



NYSFDA



LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY

Class of
2016

Class of 2016

KENDRA M. HARRIS CONSTANT

Harris Funeral Home
Roscoe, NY

MARTIN J. "MARTY" HUGHES

Betz, Rossi, Bellinger & Stewart Family Funeral Homes, Inc.
Amsterdam, NY

TYLER E. KENT

Walter J. Kent Funeral Home
Elmira, NY

NICOLE M. LARUE

LaRue & Pritcher Funeral Home & Cremation Service
Ogdensburg, NY

JULIA GOODMAN O'BRIEN

Hammill Funeral Home
Winthrop, NY

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We asked the 2016 graduates of the NYSFDA Leadership Academy to respond to the following question:

As an association leader, how would you deal with the changing landscape of the association industry, especially as it relates to recruiting and engaging tomorrow's association members? What changes would you recommend to ensure the member benefits are current, competitive and cutting-edge?

We asked them to answer thoughtfully as they reflected on what they learned during the 11-month program. Their essays were creative, serious, insightful, humorous; a true reflection of their own leadership style.

The second graduating Academy class dubbed themselves the "Fab 5" and they hope the following can be used as a tool for future NYSFDA leaders.

Kendra M. Harris Constant

Harris Funeral Home | Roscoe, NY & Liberty, NY



As the world is ever-changing, so is funeral service. Association leaders will be well-equipped to deal with the changing landscape of funeral service by recognizing the critical issues that affect funeral directors.

The NYSFDA Leadership Academy is a great way to build awareness and interest in one of our most valuable resources: the New York State Funeral Directors Association (NYSFDA). Through the continued efforts of the staff and volunteers behind the Leadership Academy, the critical issues of the industry are being uncovered.

While NYSFDA staff work tirelessly to raise awareness and strategize around the critical issues, many funeral directors wait for the solutions to be delivered. A meager five funeral directors (our officers) along with 17 of their colleagues VOLUNTEER their time on the NYSFDA Board of Directors in an attempt to keep up with current issues and provide information to work with the NYSFDA staff. That is not enough.

If funeral directors are to keep up with the demands of the ever-changing world and prosper, change will have to happen from within the industry itself. Funeral directors must meet the change with urgency. We must resolve to join the NYSFDA team and direct the change, just as we direct funerals, with equal amounts of tenacity, dignity and refinement.

It is time to stop complaining and start directing our own future. That is what we can do for ourselves. That said, time is a rare commodity. No one would argue that lack of time is part in parcel to a successful funeral business.

My recommendation to the staff and officers of the Association is to consider this lack of time when planning. Look beyond the audience of funeral directors who are sitting at every regional meeting. Look beyond the funeral directors who attend every continuing education class.

For a true “read” on what funeral directors want, change the way you gather your information. Instead of polling the audiences of funeral directors who are at meetings, make a phone call, send a canvas letter,

and use social media or any avenue to include all funeral directors when seeking input or feedback.

My recommendation to funeral directors is to respond. The greater the number of funeral directors involved in the process, the better equipped the NYSFDA board and staff will be to understand our needs as they advocate on our behalf and provide resources.

It seems senseless that we have control of every field of service EXCEPT the most growing one . . . cremation. Funeral directors who need to sell muffins and coffee to stay afloat should open a bakery and close their funeral homes. We can sell flowers and muffins and rent limos and apartments but we can't cremate a body. We are our own worst enemies.

I truly believe that we allow the New York State Cemetery Association and the public control our industry, and this adds to the daily struggles of the funeral director in many ways, but especially in the way it contributes to our struggle with lack of time.

Funeral homes should be allowed to open and operate a crematory. If we are trustworthy enough to bury a body, we should be trustworthy enough to cremate one. Some of you will make the argument that this would allow cemeteries to open funeral homes. I agree. If a person is qualified and completes the required certification requirements, there should be nothing to stop him/her from pursuing his/her dreams. If you are confident in your skills as a funeral director, you've got nothing to be afraid of.

The following are some suggestions that the association should consider when lobbying for changing the laws:

- ALL cemetery burials, whether full burial or cremation, should require the supervision of a funeral director. In some cases direct cremations will turn into a graveside service giving the funeral director more opportunity to sell an urn and urn vault.
- Plot owners of those people who sneak into the cemetery at night to bury their loved ones and dogs should be fined. No future burials should be permitted until the fines are paid in full.

