

The Southerner

Newsletter of the SCCFA

December 2018



Tis The Season To Be Merry?

We are so quickly approaching the Christmas season. Christmas is such a special time of the year, one of my personal favorites. I commented this week that aside from Christmas being so special in my year because of my religious beliefs, Christmas is now special in my year because I have two small children. I will get to see their eyes light up on Christmas morning. I will get to enjoy good meals throughout the season with our sweet family. We will see Santa. We will go to special church services. Christmas is a wonderful time of year. The world seems to be a little brighter around Christmas. You get to give gifts. You get to receive gifts. The season is filled with parties, laughter and time with people you may not ordinarily see. Saying that, it is important to think of those who have lost someone very special to them this year. I know well that people in this community will be celebrating Christmas without their child who has always been there on Christmas morning. They will celebrate without their spouse who has made Christmas special for 60 years. Of course, I could go on and on as I think of the families I have served this year.

That first Christmas after a loss is a hard one. There is an empty chair at the table waiting to be filled. I was particularly close with one of my grandfathers. I remember feeling so sad the first Christmas he was gone because the chair he always sat in at Christmas dinner was empty at the table. I encourage you to remember those who have lost loved ones and reach out to them on Christmas day. Do not be afraid to talk with them about whomever it was they have lost. Share a fond memory. Say a prayer with them. Remind them that they are loved by you and by others in their life. People need to hear that. Often, after, the funeral, people quickly forget about a family who has experienced a loss. That is expected—we live in a busy world. The great author C.S. Lewis, when writing about the death of his wife wrote, "It doesn't really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist's chair or let your hands lie in your lap. The drill drills on." On Christmas day, for those that have lost a loved one, the "drill drills on". The grief that was there continues to be there even with all of the festivities going on around them.

I will never forget a story from an older funeral director I knew. A family in this community lost their little boy from a disease at around 4 a.m. Christmas morning. They had hoped he would make it through Christmas to open his gifts. They came to the funeral home the next day with a load of toys. They buried all of his Christmas presents including a bicycle with him. How heart breaking! We live in a world with so much hurt and at the same time have been so richly blessed.

So, as you move through the Christmas holiday make it a point to reach out to someone who is in the midst of "the valley of the shadow of death."

Sam James is a funeral director and is the owner of James Funeral Home & Northlake Memorial Gardens in Hunterville.



Save the Dates

2019 CONVENTION & EXHIBITS

Hosted by

Southern Cemetery Cremation & Funeral Association
Texas Cemeteries Association

May 19th ~ 21st

San Antonio Marriott RiverCenter

More information will be available in January

LITTLE THINGS

By Miles Penn

Before coming to work at a cemetery, I worked for a lawn and landscape company. My primary job was to make sure the trees and shrubs that we installed and maintained looked good. After working in the cemetery industry for more than 20 years I am still a plant and tree man at heart, but I have come to realize that maintaining the cemetery grounds is only a small part of a person's experience when they visit your cemetery. I have learned that it is some of the little things that make a big difference in a families visit to your cemetery.

When I speak of the little things that make a difference, it could be as simple as picking up trash on a family's lot or in front of your office. Something as small as picking up a piece of paper can influence whether or not a family will choose to use your cemetery. Another simple thing I have learned is that a phone call can make a big difference if you are getting a complaint or a compliment. Our cemetery has multiple decoration clean ups every year, even though these clean ups are well posted you will always have people that leave decorations on their plots. The maintenance guys noticed that some decorations had not been picked up from a lot, they notified us, and we called the family to let them know that they needed to be picked up. The family was so grateful that we called them, the next week they bought pizza for the entire maintenance staff in appreciation. Some other things could be as simple as carrying a plant from the car to the grave or bringing a bucket of water to help clean off a family's monument. The biggest thing I have learned in working at the cemetery is not how many lot sales, or monument sales or how many funeral services you are having. It is the personal relationships that you make with the families that you serve. There are at least 20 to 25 people a week that I stop by and talk to when they are visiting our cemetery. These personal relationships that I have cultivated mean more to me than any aspect of my job. With most of these people I know what is going on with their families, if they have been ill or if they are celebrating a birthday, anniversary, etc. It might be as simple as waving to them as you see them, or you could stop and chat if you have the time.

I will always be a plant guy, but I am glad that I have become a cemeterian. I hope that I continue to learn something every day that will help me better serve the families that entrust us with their loved ones, and I hope that any advice that I give can be a help to you serving your families.

