

# Canadian

FUNERAL NEWS



OCTOBER 2023



## A WELL-OILED MACHINE

DARCY THOMAS AND THE SASKATCHEWAN CREMATORIA  
COUNCIL KEEP THINGS MOVING

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Darcy Thomas

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# He said he wouldn't mind if he never saw snow again. Rest assured, we'll make sure he gets home, regardless.



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Pat Ottmann

## BIRTHS, DEATHS AND IMMIGRATION IN CANADA

by Pat Ottmann

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

We have been and will continue to ask questions about the funeral education system in Canada and how it might change to meet the demand for services. The northern and rural areas across the country are being hit hardest in attempting to recruit licensees, but I know of few – if any – urban centres overflowing with qualified personnel. The issue is virtually across the board.

The most recent stats on births, deaths and immigration are as follows. Births are at 368,000, deaths are at 323,000 and immigration is at approximately 500,000. This gives Canada a net growth of approximately 545,000 people. If we use the Canadian death rate of 7.8 per thousand – which adds approximately 4,250 call per year growth at 125 calls per licence (rule of thumb used to be 100) – we need to be turning out an additional 34 licences per year to halfway keep up. This does nothing to alleviate the shortage already out there; this is an over and above number. From what I can determine, the immigration policy is not changing any time soon. We can predict that the death rate and birth rate will remain somewhat steady and therefore the pressure to find licensed people will just get worse.

In the year 2000, Canada had a population of just over 30 million people. Today, we are at 38 million. Most provinces are recording fewer funeral homes serving these 38-plus million people. That's an increase of some 62,400 funerals being provided every year – all with a smaller number of providers.

When we look across the country and check in with the educators, the number of grads has remained fairly consistent through this time. Couple this with the exodus of the boomers, and more pressure is put on an already strained system.

When we view our profession through this lens, it's no wonder we are short staffed.


My fear (which many colleagues share) is that the shortage of staff reduces the quality of care. As a result, the family cannot justify the expense for what was provided the next time they plan a service. We are, in essence, writing our own obituary as a profession. Many people are willing to pay top dollar for premium service but when the two don't match, the next purchase is far less. This plays out even more notably when the purchase is forced or mandatory.

Alan Wolfelt has written for years about the negative repercussions of not taking the time to acknowledge and mourn the loss of a loved one. The funeral service is a huge part of that. It allows people to stop, acknowledge and grieve as a community. The consumer isn't educated to that fact. When we fail to acknowledge loss, unresolved emotions can cause pain and suffering for years. Yet, this is exactly what the profession is doing. Through lack of people and service, the consumer is being pushed to no service for the wrong reasons.

As a publication, *Canadian Funeral News* has been writing about this for the past 15 years. Why are regulators – those paid to “protect the consumer” – so daft when it comes to basic numbers, demographics and trends? When those who make the rules are asleep at the wheel, it is ultimately the consumer who is hurt, and hurt in ways that may never be fully understood.

Ronald Reagan said it best, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language: I'm from the government and I'm here to help.”

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# A WELL-OILED MACHINE

DARCY THOMAS AND THE SASKATCHEWAN CREMATORIA COUNCIL KEEP THINGS MOVING

by Lisa Johnston

The Saskatchewan Crematoria Council (SCC) is unique in Canada. Unlike funeral home associations across the country, its mandate is entirely dedicated to the operation of crematoriums throughout the Prairie province, handling governance aspects for all members since incorporation in December 1992.

Although membership in SCC is 100 per cent voluntary, every crematorium operator in Saskatchewan has signed up to belong. Offering education, compliance, networking and a unified voice with the provincial government and Saskatchewan Environment, SCC is as strong as ever under the guidance of longtime president Darcy Thomas.

“I think my position is permanent,” laughs Thomas, owner of J.E. Thomas Funeral Home and Crematorium in Meadow Lake, SK. “I always ask at our annual general meeting if anyone wants to take over the reins, and everyone always says, ‘No, that’s OK. You’re doing a good job.’”

Based on their track record of success and their continued member loyalty, SCC and Thomas are doing a stellar job. Established in the wake of Saskatchewan’s Clean Air Act, SCC operates as the governing arm of crematoriums in the province in conjunction with the provincial government. According to

“I always ask at our annual general meeting if anyone wants to take over the reins, and everyone always says, ‘No, that’s OK. You’re doing a good job,’” laughs Thomas.





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Three generations of the Thomas family with Dustin, Jim and Darcy.

Thomas, self-governance is an ideal scenario. Who better than to keep a handle on things than those operating the facilities?

“In the early days of establishing crematoriums in the province, there were worries about having them in certain areas and the risk of pollution,” says Thomas. “Knowing we were not going to put a lot of pollution into the air, we were able to work with the government at the time to become the guiding group to police ourselves. As long as we are a member of SCC and abide by the rules set forth by council and the government, we can operate as our own entity. However, if crematoriums choose not to belong to SCC, well then, they’ll have to deal with the government on their own.”

In cooperation with Saskatchewan Environment, SCC has developed a set of best management practices that focus on operational issues. To remain a member in good standing, members must comply with these practices. Additionally, SCC organizes cremation technician training, certified workshops, equipment inspections and oversees the Complaints and Cor-

rective Action Committee that works in hand with the Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan (FCSCS) on common cremation issues.

Due to the high standards and compliance by all crematoriums in the province, Thomas says his job as president – most days – is a fairly easy one.

“All members remain in good standing with full compliance with the approved practices. No complaints were received or filed in 2022 and the Complaints and Corrective Action Committee did not have to be engaged.”

Recently, Saskatchewan crematorium operators underwent an extensive audit – another unique thing that has not happened in most (if any) regions of Canada. According to Thomas, it was a good exercise with a positive end result: all operations were ranked high by the auditor. It was another win for SCC as it continues serving as an example to other industries in the province.

“Our job is to ensure due diligence, whether it is keeping up with education or the operation of a crematorium,” notes Thomas.

“Our job is to ensure due diligence, whether it is keeping up with education or the operation of a crematorium,” notes Thomas. “Once a year, we provide a workshop on how to run a crematorium, which is usually hosted by Larry Stuart Jr. and Blair Derkachenko. There is an exam at the end and then participants are required to write a jurisprudence exam with FCSCS. As other provinces, such as Alberta and Manitoba, do not offer a similar program, they often send their crematorium personnel to attend. They value our program and look to Saskatchewan to help train their technicians.”

Across the border in the town of Lloydminster, AB, McCaw Funeral Service has joined SCC as an affiliate member – not because it will play a role in their provincial governance, but solely to take advantage of its expertise. In addition, the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA) has called on SCC to host cremation technician training courses at their annual conference.

With the assistance of fellow dedicated council members Bill Edwards (secretary), Blair Derkachenko (treasurer), Patrick Brown, Dustin Hall, Raymond Bailey and Dan Martens, Thomas can balance his time between serving as SCC president and running his long-standing funeral home, J.E. Thomas Funeral Home and Crematorium, in Meadow Lake. The family business initially started in Moosomin with his grandparents, John and Florence, before his parents, Jim and Nola, moved operations 750 kilometres northwest in 1975. The crematorium was added in 2007, following a steady uptake of cremation requests.

“Before we owned our own crematorium, we used to travel to Saskatoon or Lloydminster to get our cremations done,” says Thomas. “That involved a three-hour journey to get there, waiting for the cremation to take place and the road trip back home. With cremation rates rising, we felt having our own crematorium would offer us the flexibility to serve our clients better. It also provided peace of mind to families, knowing their loved ones were not travelling far.”


A third-generation funeral director, Thomas says he has never considered doing anything else. “I graduated from high school in 1985 and went right into funeral education. It seemed to make sense to try it until I decided what I might want to do, and I guess maybe I am still deciding,” he laughs.



Darcy Thomas at J.E. Thomas Funeral Home and Crematorium beside a bust of his grandfather, John.

Even though he largely runs the funeral home as a one-man operation, Thomas has always felt the need to give back to the profession. It has been a perfect opportunity to serve with SCC, where he finds value in being a member every day.

“There is a huge reward, otherwise I wouldn’t have done this for as long as I have,” Thomas says. “We are unique in Saskatchewan. We have three boards – the Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Funeral Service Association and the Saskatchewan Crematoria Council – all assisting us with operations and serving the public.”

When asked if he would recommend a similar setup in other provinces, he does not hesitate to answer, “Definitely! Everyone operates the same across the province; we play by the same rules. While there is competition and a bit of price differences, no one is under cutting anyone. There is a huge merit to having a unified group. It’s a win-win for the province and all the crematoriums that operate within its borders.” 



