to become an accomplished funeral director/embalmer, with the aim of giving my best to society.

I commit to utilizing the resources provided to expand my knowledge and skills in this important field, contribute to its continuous development, and provide compassionate care to all. Passionate about the issues surrounding death and mourning, I am convinced that this scholarship will enable me to acquire the necessary skills to work in this field and contribute to the well-being of bereaved families. 

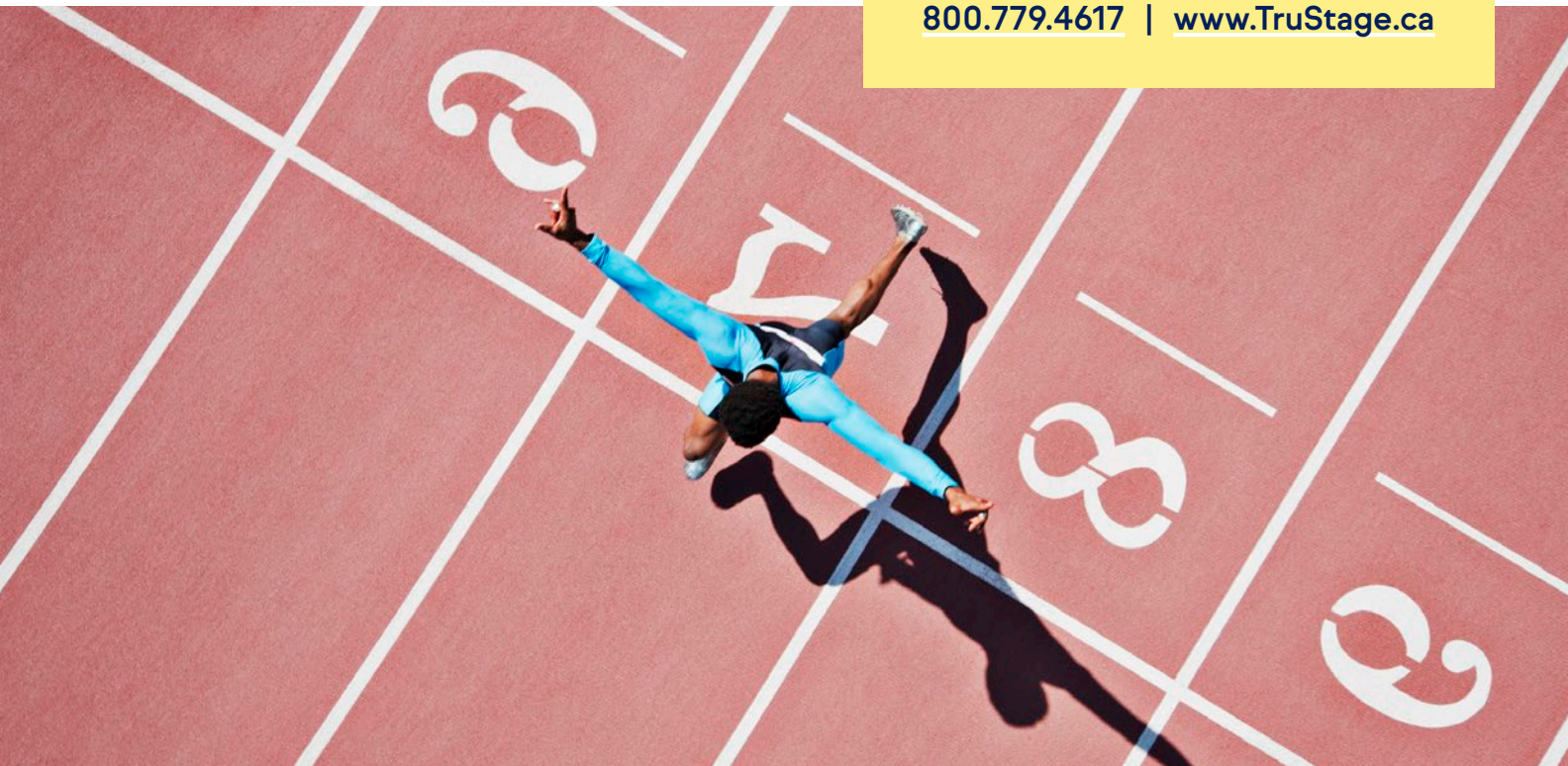


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