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ALL IN A HARD DAY'S WORK

Life lessons have led John Perrotta to OACFP

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ALL IN A HARD DAY'S WORK

Life lessons have led John Perrotta to OACFP

By Lisa Johnston

John Perrotta is not afraid of hard work – a quality he brings to his roles with both the City of Hamilton and the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP).

The desire to commit his life to cemetery service started at a young age. As soon as Perrotta was old enough to work, he was recruited to join his dad on the grounds of Burlington's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

"I grew up in a household with parents who had immigrated from Italy, so the second I was able to work that is what I was doing," recalls Perrotta. "My father showed me the ropes of cemetery maintenance and his expectations contributed to my work ethic today. Anyone who is employed by their father knows how important it is to not disappoint."

Perrotta didn't disappoint, instead he shined, taking great pleasure in helping families and maintaining the cemetery to the highest standards. Upon graduation from university, he joined the office staff full time and remained with The Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Hamilton for the next 19 years,

servicing several roles including most recently as family services manager. In 2017, he joined the City of Hamilton as supervisor of cemeteries and was promoted to superintendent later that same year.

"Helping people is definitely the most fulfilling reward of this profession," says Perrotta. "When people come into the office, they are having the worst day of their life and you are there to make it a little better by guiding them through the entire process to help them make decisions and ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible. While I don't get that same personal contact in my current role as superintendent for the City of Hamilton, I do get to instill my principles and beliefs as to how we are treating families and the overall development of the cemeteries."

That desire to help families also extends to his colleagues across the province, which prompted Perrotta to join OACFP's mausoleum best practices committee in 2017.

"From that first moment I discovered the value of OACFP, I never looked back," says Perrotta. "From networking and meeting people to learning new things, the experience has been remarkable. I enjoy attending seminars and training sessions, or sending my staff, because we always come back more informed and more engaged, ready to tackle whatever our day brings."

When a vacancy opened on the board of directors in 2020, Perrotta once again did not hesitate to raise his hand. "At the time, I was already chairing a few committees and officially joining the board was an opportunity to give back even more while also offering my guidance on how to grow the association for the future."

Two years later, Perrotta accepted the request to step up once again, this time joining the executive on what led down the road to the presidency.

"It was never in my long-term plan to hold the president's seat, but when then president Steve Reynolds called me and asked



John Perrotta at OACFP's conference last October.



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John Perrotta, sixth from left, with the current OACFP board of directors, Philippe Lauriault, Shelley Challenger, Caley Ferguson, David Perry, Tim Vreman, Mark Richardson, Allan Job, Heather Earle and Darren Denomme.

if I wanted to jump on the executive, I said, 'Sure, whatever you need.' He replied, 'You know that means you're going to be president?' I said, 'Uh, yes, I guess it does, but sure, let's do this.'

Getting things done is exactly what Perrotta has been doing since his election as president at OACFP's last fall conference and AGM. He is a vocal voice, spreading the word about OACFP's latest offerings, including a vast array of educational programs.

"Networking is so important and I'd really like to see our education programs continue to expand to welcome more attendees," states Perrotta. "There is so much value in learning together. I recently attended a Trusted Advisor Training seminar and it was fantastic to meet so many new people in our sector."

In between his duties at the City of Hamilton and family responsibilities at home – Perrotta and his wife, Evangelia, have two boys, Christian, 10, and Leo, 2 – he is also hoping to make inroads with government policies during his one-year term as president.

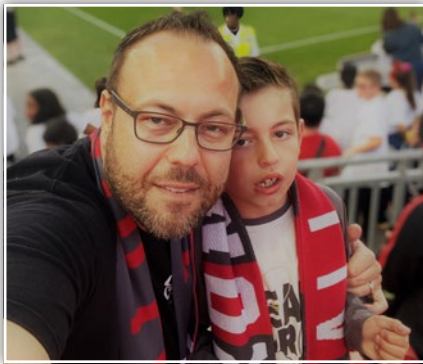
"Government advocacy is a really hot topic and always a challenge, so I would like to see some positive change over the next few months," he says. "We are doing a lot of work to have some regulations changed while also acting as the unified voice of the profession."



John Perrotta with his sons, Christian and Leo, and his wife, Evangelia.

One of the government tasks in the spotlight is the approval of Priority of Persons legislation. "We are currently one of the only provinces that doesn't have this legislation, which essentially states who has the rights to direct disposition of a deceased person. It would make things a lot easier for funeral homes and families if there was something in writing. Decision-making would be a lot easier without having to go to the courts and dealing with the challenges that brings."

Another government priority concerns crematorium emissions. "In Ontario, a lot of our crematoriums are being challenged to make sure they conform with arbitrary ECA [Environmental Compliance Approval] standards, which



Being a dad is an important role for John Perrotta.

basically say their pre-burn temperatures have to be 1,000 degrees. Many of our crematorium machines were not designed to run at that temperature and if they could, it would mean creating significantly more greenhouse gases. This is a huge concern for not only our crematorium operators but also our families. If we can't convince the government to set a more realistic temperature, crematoriums could be closing down which means families have to go elsewhere for cremation."