Michael Brooke

# FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

by Michael Brooke

**D**id you know that the average person spends up to one-fifth of their life talking? In just one day, if all our words were put into print form, it would fill a 50-page book.

Words are so powerful that researchers say they may affect how well someone heals from an injury.

A 2018 article from the *Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy* recommended that doctors use new language to discuss well-known conditions to encourage quicker recovery. Proposed replacements include using “normal age changes” instead of “wear and tear” and “everything will be OK” instead of “don’t worry.”

As a funeral service professional, did you ever take a moment to think about how much you rely on the power of words? From the moment you take a first call to the time you spend with the family, every word you say leaves an impression.

A quick Internet search indicates numerous quotes about the impact of what we say, but this quote by Abraham Joshua Heschel spoke volumes: “Speech has power. Words do not fade. What starts out as a sound, ends in a deed.”

As someone who has spent over three decades making a living by writing, I am intensely curious about what people say and how it relates to how they act. My time as a funeral director’s assistant provided me with unique insights into the worlds of grief and death.

Those who work in funeral service are acutely aware that many people are simply at a loss for words when dealing with death and dying. Those trying to console the bereaved often find it challenging to know the right words. The words spoken by funeral directors and assistants act as bridges and catalysts for action. Their assuring words help to calm difficult situations. Words help to frame both the grief experience and the actual funeral service. Words can help soothe and assure.

As a funeral service professional, did you ever take a moment to think about how much you rely on the power of words? From the moment you take a first call to the time you spend with the family, every word you say leaves an impression.

Most of us take the ability to communicate our feelings for granted. But according to researchers, up to 13 per cent of the population suffer from difficulty experiencing, identifying and expressing emotions. The condition is called alexithymia. The word comes from three Greek words: ‘a’ meaning lack, ‘lexis’ meaning word, and ‘thymos’ meaning emotion. Putting it all together, it means having a lack of words for emotions.

Alexithymia is not a clinical diagnosis, and mental health professionals do not consider it a disorder. Some signs of alexithymia include problems with introspection and struggles with communicating emotions. People also experience difficulty in identifying and responding to emotions in others.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is something called logorrhoea. This is a communication disorder that causes excessive wordiness and repetitiveness. It causes people to be incoherent. Logorrhoea is commonly classified as a symptom of mental illness or brain injury.

Social situations can be acutely difficult for those managing these disorders. Funeral professionals must recognize the signs and offer the appropriate support.

The truth is that while AI can mimic human writing styles, it lacks genuine sentiment and understanding. AI can result in humorous yet entirely unrealistic obituaries. AI is limited in understanding human lives and emotions. The experiment highlights the fine line between AI's capabilities and human touch regarding tasks requiring sensitivity and understanding.

When paying tribute to the deceased, the words in a eulogy and obituary play a vital role. A beautifully written eulogy provides listeners with an opportunity for deep introspection.

But, as technology creeps into every facet of our life, it's unsurprising that the Lifehacker website published an article about using AI to write obituaries in July of this year. The author, Stephen Johnson, experimented with AI models to write fictional obituaries for living individuals. While the AI-produced obituaries captured various aspects of people's lives, they tended to be exaggerated, inaccurate and sometimes wildly inappropriate.

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While technology is rapidly advancing, AI struggles to grasp the uniqueness of the human experience. Johnson ultimately emphasizes the need for human connection and genuine emotions in tasks like writing obituaries. This is where your experience as a funeral director can truly shine.

Many people turn to books when offering support to grieving people. There are numerous books on the subject of grief. Some, like George Bonanno's *The Other Side of Sadness*, challenge the traditional five-stage grief model. Megan Devine's *It's OK That You're Not OK* questions the notion of finding solutions for grief and emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual's grieving experience.

This past summer, I had the opportunity to meet up with a Toronto-based writer named Mitchell Consky. His book, *Home Safe*, was released in November last year. As his father dealt with cancer, Consky drew on his background in journalism. He interviewed his father daily and made audio recordings. Consky's book discusses feelings surrounding loss and grief in a genuinely poignant way.

The book started as an essay in the *Globe and Mail* in June 2020. "As soon as it hit, I got a wave of responses – many from men," recalls Consky. "What made the article resonate was not how remarkable it was, but how universal my story was for so many." Consky says that many people are connected to the idea of "role reversal." The idea is that the child becomes the parent, and the parent becomes the child.


*Home Safe* also touches upon the ideas of stoicism and masculinity. "Men tend to armour themselves up," he says. "My father armoured himself and used humour to cope with the situation. My biggest difficulty as a journalist was trying to crack that armour." Consky acknowledges that it can be difficult for men to speak to their fathers, and sometimes a terminal illness provides the opportunity for a change. "When you lean into these difficult conversations, you can understand people in ways you wouldn't normally."

I asked Consky if he was in a room full of funeral directors how he would respond when asked how his book could be of value. "I think that if the directors looked at the families they serve, they could see the 'rocks' of each family unit. These are the people who try to keep things all together. They provide the shoulder for everyone else to cry on. My book allows an opportunity for these people not always to be this rock."

Consky mentions that he adopted a soldier-like mentality when it came to the care of his father and felt that he couldn't break. "The conversations and writing provided me with therapy and a release. It allowed me to internalize my emotions."

The power of *Home Safe* is that it can be a catalyst to spark much-needed conversations. It is Consky's sincere hope that the book is an antidote for the "rocks" of every family who feel they need to keep their emotions bottled up while they attend to the needs of others.

I sense that *Home Safe* could be a unique tool for funeral homes to provide support for those dealing with loss – especially men.

I welcome your input on any books or articles that have helped your clients process and deal with their grief. 

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



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



## LABELS

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

Ask a simple question; get a simple answer, right? This summer I was at a big-box hardware store looking for some help on a small DIY flooring project. The flooring aisle was loaded with adhesive products; more than 20 including a few familiar brand names and lots I've never heard of. Not being a flooring expert, I decided to seek help from a store employee. I looked around and noticed an employee looking bored.

"Can you please help me or introduce me to someone knowledgeable regarding your flooring adhesive products?" I asked.

"That's not my department," was the reply.

"It's not really my department, either. May I ask, do you happen to know someone who can help me?" From where we stood, a lot of staff could be seen scurrying around, busy like mice in a maze with their shopping lists for online pickup orders. He said, "Don't ask them; don't even try, cuz they won't help. See way over there, try customer service."

After the counter staff finished their personal sounding conversation, I explained that I needed "like really specific" help in flooring. "Would you like me to page someone?" was the offer made by a person labelled "Cashier" to which I replied, "Yes, please."

I headed back to the flooring aisle and true to her words, an announcement "flooring associate to flooring customer waiting" was soon heard over the store's PA system.

It's a long drive back to my little tiny town with no hardware store, so I continued looking around for other items. While waiting for assistance, I took a lengthy technical call, which I'll get back to shortly. A few moments later, a keener labelled "Trainee" asked me a simple question: "Are you finding everything you need?" I said, "No, I need help in flooring." She happily agreed to help me.

When we arrived at the flooring aisle, I asked which adhesive she would recommend. She said, "Wow, there are a lot of choices. Sorry, I don't know anything about this stuff, but just look at the labels and I'm sure you'll find clues." Hmmmm, labels and clues, eh?

Depending on where you go and what you are buying, labels are important! For instance, while in Japan years ago, there was a brand of dish soap with exactly the same shaped bottle as a brand of peach juice and an orange salad dressing. What do you do when you can't read the label? I take the lid off and smell it. These three particular Japanese products smelled almost exactly the same. Once removed from the context of the soap aisle or condiment aisle in the store, it was a culinary adventure.

There were 20 different kinds of adhesives. There were powdered products in paper sacks, premixed pastes in plastic bags, large plastic pails and small plastic tubs. There were two-part mixtures to be blended together just before application and some that said "pressure sensitive." I wasn't interested in smelling any of them.

While label gazing, an older fellow sauntered up and said, "Finding what you need?" His label said "Flooring Expert" and I asked him if he was properly labelled. He was! This fellow was great. He was patient, kind, thorough and really knew his products; you know, like one of us death-care folks!

He asked me a few questions about the building, the subfloor material, the floor, the exact floor covering I was installing and about the traffic. He then recommended two products that would work. The price difference was huge, almost double, so I asked him which one he would recommend. He said that depended on me. "Are you in a hurry? Are you trying to save money or want the cheapest? Do you want the best outcomes and ease of replacement down the road when it is time to put down new flooring from damage or wear?"