Splitting The Difference ~ Ossuaries Then and Now

By: Lauren Blevins



Cemeterians, funeral professionals, and embalmers are all storytellers. We are often trusted with the responsibility to ensure that someone in our care is memorialized: whether that means in stone, the written word of obituaries, entombing, or burying. The options are limitless to our own creativity. Our history began in the form of burial rites and rituals. These burial rites and rituals have existed in one form or another for thousands of years evolving throughout history depending on culture, religion, and technology. The ossuary is one of those transformations existing in different forms today from its original roots in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

What is an ossuary? The definition from Wikipedia defines ossuary as: *"is a chest, box, building, well, or site made to serve as the final resting place of human skeletal remains. They are frequently used where burial space is scarce. A body is first buried in a temporary grave, then after some years the skeletal remains are removed and placed in an ossuary. The greatly reduced space taken up by an ossuary means that it is possible to store the remains of many more people in a single tomb than if the original coffins were left as is."* This definition, in its original concept, dates back to its Persian, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox roots. The largest known ossuary with this definition contains the remains of nearly six million people neatly arranged in subterranean catacombs beneath the streets of Paris. Ossuaries can still be found and used here in America. An example is in parts of Louisiana where there is a great deal of ossuary usage because of limited burial space and most burials happen above ground.

How has the use of ossuaries changed in modern day cemeteries? To begin with, ossuaries do not have to be used with traditional burials, but can be used for cremated remains. Nine years ago we installed our first ossuary. It is situated at a beautiful spot on the bank of our lake in our largest park. It has a broad base and a statue of an angel affixed to the top. The intent of the ossuary was to deter scattering cremains in places that were not intended for scattering. The theory was to offer this to our families who use our cremation services for free...yes, I said free. The ossuary also offers a place to memorialize their loved one. We have all waited on cremation families and often hear some variation of these phrases: "Dad just wanted me to scatter his remains in the lake where he loved to fish...or in the ocean...or on a mountain ridge...or in grandma's backyard... or in mother's flower garden." Who knows! They desired their ashes to be scattered in a favorite place or places. We strongly caution against what is referred to as "Wildcat Scattering" due to the loss of a place to memorialize a loved one for generations and the potential psychological ramifications as a result of losing a "place to mourn." In part, ossuaries are encouraged over scattering because often times scattering can mean the loss of the story or a story missed or untold. Dare I mention the cremated remains we have received phone calls about years later found in storage units and car washes. Yes, car washes. These families, without a doubt, set out with the best of intentions to scatter their loved ones at some desired spot, but seemingly never make that trip to the top of that mountain in Hawaii or hiking up The Appalachian Trail. Maybe it is because of money or simply because life tends to get away from them. With these thoughts in mind, it is understood why we discourage cremation scattering.

If families choose to use our free ossuary they are provided a placement certificate. The families must sign a form ensuring they understand that their loved one's cremains will be co-mingled underground, and it can never be undone, retrieved, or moved. Suddenly you have created an instant memorialization site for a family who may have potentially missed out on this opportunity. The same could be said for scattering gardens properly regulated and within the confines of a cemetery. While free placement typically returns the families to our park, we do offer options to buy a plaque to memorialize their loved ones on the outside designated area of the ossuary. This option has proven to be successful with some families who might have not otherwise ever chosen to have any memorialization at all.

A paradigm concept of the ossuary has shifted from one way of thinking to another, but so has our culture surrounding burial, especially that of cremation. Cemeterians have to continue to find ways to help our families memorialize loved ones so we can ensure that their stories are not overlooked or forgotten. Ossuaries are one way to help facilitate families to meet that change.

"The living owe it to those who no longer can speak to tell their story for them."

— Czesław Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*

My fellow Funeral Professionals,

What does the word “sales” mean to you? The meaning of that one word can vary from person to person. Some think of car salesmen and others think of retail outlets. In our industry, sales can equal revenue via new funeral sales or upgrades to existing preneed contracts. For the purpose of this conversation, I want to touch on preneed funeral sales. What does a family gain from purchasing their funeral arrangements in advance? Peace of mind, controlled costs, documenting what they want, and the gift of giving. Perhaps one of the greatest rewards for a funeral professional is to know that families are having conversations about celebrating their loved one’s life. In addition, all of us would agree that there is a tremendous difference in the arrangement room when the next of kin walks in and there are no arrangements in place versus a paid in full preneed put in place by their loved one.

My question today is what’s in it for you? America experiences over 2.8 million deaths per year and far less than half have any type of prearrangement in place. It is an opportunity for each of us to positively affect our business in 3 major ways.

1. Market Share
2. Positive financial impact today
3. Positive financial impact long term

Market share-None of us has the ability to guess who will pass and when therefore our business can be difficult to predict. What we can do, with a bold preneed effort, is feel confident that when a member of our community does pass, they will call you to serve their family because of a previously planned preneed.

