

# NETWORK

Canadian Cemetery Management

July 2023



## RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Allan Job serves as OACFP president

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



# RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Allan Job serves as OACFP president

By Lisa Johnston

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Allan Job



**OACFP**

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY  
AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS

# ASSOCIATION UPDATE

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

By Allan Job, President, Board of Directors

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

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

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

### The Baby Boom

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

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

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

### Technology

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Labour Shortage

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

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

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

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

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



Ken Munday



# ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Ken Munday, WCCA President

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you have any questions about WCCA or would like more information, please visit our website at [westerncemetery.com](http://westerncemetery.com) or send us an email.

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



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