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He grabbed the most expensive one and pulled the tab on the label to reveal a small plasticized booklet with application instructions. Once peeled back from the tub and fully opened up, the label was actually a ten-page, multi-fold booklet with really small print instructions in English, French and Spanish. He said this is why the product costs so much.

He went on to recommend that the cheaper product, if used correctly, would be the best choice but it would take a little practice to get the hang of mixing and applying it. As he explained other benefits, like less packaging waste, longer shelf life and the ability to mix any size batch needed, I was having a déjà vu to my earlier technical call.

“Hi Jeff, simple question for you today. I’m trying your pink stuff, Eck-O-Gel. How long should I leave it on for? It doesn’t say on the label.”

That’s a simple question with no simple answer. “Can you tell me about the condition you want to treat?” I asked. Courtesy of the big-box store, we had time for a chat and when we finished, she said, “That sure wouldn’t have fit on the label. Maybe you should write an article about Eck-O-Gel.” Challenge accepted!

Welcome to Eck-O-Gel! It is different than every other gel you’ve tried. It smells different because it contains natural ingredients like pine balsam. Keep the lid on tightly as it is designed to “gel.”

Generally speaking, all human skin and tissues are not the same. Different kinds of disease, injury and medico-legal procedures can make the same body parts take very different amounts of time and product to be properly preserved or desiccated.

Small razor burns and skin slip on ears, nares and fingers can be treated with a thin coating of gel and left in place. As it dries, it leaves a rubbery texture that makeup can stick to well.

Minor skin slip can be treated the same way. Brush on a thin layer and allow it to dry uncovered. Sometimes more than one layer is needed. It can preserve and patch, and often cosmetics can be applied directly to the newly preserved and sealed surface. These techniques are great before embalming and on ID view type preps.

If it is a simple and not too deep complication, like a soft ear or soft nose that didn’t quite get enough solution, instead of a hypodermic treatment, gels are effective. Clean the surface of the ear or nose and brush on a two- to four-millimetre layer of Eck-O-Gel inside and out, coating all structures. Don’t forget behind the ears and into the ear canal and nostrils and cover with plastic film. Leave it for an hour.

For the same problem, but worse – as an example, the nose, eye, ear or finger is bruised, swollen or abraded (broken and scratched) – apply four to six millimetres thick and leave at least two hours. Remove the plastic, swab the nostrils and ear canals, wash away any residue and apply Satin Cream.

In cases of slightly puffy eyes, Eck-O-Gel will produce excellent results when applied on eye caps before arterial embalming. Coat the eye caps with a thin layer of gel and pose them. If you aren’t going to embalm right away, be sure to remove them and replace with Smile-coated eye caps one to two hours later. This will prevent over embalming and prevent further swelling during injection.


Badly bruised and heavily swollen eyes need a generous layer of the gel on the eye caps and two to four millimetres thick on eyelids before embalming. It should be reapplied after embalming until desired firmness and bleaching is achieved.

In cases of burns, gangrene and bedsores or open cancer, apply a 10-millimetre layer of gel before embalming and cover with plastic wrap. It can also be left in place under plastic after embalming.

I like to fill an empty Smile syringe with Eck-O-Gel and keep the cap on until I use it. The syringe makes it easy to cauterize enucleated eye sockets, autopsy and donor cases, incisions, trauma and surgery sites. The Smile syringe keeps your hands clean and gives precise control to direct and dispense the product too.

For autopsy and donor cases, treat skin flaps by applying a five-millimetre-thick layer of gel under the skin as soon as you open the body. Leave in place while embalming. Apply again while suturing for more leak proofing. Suture a length, place the cone tip under the sutured area and squirt gel under the sutures. When it comes through any suture holes, it will gel, giving extra security.

Whether it is a big-box store or a funeral business, there will be lots of products, staff and questions involved. Ask yourself, is there enough information on a label that says 20 gauge for a family to make good choices? How about a 20-index label on embalming fluid? Is there enough information for an embalmer trainee to make good choices on that label?

May I ask you, are your staff members properly labelled? Do they know and easily share the information that a label can’t? I’m Jeff from Eckels; I’d love to help you with your label challenges. 

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



## Finding grace at the end.

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# Grief

the unwelcome journey

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

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

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

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

Visit [www.griefjourney.com](http://www.griefjourney.com) for more grief support resources.



Dr. Bill Webster

# A SUMMER OF GRIEF AND LOSS

by Dr. Bill Webster

The summer of 2023 will go down in the annals of Canadian history and in many personal memories as one of loss and grief. We have seen fire and flood, death and disaster, crisis and catastrophe on a scale rarely seen in modern history. In Canada, we experienced fires in the West and North, floods in the East, rising temperatures and changing weather patterns. Other parts of the world battled more powerful hurricanes and a host of traumatic events that have taken our breath away.

U.S. President Joe Biden said recently, “I don’t think anybody can deny the impact of a climate crisis anymore. Just look around: historic floods, more intense droughts, extreme heat and wildfires have caused significant damage like we’ve never seen before, in Hawaii, Canada and other parts of the world. We’ve never seen this much fire.” Biden called it “a reminder of an unfolding global disaster.”

In 2021, Emily Chung, CBC’s science, climate and environment reporter, pointed out, “Forest fires leave behind water-repellent soil crust, making landscape prone to erosion, landslides. A few short months after a devastating wildfire season, many B.C. communities are cleaning up after disastrous floods that have swept away highways, submerged homes, triggered deadly landslides and forced thousands more to evacuate.”

But more recently, Chung wrote: “We are dangerously near some climate ‘tipping points.’ When it comes to climate change, a tipping point is a major, irreversible change that happens suddenly when a certain threshold is reached, such as a certain temperature. A new study suggests that as early as 2025, England and France could suddenly get a new, colder climate, as the Atlantic Ocean Current that gives them their normally mild winters is close to collapse.”

Many families around the world have lost loved ones in earthquakes, fires, floods and other disasters. Their grief will be complicated by the suddenness and unanticipated aspect of their loss, but also by the trauma of witnessing or even imagining the horrific events that took their loved ones’ lives. In some cases, the bodies were so charred by fire that they were unidentifiable, which adds to the complication of saying goodbye.

She continues: “Many still think that most climate changes are gradual and linear and that in theory, those can be gradually reduced and even reversed if we cut and remove harmful emissions from the atmosphere. But tipping points are different. They can happen suddenly, like an on-off switch, pushing climate systems into a completely new state. And they’re generally irreversible.”

Admittedly, climate change is not my area of expertise, although I observe it with both alarm and fear for the future of my grandchildren.

My concern as a grief counsellor is the effects these current situations have on people who are experiencing such profound losses. Loss, by definition, occurs when you are deprived of something or someone that was of value to you.

Many families around the world have lost loved ones in earthquakes, fires, floods and other disasters. Their grief will be complicated by the suddenness and unanticipated aspect of their loss, but also by the trauma of witnessing or even imagining the horrific events that took their loved ones' lives. In some cases, the bodies were so charred by fire that they were unidentifiable, which adds to the complication of saying goodbye.

We have watched in horror as wildfires have wiped out entire communities. In other areas, we saw similar devastation by floods. We can only imagine the trauma of the physical and material losses these people have suffered. The loss of a home in any circumstance is difficult, but added on is the even more difficult trauma of losing material possessions. Things like TVs and furnishings can be replaced, hopefully by insurance, unlike sentimental keepsakes – photographs and family heirlooms – that have been handed down for generations. These things are not just possessions but are part of our past, and are irreplaceable.

While physical losses are hard to cope with, what many are struggling with – and will be for many months and even years to come – is more a “psychosocial” or symbolic loss. Psychological losses are more intangible and include changes in one's sense of control and safety; changes in identity or self-worth; or changes in world view related to experiencing a natural disaster.

Here's the bottom line. Those affected by these disasters ultimately see it as the loss of the world as they have known it. It's the loss of their hopes and dreams, and their expectations


of how life was going to be. It's the loss of security and safety. Those touched by trauma ask, “If this can happen, what will be next?” And in their vulnerability, the only answer seems to be “anything.”

So, to be frank, grief counsellors and crisis management experts on scene for a few weeks just ain't going to cut it. Recovery from this is going to take a long time. And the only comment I can make on what that length of time will be is this: it will take longer than most people think.

People are going to need help to get through this trauma. They will need financial support, infrastructure and social backing to rebuild their lives in the areas of homelessness, community reconstruction and restructure, and ongoing debriefing and psychological support for the trauma so many have been through.

Words will not be enough. Sentiments like “we are here for you; we are standing with you; we will do everything in our power to support you” will be meaningless unless they are backed by significant, concrete and immediate action.