According to Perrotta, OACFP is the ideal place to come together to work on the issues, whether that concerns Priority of Persons legislation, crematorium emissions or the ongoing labour shortage. As a result, he encourages all death-care professionals to get more engaged with the association.

"To have one central place for all our members that encompasses cemeteries, funeral homes and crematoriums is invaluable," says Perrotta. "Our board is diverse and we have people from different parts of the sector making decisions. We always try to jump ahead of the current issues and we have a great relationship with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO). All this contributes to a strong association that is always here to serve our members."

For the next five months of his presidential term, this is exactly what Perrotta will be doing – working hard to lead OACFP in the quest for bettering the profession. **N**

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John Perrotta

ASSOCIATION UPDATE

When Those Who Care Need Care: Compassion Fatigue and Protecting Our Sector

By John Perrotta, OACFP President, Board of Directors

While the worst of the pandemic's impact is behind us, many of us know first-hand that burnout, resulting from chronic workplace stress, compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion, remains prevalent among bereavement sector professionals. These issues impact employee well-being, service quality and client satisfaction.

Addressing the root causes and their effects is a human and business imperative. The Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) is taking proactive measures.

Understanding the Challenges

Insights from a recent joint OACFP/Collège Boréal research project funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) sheds light on the significant realities of mental health issues within the bereavement sector:

- Forty per cent of professionals considered leaving the sector during the pandemic.
- Bereavement sector organizations had to make significant business adaptations, such as limiting normal service offerings and introducing new business protocols including virtual arrangements, virtual funerals and supporting families with new technologies.
- Complying with regulations, monitoring adherence to public health mandates and managing conflict with clients and within workplaces took time and resources and significantly affected employee health within the sector.

Research participants identified layers of complex causes, including: personal stress; extra responsibilities; irregular hours; understaffing; and uncompetitive compensation and benefits.

Beyond the human costs to us and our colleagues as professionals, these were also cited as reasons for considering leaving the profession altogether. Of course, departures will only fuel the very same root causes, creating stressful workplaces.

The study went on to discover that employers play a crucial role in recognizing and addressing mental health concerns among their staff. Signs of burnout or compassion fatigue include:

- Declining physical health.
- Negative lifestyle changes.
- Decreased job satisfaction.
- Increased absenteeism.

This also applies to leaders. While you are often concerned for the well-being of your employees, it is important to take stock of yourself, assess any warning signs and be proactive if you can. Not only will you be doing yourself a favour, but you will also set a good leadership example for your teams.

Supporting Mental Health with OACFP Education and Resources

Recognizing the urgency of addressing mental health challenges, OACFP offers a range of resources and services tailored to support its member companies.

- June 18, 2024 workshop: “Leadership for Change in the Bereavement Sector Workplace” is designed to help managers develop strategies for building a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Its co-hosts – OACFP, the Canadian Mental Health Association and Collège Boréal – aim to foster resilient employees. This workshop is free for all bereavement sector employees and provides three hours of CE credit for attendees.
- Members have access to our webinar library where there are numerous on-demand presentations and courses that address mental health concerns specific to the sector. Titles include: The Burnout Challenge, Compassion Fatigue & Vicarious Trauma, Self-Care for the Bereavement Professional, Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace, and more. Log in to our website and visit the OACFP ACE portal.
- Our weekly updates newsletter features articles on mental health in every issue, including access to our Action for Mental Health “Brave” series of videos, which provide detailed skills for managing stress and anxiety in the bereavement sector workplace.
- OACFP training programs, conferences and events regularly feature sessions that address the mental health needs of participants led by mental health experts and researchers in the field.
- Employee Assistance Program through Telus LifeWorks. This EAP service is available to OACFP member organizations and their employees with preferred pricing. It can provide invaluable confidential counselling and support to employees facing burnout, compassion fatigue and many other life challenges.

- Discounted GoodLife Fitness membership for OACFP members and your teams. The connection between our physical and mental well-being is well-established. Set an example yourself and hit the gym!
- OACFP’s networking events provide opportunities for members to lend a compassionate ear to a colleague who understands what they are experiencing. This human connection can be an important step in knowing you’re not alone in what can be a challenging profession.

We can enhance employee well-being, productivity and retention by prioritizing mental health.

Moreover, promoting mental health awareness contributes to stigma reduction and fosters a supportive work culture conducive to long-term career longevity within the sector – something we all want to see.

In closing, our members are caregivers – that’s what motivates and moves us. But sometimes, the caregiver needs some care. OACFP gets it. And we’re here to lend a collegial ear and offer quality training and vital services for our members.

By prioritizing the mental health of its employees, the bereavement sector can sustain its vital role in supporting individuals and communities through life’s most challenging moments. Together, we can build a resilient and compassionate sector for the benefit of all.