Positive financial impact today-Although many different professionals would offer different positions on preneed insurance products versus funeral Trust products, it can’t be denied that both avenues provide a financial gain for your business.

Positive financial impact long term-Perhaps this is the simplest of the 3 benefits. Although the family has secured “yesterdays” prices, would you like the guarantee of revenue and profits from that “old” preneed or take the chance that the family picks a different firm and you receive 0 revenue and 0 profits?

I am a strong proponent of a bold preneed sales program. The 3 items I listed above are literally undeniable and can be the cornerstone of your business for generations to come.

Happy Selling..... *Tim Rodgers*

SOUTHERN CEMETERY, CREMATION AND FUNERAL ASSOCIATION

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The ICCFA University is a 5 day program designed to offer intensive instruction and networking opportunities in a college-campus setting. It is located at the Fogelman Executive Conference Center at the University of Memphis, TN offering six colleges and two graduate programs.

There are seven colleges to choose from:

21st Century Services
Cremation Services
International Studies
Funeral Home Management

Land Management & Ground Operations
Leadership, Administration & Management
Sales and Marketing

THE GOAL:

The Scholarship covers all registration fees, housing and meals for the ICCFA University for the calendar year in which awarded. Recipient is responsible for their own transportation. The ICCFAU is held in July 2019 at the Fogelman Conference Center in Memphis, TN.

THE RULES:

1. Applicant, or the firm with which the applicant is affiliated, must be a current member of SCCFA in good standing for the fiscal year.
2. Applicant must have been employed with a member firm in the cemetery or funeral industry for at least one year.
3. Only completed applications will be considered by the selection committee. Missing information on the Personal Data, Scholarship Questionnaire, or Certification of Intent form or failing to sign it will disqualify the applicant.
4. Alternates will be selected in the event that the scholarship recipient is unable to attend ICCFAU, or is no longer in the employ of the sponsoring member.
5. Applications must be received no later than March 1st, 2019; SCCFA scholarship recipient will be notified no later than March 31, 2019.
6. Only the individual award recipient is eligible, and the award is nontransferable.
7. All award decisions of the SCCFA Scholarship Committee are final.
8. Award winner will be publicly announced in the June 2019 issue of Southerner Newsletter.

HOW TO APPLY:

1. Carefully read and complete the entire three part application.
A) Scholarship Questionnaire B) Personal Data Form C) Certification of Intent
2. After completing the application, please sign and return to:

SCCFA Scholarship Committee
PO Box 681053
Marietta, GA 30068

SCCFA 2019 Scholarship Application

A. Scholarship Questionnaire

Submit all answers on a separate sheet of paper. Answers must be typed and double spaced. Identify each question below by number, and repeat the question prior to answering. Do not write your name on the answer sheet. Each answer sheet will be given a number before being submitted to the Scholarship Committee to keep the identities anonymous.

1. Why did you enter the cemetery or funeral industry?
2. Describe the duties and responsibilities of your current position.
3. List any community service or professional associations in which you are currently active and explain your participation.
4. What continuing education courses have you taken in the past year?
5. Describe your philosophy of customer service.
6. What are your long-range professional goals?

B. Personal Data

Name: _____ Home phone# (____) _____

Home Address: _____

Member Firm: _____

Address: _____

Firm telephone #(____) _____ Firm Fax #(____) _____

E-Mail address _____ Length of employment _____

Current Position _____ Title _____

Previous Employment:

• Employer _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

Position _____ Length of employment _____

• Employer _____ Telephone _____

Address _____

Position _____ Length of employment _____

Education (include current courses of study if applicable):

• School _____

Location _____

Course of Study _____ Completion Date _____

C. Certification of Intent

Name _____

I hereby certify that:

- A. This Southern Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association Scholarship application has been personally completed by myself, and to the best of my knowledge, the information contained herein is correct and complete.
- B. If awarded the SCCFA Scholarship for the year 2019, I am able to attend the ICCFA University program at the Fogelman Conference Center in July of 2019 in Memphis, TN and am still employed by the sponsoring member firm on that date, or I will forfeit the scholarship.

SIGNATURE _____ **Date** _____

Please return completed application to: SCCFA ~ PO Box 681053 ~ Marietta, GA 30068 or email to sccfa.office@gmail.com

Please visit the SCCFA Website often as information on membership, events and announcements are updated often. www.sccfa.info

If we can be of any assistance, please contact the association office at 770-880-7210 or email us at sccfa.office@gmail.com We would be pleased to hear from you.

And always remember.....

Life is short, be Southern