Many look at the fires in Western and Northern Canada, and the floods in the East, and are thankful that it didn't happen here. But it would be the ultimate denial not to see our common vulnerability in the current climate and say “this could have been me.”

It is when we realize that reality that we will join together to say, “What are we going to do about it?” 

Dr. Bill Webster is the director of the Centre for the Grief Journey, and can be reached at [www.GriefJourney.com](http://www.GriefJourney.com), and on Twitter @drbillwebster.

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# REBUILDING THE FUTURE

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM ATLANTIC PROVINCES FUNERAL DIRECTORS AND SERVICE CONVENTION

by Lisa Johnston

**R**ebuilding the future was a fitting theme for the first Atlantic Provinces Funeral Directors and Service Convention (APFD&SC) since 2019. Hosted by the New Brunswick Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association at the Delta Fredericton from September 14-16, 2023, even the prospect of Hurricane Lee could not keep the 75-plus delegates from attending the event.

In addition to topics centred on navigating the future, the convention was all about reconnection, and spirits were not dampened by a bit of rain when the planned golf outing was rerouted to an indoor golf simulator. Hugs and handshakes were a common sight throughout the hotel lounge and lobby as guests checked in prior to the Thursday evening keynote address featuring Larry Stuart Jr.

Focused on the topic, *Funeral Directors in the Age of Cremation*, Stuart led delegates on the first path into the future with a discussion on the importance of realigning funeral service with the expectations of today's consumers.

"Don't be humble," said Stuart. "We are turning dead bodies into living memories. You are the expert and people are hungry for the information you possess."

According to Stuart, client families are willing to spend money – whether for a cremation or a burial; the funeral director just needs to help them find out what is important to them. To do this, funeral directors must understand the facts (including all the components of cremation) while effectively communicating in a language the consumer understands.

Following Stuart's words of wisdom, delegates moved from the lecture hall to the opening reception. While enjoying a seafood bar, appetizers and drinks, old friends reunited and new acquaintances were made as the socialization continued late into the evening.

Friday's agenda encompassed a full slate of education, featuring back-to-back presentations by Todd Reinholt. Kicking off with *The Purposeful Funeral Celebrant*, Reinholt discussed changing funeral trends and how using a funeral celebrant can help craft meaningful ceremonies.

"It takes courage to move in a different direction but if we don't change direction, we will end up in a place we don't want to be," explained Reinholt. "Thirty-five per cent of families are requesting no service which is a decision largely based on not receiving value for past service. We



Gloria Hogg, Jarvis Spires, Steve Spires and Bruce Hogg.



Batesville's Charlie Mattie and Jeff Geddes.



Andrew Huskilton, Don Andrea, Al MacLeod and Kelly MacLeod.



Paul Daigle, Faye Doucette and Bill Sampson.



Lisa Palmer at the GFD booth.



Kelly Murphy, Larry Stuart Jr. and Jean Vaillancourt.

have to start thinking like event planners to create great events to bring the community back together again.”

After a short break, Reinholt then moved on to the topic of creating ambience for his second presentation. He explained that ambience is a feeling or mood associated with a place including a funeral home. “What we see, hear, touch, smell and taste – whether good or bad – makes us feel something, and people remember what they feel.” Reinholt finished his seminar highlighting ways to create ambience both inside and outside the funeral home to provide a welcoming and safe environment.

Following lunch, technical experts took to the stage with consecutive seminars from Bill Sampson (Dodge Canada), Karl Wenzel (Genelyn Canada) and Jeff Chancellor (Eckels). Sampson was up first with an important topic on exposure to diseases, viruses and bacteria. For the past three years, death-care professionals have been hyper-focused on COVID-19, but Sampson stressed past diseases should never be forgotten.

“Embalmers are an extension of the health-care system,” said Sampson. “In the prep room, we are faced with diseases; we are faced with viruses; we are faced with bacteria. So, we need to be sure we’re protecting ourselves and the general public.”

Wenzel’s presentation tied into Sampson’s by moving past the dangers of working with deceased bodies to the risk of chemical exposure. “None of the products are 100 per cent safe,” noted Wenzel, referring to all the major brands used in Canada during his presentation on chemical safety dos and don’ts. “We know what they do to the body but do we know what they do to us?”

Chancellor took a different angle by reminding delegates that people feel what they see. He then led the audience on a jour-

ney of what he has “seen” in the profession around the world while asking how funeral professionals can improve their service standards, especially when it comes to body preparation.

“Everyone is trying to maximize stuff (such as space in the cooler) but nobody is trying to maximize service,” said Chancellor. “Or what it looks and feels like to the consumer on a meaningful level. If they were, we wouldn’t be seeing that 50 per cent reduction on embalming or quality caskets or the volume of dollars coming into our facilities.” Chancellor went on to explain that funeral homes are in the “show” business and whoever shows the best gets the business. As a result, embalmers need to ensure they do their best in clinical care.

With the education portion of the conference wrapped up, delegates enjoyed a free evening. Some gathered for dinner in downtown Fredericton while others participated in the lively activities centred around the Harvest Music Festival.

It was back to business on Saturday morning with the annual general meeting. Jim Bishop called the meeting to order followed by a moment of silence to recognize those lost over the last four years. The meeting then continued with Amy Shaddick presenting the New Brunswick association report on behalf of president Adam Martin.

“The focus this coming year is on growing the association and engaging new members,” reported Shaddick. “The other main concern is finalizing the agreement with the Department of Public Safety as we’ve been without a contract since March 2023.”

There was no report provided from Nova Scotia. Atlantic Province Convention secretary-treasurer Bruce Varner presented both the Newfoundland and P.E.I. reports on behalf of the association presidents who were not in attendance.



Julie Maifrini and Jennifer Blakely with Life's QR.



Karl Wenzel and Chuck Ferris.



Eckels' Jeff Chancellor.

“On behalf of Newfoundland, a new board was elected this past year with two new members, Shane Moulond as chair and Brent Abbott. Cremation legislation is set for final approval with the minister. In October 2022, Newfoundland started using its new government portal to register deaths with Vital Statistics along with requesting burial permits.”

As for P.E.I., it has been two years since a funding increase for social service funerals. They are in the process of approaching the minister of social development and housing to work toward receiving higher rates.

Varner also provided the Atlantic Convention treasurer's report.



The Fundy Funeral Home team, left to right, Monika Ouellet, Tennille Snoggrass, Tanya Hachey, Kathy Tyler, Paul Daigle (Belvedere), Billy Tyler, Bruce Hanson and Terry Rogers (kneeling).



Andrea Love, Susan Barrett and Jane Pigott.



Classic Memorials' Carl and Mike Nelson.



CFHC Online's Robert Weeks.




Cutting the trade show ribbon with David Keirstead, Amy Shaddick, Jim Bishop and Bruce Varner.

He stated the convention had been gaining good momentum which was unfortunately sidetracked with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of having no convention since 2019, the bank account was depleted. That will no longer be the case following this year's success.

"I believe in this convention and this year we have done fairly well," stated Varner. "I want to give a huge shout-out to our suppliers because without their support, we absolutely would not be able to hold this event." Varner will continue his role as secretary-treasurer with the next convention scheduled to take place in Charlottetown.

Recognizing the importance of connecting with supplier members, Varner encouraged all delegates to attend the Saturday afternoon condensed trade show. Delegates enjoyed perusing supplier booths, displaying everything from memorialization products to pre-need services and chemical supplies. All the while, they had their "passports" stamped for a chance to win great prizes. The relaxed mood and enjoyment carried through to the banquet where there was no better way to close the convention than with dinner, the hilarious antics of hypnotist Ian Stewart and a night of karaoke.

This year's Atlantic Convention had it all: educational seminars, entertainment, a trade show, plus the opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues. Delegates returned to their businesses refreshed, energized and possessing the tools needed to continue building their futures. 

# BAO EXPLORING SOLUTIONS

by Jim Cassimatis, Interim CEO/Registrar, Bereavement Authority of Ontario

**A**s I continue in an interim role, I have heard loud and clear the concern about labour shortages facing our profession in Ontario.

Labour shortages are a result of attraction and retention factors. While the retention matters are more appropriately addressed by those employing funeral professionals, I believe the regulator has a role in addressing the factors that may attract more people to become licensed professionals.

I have had many discussions with bereavement sector associations, colleges and a number of individual funeral and cemetery professionals. While these shortages are not limited to the funeral profession, we are actively exploring an array of solutions to shortages in the number of funeral directors (FDs), particularly in rural and northwestern Ontario.