Drop me a line any time. **N**





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WCCA ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Ken Munday, WCCA President



Ken Munday

As we step further into spring, I am getting really excited about the upcoming Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC) Summit & Exhibitor Showcase in June. This is the first time the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA) has partnered with FSAC, or with any association. The upcoming summit in Winnipeg promises to be a great event and a wonderful opportunity to network with people we wouldn't normally meet. With the quality of speakers that FSAC has put together, everyone is sure to come away with new knowledge and tools to help their respective organizations. If you haven't registered for this unique event, please sign up as soon as possible. You will not want to miss the FSAC summit this year!

With the quality of speakers that FSAC has put together, everyone is sure to come away with new knowledge and tools to help their respective organizations.



The theme is *Better Together*, which is fitting considering FSAC brings funeral homes, crematoriums, cemeteries and suppliers together. WCCA is fully embracing this theme.

The theme is *Better Together*, which is fitting considering FSAC brings funeral homes, crematoriums, cemeteries and suppliers together. WCCA is fully embracing this theme. The presentations by Tina Varughese on “Better Together in the Changing Workplace” and Sébastien Sasseville on “Together to the Top: Building Dynamic Teams” promise to help us all work together better. What we will learn from them will certainly apply within our own organizations, but I believe it will also apply to the entire profession.

I am looking forward to the presentation by Wayne Lee as well. Mr. Lee provided the entertainment at a previous WCCA banquet in Edmonton many years ago. I have seen him a few times since, and he never disappoints. It will be interesting to see his presentation instead of watching his show.

It could be because I am a bit of a techie, but one of the presentations I am most excited about is “How will AI Impact Death Care?” by Marc Verbenkov. I am using AI more and more in my day-to-day work and it is very helpful and promising, if used correctly. I met Mr. Verbenkov last year in B.C. and have watched a few of his videos. He is a dynamic speaker, very intelligent and is an expert in AI. WCCA is the proud sponsor of this presentation and I’m looking forward to learning more from Mr. Verbenkov in June.

WCCA is hoping to have our annual general meeting (AGM) at the summit this year. However, this will depend on whether enough WCCA members attend for us to have a quorum. If we do not have a quorum, we will host a virtual AGM in September. We have several board positions ending this year. There will be one director position available for both Alberta and Manitoba, and two positions available for Saskatchewan. Our supplier director position will also be coming up for election. If you would like to join the board and contribute your knowledge and expertise to the continued growth of WCCA, please consider putting your name forward for one of these positions.

The Manitoba Funeral Service Association (MFSA) and Canadian Funeral Trade Association (CFTA) are also partners of the FSAC summit this year. It will be great to meet the members of these respective organizations as well, and to learn more about each association. Hopefully, this will lead to more partnerships or joint conferences in the future.

As always, if anyone would like more information about the summit or WCCA, or if you have any suggestions or ideas on how to continue to strengthen relationships across the profession, please do not hesitate to contact our WCCA administrator, Lorraine Piller, at administration@westerncemetery.com. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing everyone in Winnipeg soon! **N**



INNOVEXIA STRENGTHENS PÉRENNIA TEAM WITH KEN MUNDAY AS PRODUCT MANAGER/ SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Innovexia, a trusted partner providing records management solutions for the death-care profession (Pérennia), is proud to announce the appointment of Ken Munday as product manager/senior account executive. With a distinguished career spanning over 25 years, Munday is a seasoned professional and currently serves as president of the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA). His extensive experience in delivering technology solutions, coupled with his leadership in the profession, makes him a valuable addition to the Pérennia team.

Innovexia is a dedicated partner of the death-care profession. The company is committed to providing collaborative solutions that go beyond mere functionality, ensuring funeral homes, cemeteries and professionals have a reliable ally in managing their records effectively.

“Pérennia has really been a great partner,” says Meghan Henning, general manager of Lakefield Cemetery and Crematorium and past president of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP). “They have given us back time in our day that we would have otherwise spent on administration and can now spend enhancing the services we provide our client families.”

Michael Jacques, president, adds, “We are excited to welcome Ken Munday to Innovexia. His wealth of experience and sector leadership align perfectly with our commitment to being a true partner for the death-care profession. Innovexia is not just a software provider; we


are invested in the success of our clients, and Ken’s role will be pivotal in furthering that commitment.”

In his position as product manager/senior account executive, Munday will play a crucial role in advancing Innovexia’s mission to provide innovative and comprehensive records management solutions. His responsibilities include leveraging his expertise to guide product development of Pérennia and ensuring clients receive solutions to meet their evolving needs.

In addition to his role as president of the WCCA, Munday has been a featured speaker at numerous events worldwide and has contributed articles to various trade magazines, solidifying his reputation as a thought leader in the death-care technology landscape.

“I am honoured to join Innovexia, a company that truly understands the needs of the death-care profession and is committed to being a trusted partner,” says Munday. “I look forward to contributing to Pérennia’s growth and continuing to provide cutting-edge solutions that empower our clients.”

Innovexia’s commitment to being a partner for the profession is reflected in its collaborative approach, ensuring that clients receive personalized support and solutions that enhance their operational efficiency.

For more information about Innovexia and Pérennia, please visit www.innovexia.ca and www.perenniasolution.ca or <https://www.facebook.com/perenniasolution/>. 

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