I am working with our licensees and education providers to have:

- Short-term improvements to support better services to grieving families and relief for overworked funeral directors.
- Long-term improvements in access to education for modern needs of people wanting to enter the profession – including those younger and more mature.

Solutions could include expanding work practices of assistants to free up directors for responsibilities that require a licensed FD, and greater accessibility to college funeral director programs.

Here's what's happening in the sector to address this issue.

## **ACTIONS FOR SHORT-TERM RESULTS**

### **More hybrid learning**

As the bereavement sector regulator in Ontario, we are promoting and supporting an increase in online education at Humber College in Toronto and Collège Boréal in Sudbury, offering education in the French language.



Jim Cassimatis

The reach of the college programs could be greatly extended into northern Ontario and everywhere/anywhere by offering much more funeral director education through online learning. Post-secondary education institutions have become nimbler during the two years of COVID-19 restrictions when online learning temporarily became the norm. Humber and Boréal already know how to do this – and do it well – in a hybrid model of online and some in-person learning.

Fixed-place, old-school formats have been part of the problem for more remote communities and smaller ones in Ontario for getting access to the programs. This issue applies to recent high school graduates and people seeking a second career.





P R E S E N T S

# Acts of Kindness

**ANIKA APOLLON** | BIRTHDAY WONDERS

While working full-time as a funeral director in Toronto, Anika Apollon started thinking about how to help needy children — especially those with their families in shelters.

Anika has had a first-hand understanding of the financial barriers single-parent women face. “Being a young mom, in school full-time while raising my children, opened my eyes to the other side. During my time of adversity, all I could think about were the things I wanted to give to my kids, but I couldn’t.”



So Anika decided to take action and founded a remarkable charity called Birthday Wonders. While the essentials like rent, food and clothing came first, Anika thought about the emotional well-being of children. “A child’s birthday is truly a special occasion, but for those kids in the shelter system, it can be a real challenge for a family to celebrate this time,” says Anika. Birthday Wonders provides a delightful birthday party for families who may not have the financial means to put something together.

Birthday Wonders deliver the birthday box, cake, balloons, and food to the front door. The shelter caseworker will then facilitate the party with the children participating.” The birthday box has been an enormous hit with the children. The boxes have been a powerful tool, showing them that they matter and are special.

The gratitude and joy these experiences have generated have fuelled Anika’s vision. There are countless magical moments. Anika hopes that awareness of Birthday Wonders grows and that she can delight more children on their special day.

For more information, please visit [birthdaywonders.ca](http://birthdaywonders.ca)



*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](mailto:mbrooke@timeformystory.com)*

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The distance-to-education barrier can be minimized through hybrid online and in-person learning – with a bias favouring more online/virtual learning. Hybrid learning will provide:

- More convenience;
- Lower cost to students; and
- Greater accessibility to FD programs.

‘The sooner the better’ is our message to our educational partners. We support and applaud their efforts to address this issue.

### **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships at funeral homes, local to each student, would also be a big plus for anyone looking to enter the profession. Different from internships, these apprenticeships will provide much more direct experiential learning in a funeral home from the early part of the programs, in addition to the pre-existing internships.

We have started discussions with an existing apprenticeship program and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to establish an apprenticeship program in Ontario. These are early days but appear promising so far.

### **Professional mobility**

We will continue to recognize the qualifications and licensing from another North American jurisdiction to enable and encourage funeral directors from other jurisdictions to work in Ontario. This is contingent on each such person passing the BAO’s jurisprudence exam in order to work in the province as FDs.

### **Expanded role for non-licensed staff**

An expanded role for funeral director assistants (FDAs) would enable funeral directors to provide more licensed services to grieving families.

This would involve changing how the non-licensed FDAs work in our sector. The expanded role would see FDAs conducting funeral rites and ceremonies, which are currently part of many funeral directors’ standard practices. (Celebrants already fill this role at various funeral homes.)

For the last several months, we’ve had a funeral home in Ontario piloting this idea. I look forward to sharing with the sector what has been learned in the pilot in a future article.

More broadly, funeral homes could make greater use of their non-licensed staff to do non-licensed work. This would add

some efficiencies to day-to-day operations – again freeing up funeral directors to provide care and services requiring a licensed FD.

I recognize that, on its own, this idea wouldn’t solve the problem. But it could be part of the solution in the short and long term.

## **ACTIONS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY**

### **More colleges offering FD programs**

Actions for the long term, to sustain the number of FDs, require changing how we welcome and retain the professionals we licence and regulate.

The BAO has had discussions with another college in Ontario, which has been considering the development of a new funeral director education program. Currently, such program offerings in Ontario are limited to Humber College and Collège Boréal.

Having more colleges recognized by the BAO to provide the FD programs in other parts of the province would make the profession a more practical choice for younger people and those considering a second career.

### **Sustained teamwork**

It’s important that we at the BAO, as the regulator, keep working with and supporting our partners to address this issue that is so important to families, our licensed FDs and people interested in joining the profession.

It will take our sustained efforts as a team to implement the solutions.

### **About The BAO**

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) is a government-delegated authority and not-for-profit corporation administering provisions of the Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002 (FBCSA) on behalf of the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery. Responsible for protection of the public interest, the BAO regulates, ensures compliance with the law, and supports licensed:

- Funeral establishment operators, directors and pre-planners;
- Cemetery, crematorium and alternative disposition operators;
- Transfer service operators; and
- Bereavement sector sales representatives across Ontario.

The BAO is wholly funded by licensee fees (not tax dollars). 

# CANA'S 105<sup>TH</sup> CREMATION INNOVATION CONVENTION A SUCCESS



The 2023-24 CANA Board of Directors. Front row, left to right: Tim Borden, Sandra Walker, Caressa Hughes, Robert Hunsaker, Lindsey Ballard and Ryan Wiseman. Middle row, left to right: Jason Widing, Lara Price, Kim Price, Dirk Bearden, Tim Koch and E. Gene Allen. Back row, left to right: Jimmy Lucas, John Gooback and C.R. Lyons. Not pictured: Stephen Bassett, William Clark and Denis Desrochers.

The Cremation Association of North America (CANA) celebrated its 105th Annual Cremation Innovation Convention with over 225 of its dearest friends in Washington, D.C. The event attracted professionals from across funeral service and welcomed many new faces to enjoy connecting with colleagues, viewing innovative supplier solutions and hearing inspirational presentations.

“We’re so glad to mark 105 years of innovation together in D.C.,” remarks convention planning advisory group chairperson Kim Price. “The energy of a CANA convention is palpable with presentations, meals, networking and the trade show in one room together. More than 60 exhibitors brought their products and services that keep our profession operating smoothly.”

At the core of every CANA convention are innovative sessions, and the D.C. program made good on this tradition with the following presentations:

Brent Patterson, memorial care specialist and licensed funeral director with Tribute Memorial Care Southwest, and InSight Institute vice president Glenda Stansbury kicked-off the CANA convention with a discussion on providing the right environment to grow and nurture employees who might be *Blocked, Burned Out, Blasé*.

Eric Layer, partner at McKee Wallwork, drew on key findings from national data about family preferences around disposition, memorialization and the funeral profession generally – and shared ways for attendees to respond to these trends by *Targeting with Data*.

*Regulate, Recruit and React: A Quick Take on Current Issues* featured a number of speakers. Caressa Hughes, CANA president, presented a *Regulatory Update* on legislative changes to watch; past president of the ICCFA Educational Foundation Jim Price discussed tools for *Recruiting Veterans* to serve families; and Scott Smith, past president of CANA and Texas



Chris Benesch wins a Fire Tablet.



Colin Benesch is presented with AirPods from Jessica Booker, National Guardian Life Insurance Company.



Candy with exhibitors.



Kyber Columbariums' Derek Maher, right, visits at the convention.

Funeral Directors Association, offered his tips on *How Can I Pitch In?* when disaster strikes your community.

Your Funeral Coach Founder Lisa Baue presented seven essential components of mentoring, discussing *Why Mentoring Matters* to both owners and team members.

Death educator and suicidologist Dr. Sara Murphy assisted attendees in *Responding to Suicide Death and Recognizing Suicide Risk* – both for the families served and among members of the funeral profession in a special two-hour session.

*continued on page 64*

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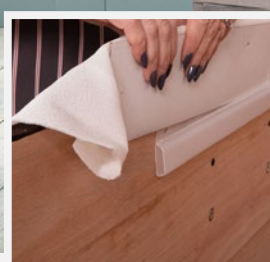
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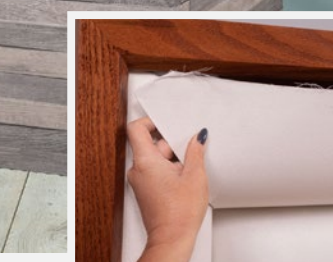
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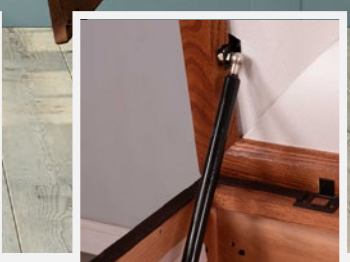
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## TYLER WEBER PRESENTED WITH ROBERT SNODGRASS MEMORIAL AWARD

The Alberta Funeral Service Association (AFSA) has a long tradition of presenting the distinguished Robert Snodgrass Memorial Award during its annual conference awards gala. Presented to an individual demonstrating outstanding contribution to the association and the funeral profession at large, this year's recipient, Tyler Weber, checked all the boxes.

According to past AFSA president Chris Jong, the board nominated Weber for the award because of the leadership and the extra effort he put forth to help the association and funeral providers throughout the province better navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

As president of the association from 2019-21, Weber had initially set his focus on government relations, which was quickly sidetracked with the start of the pandemic early in his presidency. However, he is quick to point out all successes were a group effort rather than anything he accomplished individually.

"I recognize my success was built off the success of others," says Weber. "I see this award going to the entire board of directors who served throughout the pandemic under my presidency and Chris's presidency after me. There were people who stepped up and when the going got tough, the tough got going. It would have been really easy for us to crumble, but we stayed together, so even though the award has my name on it, it belongs to the entire board."

While the pandemic stalled negotiations with Community and Social Services, AFSA was able to approve the new Public Guardian and Trustee agreement. For the first time in the association's history, AFSA also pivoted to an online conference, juggling multiple day-to-day tasks with the new workload brought about by the pandemic.

"The Alberta association reached out to a lot of the other associations early on to find out the restrictions in their jurisdictions," notes Weber. "That led to FSAC really becoming the linchpin for galvanizing associations across the province. There were weekly presidential meetings so we could all get together to discuss what was going on and talk about successes or find providers of PPE."

Weber continues, "The amount of time the board had to dedicate to the association increased tenfold – getting together to discuss our own restrictions, interpreting their implications, and then getting the information to members in a timely



Tyler Weber, centre, receives the distinguished Robert Snodgrass Memorial Award from Chris Jong and Eden Tourangeau.

fashion. I'm proud of the fact that we were able to do that so quickly while also searching for answers to the questions our members had."

Weber grew up in the family business, Weber Funeral Home, alongside his dad Marvin and his brother Layne. He graduated from the Western School of Funeral Service in 2005 and let his name stand for election to the AFSA board in 2014. From the start, he found his passion in




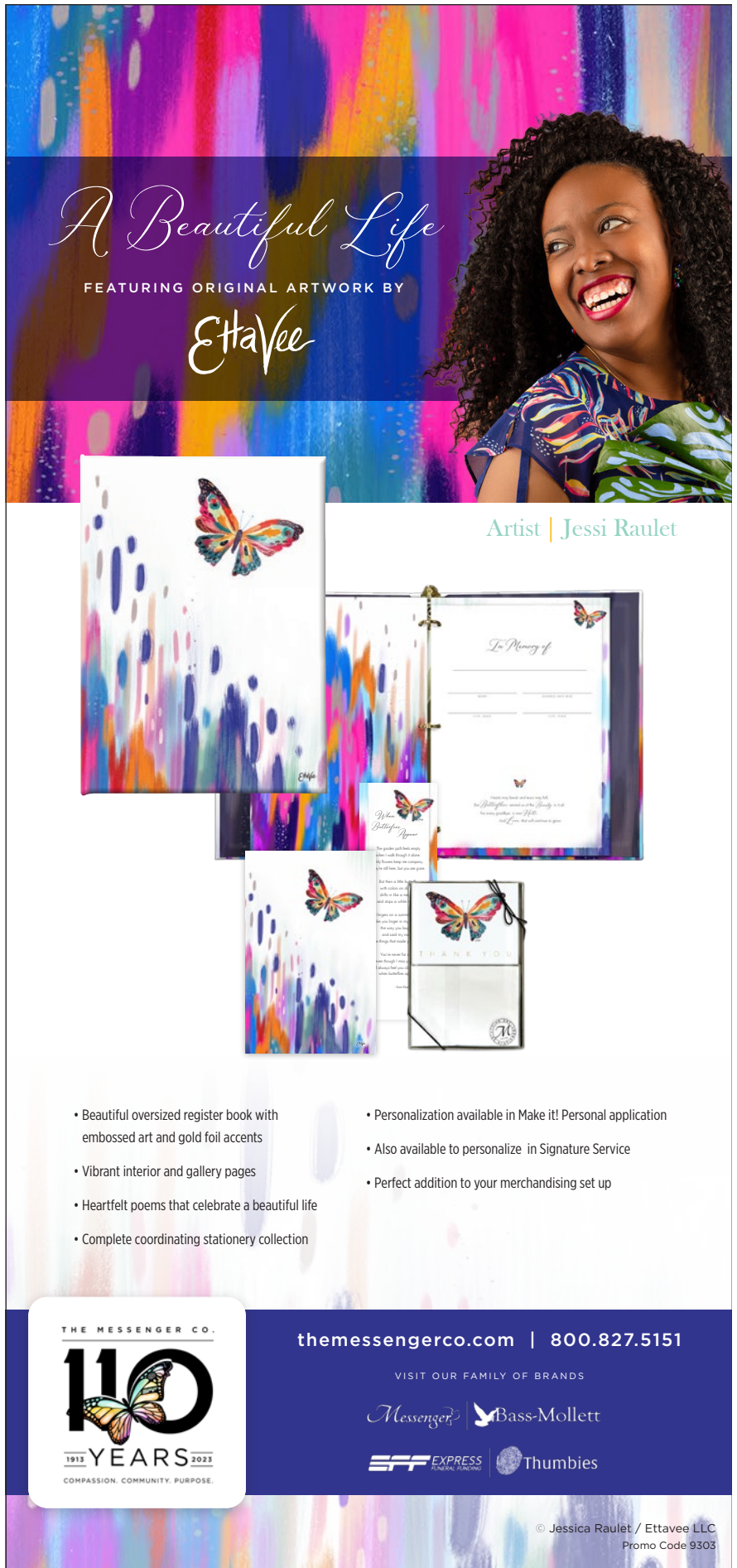
Kristie Tourangeau, centre, received recognition for 30 years of service at AFSA's President Banquet and Awards Gala. The Long Service Award was presented by AFSA vice president David Root and president Eden Tourangeau.

government relations; something he is still involved in today as a member of AFSA's government relations committee. In addition, Weber serves on FSAC's governance and nominations committees, the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board funeral education review committee and the Alberta Funeral Services Act review committee.

Weber is humbled to receive the award and extends his thanks to past mentors, family members and those who worked alongside him on the board. "The only reason I received this award is because of the mentorship that came before me and I truly mean that," says Weber. "If it wasn't for the leadership I received from past presidents Dean Ross and Stuart Murray, and from my vice president Chris Jong and my treasurer Eden Tourangeau, I definitely wouldn't be here."

Weber is also thankful for the backing of his family. His wife Andrea and his parents Marvin and Margaret were in attendance to witness the presentation of the award. "When the stress of leadership would bubble over the brim, my wife Andrea was there to listen and help me gain clarity and perspective. My brother Layne and father Marvin supported me greatly with enduring the additional share of work at our office as I was called into government meetings, media interviews and association activity. I could not have fulfilled the leadership role without my family's support."

While Weber's resumé demonstrates all the reasons he deserves the Robert Snodgrass Memorial Award, those who know him truly understand the impact he makes every day. Award presenter Chris Jong sums it up best. "Whether it is dealing with fellow colleagues on current day-to-day issues or the ... government ministries, Tyler's passion and dedication to our profession is unmatched." 



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# IN MEMORIAM

Ronald Cecil McEachern  
(February 24, 1935 – August 27, 2023)

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Ronald (Ron) McEachern, a funeral director and embalmer who began his career as a driver at Speers Funeral Chapel in 1954 before becoming an apprentice of the late George Speers. He would go on to become licensed and worked at Speers until 1980, when he purchased the funeral home with two colleagues. He served as president until 2004 at which time he sold the funeral home to the current owners. Ron was recognized for 25 years of service by the Saskatchewan Funeral Service Association in 1983 and earned the Lifetime Funeral Service Award for his contributions to the profession.

Ron became a member of the WaWa Shrine in 1987. In 1993, he served as director, and was asked to assist in fundraising for the Patient Travel Fund. Ron designed the current WaWa Shrine Patient Transportation Fund 'In Memory Cards' and he raised funds for the Shriners Hospital in Montreal, Quebec for many years. Ron was always thankful for the support and generosity that allowed the WaWa Shriners to support a large number of children from Saskatchewan to achieve a happier, healthier lifestyle. Through Ron's many years of work and

fundraising, his fondest memories included travelling across Canada, the U.S. and into Europe with his loving wife Lynn by his side. He always enjoyed spending time with his family and friends.

Ron will be deeply missed by his sons Tim (Sheryl) and Alan (Elena); grandchildren Brian (Sheri) McEachern, Kevin (Rachel) McEachern, Kyle (Rachel) McEachern, Ira (Eugene) Baronovskaya, Larissa (Chris) McEachern, and Veronica Lynn McEachern; six great-grandchildren; and many other family members and special friends. Ron was predeceased by his loving wife of 53 years Lynette McEachern; father and mother Dolphy and Isabel McEachern; father-in-law and mother-in-law Leo and Louise St. Onge; and sister-in-law Betty St. Onge. His loving memory will be cherished by all who knew him.

A celebration of Ron's life was held on September 11, 2023 at Speers Funeral Chapel in Regina with Rev. Dexter Van Dyke officiating. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Ron's name to the WaWa Shrine Patient Transportation Fund or to a charity of choice. ☐

# IN MEMORIAM

Janis Avellana

It is with sadness that we announce the unexpected passing of Janis Avellana on Tuesday, August 1. Janis was the marketing communications manager for ManageWise, the company who provides administrative support to FSAC and AFSA. Janis was responsible for website updates, marketing material and her most recent project was the FSAC Academy. She was diligent, kind, excellent at her job and an absolute delight to work with. She will be deeply missed.

A funeral mass was celebrated on August 11, 2023, at St. Albert Catholic Church in St. Albert, AB. Following the mass, Janis was interred in Holy Cross Cemetery in Edmonton. Arrangements were entrusted to Connelly-McKinley St. Albert Funeral Home. ☐







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# CCFS CELEBRATES ALBERTA




## GRADUATES:

Front row, left to right: **Sheri Arndt** – Cornerstone Funeral Home, **April Bolen** – Athabasca Community Chapel, **Elena Braun** – Parkland Funeral Home & Crematorium, **Lisa Demers** – Choice Memorial Cremation & Funeral Services, **Heather Ewert** – Park Memorial Funeral Home, **Courtney Hansen** – Connelly-McKinley Funeral Home, **Erin Hoffman** – Connelly-McKinley Funeral Home, **Madison Howdle** – Pointe West Cremation & Funeral Service and **Lauren Howse** – Parkland Funeral Home & Crematorium.

Back row, left to right: **Jessica Johnson** – Baker Funeral Chapel, **Jack Martin** – Martin Brothers Funeral Chapels, **Nash Mathers** – Parkland Funeral Home & Crematorium, **Brianne McDonald** – Connelly-McKinley Funeral Home, **Wyatt Petersen** – Wheatland Funeral Home, **Tyler Salmon** – Christensen Salmon Generations Funeral Home, **Kyra Souvie** – Park Place Funeral Home, **Cori Thacker** – Parkland Funeral Home & Crematorium, **Candace Wright** – Trinity Funeral Home and **Bailey Zoccole** – Westlawn Funeral Home. Missing: **Yukon Graduate Jennifer Groot** – Heritage North Funeral Home.

The Canadian College of Funeral Service (CCFS) held its Alberta and Yukon graduation banquet and awards ceremony on Saturday, April 29, 2023 at the River Cree Resort & Casino in Enoch, Alberta. Nineteen graduates from Alberta and one from Yukon were celebrated over an evening of celebration that saw the presentation of diplomas and several achievement awards.

Opening remarks were provided by CCFS instructor Rick Bilcowski while graduate Candace Wright delivered grace. Roger Girouard, president and program director, provided an inspirational message to all in attendance as did class valedictorians Jessica Johnson and Jack Martin. 

# ALBERTA AND YUKON GRADUATES

## PRESENTATION OF AWARDS



**CANADIAN COLLEGE OF FUNERAL SERVICE  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**  
(highest overall academic performance)  
Presented to Heather Ewert by  
Roger Girouard



**ARBOR MEMORIAL INC.  
JURISPRUDENCE AWARD**  
(highest overall performance in law)  
Presented to Heather Ewert by Andrew Earle



**DODGE CHEMICAL CO.  
EMBALMING TECHNOLOGIES AWARD**  
(highest overall performance in  
embalming technology)  
Presented to Heather Ewert by  
Kevin Armstrong



**IMPERIAL GROUP INC.  
FUNERAL SERVICE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**  
(graduate who best exemplifies integrity,  
honesty and teamwork amongst their peers,  
educators and the funeral profession)  
Presented to Jack Martin by Andy Jaynes



**ETERNITY'S TOUCH STEVE BILODEAU  
MEMORIAL BURSARY**  
(graduate who best exemplifies the impor-  
tance of memorialization for every life)  
Presented to Madison Howdle by  
Chantelle Bilodeau-Seton



**THE KYNDA AWARD**  
(graduate who exemplifies selfless giving,  
making a difference and active involvement in  
the community)  
Presented to Jessica Johnson by Sheila Bartsch

# GROWING, CHANGING AND SERVING: SCC CELEBRATES ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

The Saskatchewan Crematoria Council (SCC) is unique in Canada. Membership is open to, and includes, every crematorium operator in Saskatchewan. In cooperation with Sask. Environment, SCC has developed a set of best management practices that focus on operational issues. To remain a member in good standing, members must comply with these practices. Additionally, SCC organizes cremation technician training, certified workshops, equipment inspections and oversees the Complaints and Corrective Action Committee (that works in hand with the Funeral and Cremation Services Council of Saskatchewan on common cremation issues).

On May 11, 2023, SCC held their annual general meeting (AGM) in Saskatoon in conjunction with the FCSCS Spring Symposium.

“The meeting involved the presentation and acceptance of the annual financial statements, as well as the appointment of the accounting firm for the coming year,” says Darcy Thomas, SCC president. “The best management practices annual report to Sask. Environment was reviewed and all members remain in good standing with full compliance with the approved practices. No complaints were received or filed in 2022 and the Complaints and Corrective Action Committee did not have to be engaged. Members were reminded to be diligent in following and complying with the best management practices.”

At the AGM, it was agreed that membership fees will be increased to \$500 annually.

Thomas adds, “Costs of holding workshops have risen sharply in the past year or so and this will be reflected in future registration fees.”


Regardless, member participation and engagement remain high. Thomas recounts, “Last year’s group inspection tour was

well supported by member participation. Previous tours have seen up to 17 member locations participate with SCC organizing the inspection schedule and covering the cost of flights, accommodation, transportation, food, etc. for the team over the 10-day period. These costs are then prorated equally and back charged to the participating members. Each member covers the actual inspection fee for their particular retorts.”

The election saw two new members appointed to the SCC board: Raymond Bailey of Bailey’s Funeral Home and Yorkton Memorial Gardens and Crematorium, and Dan Martens of Swift Current Funeral Home & Crematorium. They join Darcy Thomas, president; Blair Derkachenko, treasurer; Bill Edwards, secretary; and board members Patrick Brown and Dustin Hall.

SCC continues to grow and provide structure, ethics, training opportunities and more to the cremation profession, as evidenced by a new event that took place on May 13. It was the first high-level cremation technician roundtable and it was held at PrairieView Crematorium.

“It was facilitated by Blair Derkachenko and Larry Stuart Jr. of Raven Plume Consulting,” says Thomas. “This was a five-hour session with 10 experienced cremation technicians participating to share detailed operational discussions, experience and solutions on topics such as scheduling cremations, scenarios to improve efficiency, managing difficult cases, repairs and maintenance, processing issues, lowering gas usage, safety and risk management, and emission control.”

The successful AGM is a precursor to what will undoubtedly be another highly successful year. The full compliance, well-attended events and growing number of workshops show that, as always, every member of SCC remains as committed as ever to serving families in need and the community at large. 

# FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS PEER SUPPORT

## IN THE THICK OF IT WITH BEREAVEMENT PROFESSIONALS

Since 2018, Funeral Professionals Peer Support (FPPS) volunteers have helped countless death service providers worldwide with burnout, PTSD, anxiety, trauma, isolation, substance struggles, workplace morale and more.

All bereavement professionals come together to support each other and to be supported via FPPS. Be that: funeral directors, para-funeral directors, embalmers, transfer staff, administrators, pre-need directors, cemetery staff, crematorium operators, cemetery sales representatives, management and owners, students and interns, grief therapists, aftercare specialists, funeral service education instructors and even hospital security, coroners, pathologists and pathology assistants. Please know that you are welcome, no matter what your role may be!

FPPS offers no-cost assistance in their monthly virtual meetings and in hosting “Stronger Together,” a podcast available on Spotify.

Three no-cost monthly virtual peer support meetings are hosted by Canada, the U.S. and Kenya. Anyone is welcome to attend, regardless of region. Each meeting has a varying theme and speaker. They focus on the most in-demand, current topic to help the individual know that they are not alone in what they are experiencing. See the website and socials at the end of this article for meeting dates and times.

They also offer a robust, affordable membership program.

The FPPS membership is newly revamped and has exceptional support services for the individual professional and their household members. At a reasonable cost of \$15 per month or \$150 per annum, membership includes:

- 24-hour helpline with licensed therapists
- Three accredited webinars per annum
- E-Therapy
- EAP program including:
  - Nutrition
  - Smoking Cessation
  - Household Finances
  - Supporting Teenage Children
  - and more

Owners and managers, inquire about purchasing a whole workplace membership to elevate your team today!


When an employer purchases membership for their entire team, an additional customized virtual meeting is included. FPPS consults with management and/or staff to find the best topic for a “whole workplace membership” virtual meeting to be held during a staff meeting. FPPS develops and hosts this scheduled event that provides a platform for discussion, actionable items and ongoing resources.

Membership acts as a great topper to existing company health benefits. Even more stellar is using the FPPS membership to provide a bonus to employees who may not qualify for full benefits or for firms that do not supply benefits to any team members.

Owners and managers, inquire about purchasing a whole workplace membership to elevate your team today!

Companies, suppliers and friends of funeral services, the work that FPPS does is key to keeping quality, healthy professionals in the profession. They are a non-profit that is registered to give charitable donation receipts. Your support and connections are imperative to FPPS’ operation. Email the address below to find how you can work together with FPPS to strengthen funeral service.

To all professionals in the field, your colleagues at FPPS look forward to seeing you at the next peer support meeting. Reach out any time for additional help or to join the volunteer team. Always remember, we truly are “stronger together.”

IG: funeral.professionals.support  
FB: Funeral Professionals Peer Support  
Email: [sponsorship@funeralspeersupport.com](mailto:sponsorship@funeralspeersupport.com)  
Web: [funeralspeersupport.com](https://funeralspeersupport.com) 

# 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

## **INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCFA)**

### **Leadership Summit**

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

### **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)**

### **Leadership Conference**

July 29 – August 1, 2024  
Ponte Verda Inn & Club  
Ponte Verda Beach, FL

## **ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)**

### **Educational Conference & Trade Show**

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

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

November 16, 2023  
Presenter: Howard Mammon

## **SELECTED INDEPENDENT FUNERAL HOMES**

### **Annual Meeting**

October 10-13, 2023  
JW Marriott  
Chicago, IL

### **NextGen Seminar**

January 28 – February 1, 2024  
Atlantis Paradise Island  
The Bahamas

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Caressa Hughes passes the presidential gavel to Robert Hunsaker.




Jennifer Blakely, left, and Julie Maifrini, right, visit with a delegate at the Life's QR booth.

Merendino Cemetery Care account executive Dan Cassin joined Foundation Partners Group's Bryan Mueller and Cole Waybright to show how to breathe new life into cemeteries and make them *Built to Last*.

Glenda Stansbury served as celebrant for the annual in memoriam service, recognizing family, friends and notable people the profession lost this year, including Todd Van Beck and

Robert L. Waltrip. The annual membership meeting saw Caressa Hughes pass the gavel to Robert Hunsaker to lead CANA as board president for the coming year. The Funeral Service Foundation and CANA also celebrated the attendees who won scholarships to enjoy the 105th Annual Convention. Many attendees took a post-convention tour of Arlington National Cemetery, attending a moving wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

This event would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of 23 companies. From the open bar to the inspiring sessions to the cemetery tour to the coffee breaks, CANA thanks all sponsors for making this event a success!

Association leadership now turns its attention to the 2024 Cremation Symposium at The LINQ Hotel + Experience on the Las Vegas Strip. This symposium, February 14-16, 2024, will focus on the latest ideas and trends in green funerals from services to memorials, disposition methods and permanent placement. Plus, keep on the lookout for details about CANA's 106th Cremation Innovation Convention scheduled a bit later than usual to avoid a crush of summer events in Chicago, Illinois. Save the date for September 11-13, 2024! Find more information by visiting [cremationassociation.org/education](https://cremationassociation.org/education). 

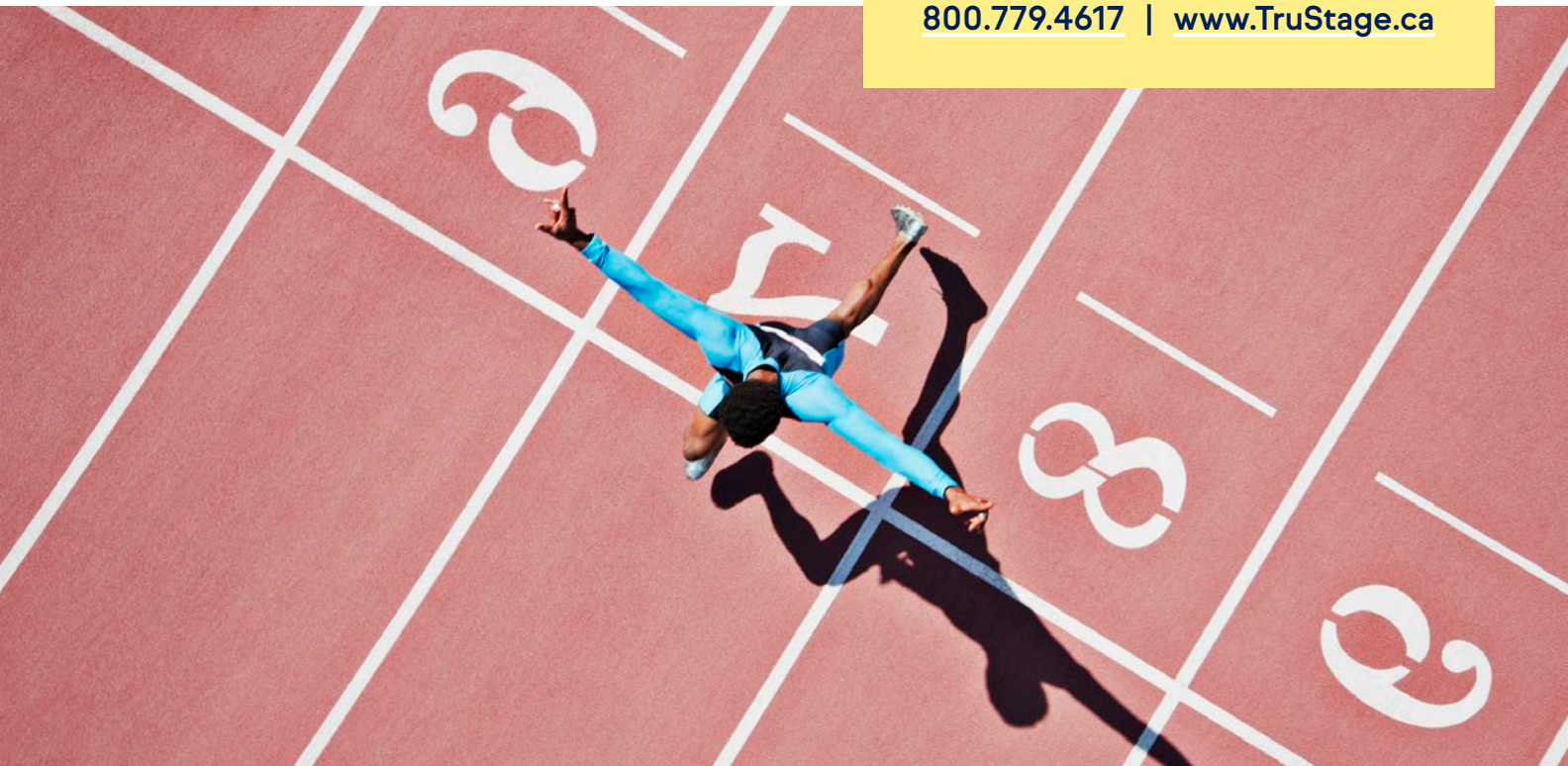


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