- Cut out the duplicate paperwork:
 - A Body Delivery Receipt is useless. Combine this step with the Burial Transit Permit. Require both parties to sign it at the time of disposition, and it will serve the same purpose.
 - The “Agent Form” we are required to fill out on every funeral should be eliminated on a funeral with cremation as disposition. The three-page form that “families” are required to fill out has the same exact language on page 2.
- Create a law that requires families to identify a body at the funeral home before cremation or burial. That direct cremation or burial will then turn into a “private viewing.” There will be people who have no family. Require the funeral director to maintain a labeled photograph of the body in the file. This won’t take any time at all, and it will protect the funeral director against future problems.

These are just a few ways to improve and sustain OUR industry. They will not involve more regulations and departments. They won’t require more paperwork or inspections. They will help the funeral director make an honest dollar doing work related to our profession. They will also save us precious time, not only because they will increase efficiency, but these types of changes could have kept us out of the food service industry.

My recommendation to the association is to lobby for laws which will perpetuate the professionalism of the funeral industry; these laws will benefit and attract new members. Pay more attention to those funeral directors who love this business with a passion. This will grow the funeral industry and ensure success for hard working funeral directors. ::

Martin J. "Marty" Hughes

**Betz, Rossi, Bellinger & Stewart Family Funeral Homes
Amsterdam, NY**



Now that I've been a Licensed NYS Funeral Director for 20 years I can say that we've undergone considerable change just in the past 5 years. Technology and information continues to reach consumers in our industry much faster than ever. Our families are much more educated than when I first started in 1996. We need to continue to instill in our consumers and families the value of funeral service and the value of the funeral director. It's so easy today to just go online and purchase something from the comfort of your own home. We need to keep our profession relevant to today's consumer by engaging them and leading them within our own communities. By being active participants I think we can be looked upon not only as professionals but as community partners.

As an association leader, I would deal with the changing landscape of the association industry by using the tools given to us by our association. I learned this past year about the many tools at our member's fingertips which help all of us get the word out about our industry and about the many wonderful and dynamic individuals who call themselves funeral service professionals. We here in New York State are the best of the best. We have one of the first and best professional associations in the United States to fight for us when it matters.

Over the years we've seen the greatest generation and how they stepped up to the plate and gave all by sacrificing for others. Volunteer organizations were at their peak. If we can tap just a small percentage of that generations' love for their fellow man and community we will all be better off. The greatest challenge in our Association is to keep the bond of face to face contact. All of the meetings and continuing education through our association fosters friendship and insight into the changing industry. The landscape of the association industry will forever be changing. I think that this NYSFDA we are a part of has figured things out and has changed with our times. The way the Association has recruited the next generation has been through social media outlets and new technology. They have kept up with the times.

The data compiled throughout the many years that our association has been in existence is readily available to all association members. Our Association is here to help each practitioner better herself and better serve the consumer.

To me, the more we educate each other and bounce ideas off of each other the better we will be able to sustain our profession into the next generations.

There are many ways we can change. We continue to gain more insight into what our consumers in our state want. We need to encourage our communities to reach out to our profession's leaders so they can understand more about who we are and what we do. Our families will know we are on their side in their time of greatest need.

We have recently seen the changes in laws on Burial Transit Permits and Food and Beverage in the funeral home. Huge changes have been implemented within the past few years in funeral service in New York State. Our Association has been at the forefront of many of these battles in our state Legislature. I know they will keep fighting and they will ensure all of our hard work will not be in vain.

Our NYS Funeral Director License matters. Our profession matters. I would recommend this Leadership Academy program to all who are willing to step up and take an active role in our Association. I'm proud to be part of the Class of 2016 "Fabulous and Fearless Five." I will remember this time for the rest of my life and I know I will become a better Funeral Director and will be able to help lead because of the time I've spent with these intelligent and truly amazing individuals.

That last statement includes everyone who works at the New York State Funeral Director's Association. I want to say thank you also to the "Great 8" who paved the way for the Leadership Academy to continue into the future and ensure that our NYSFDA continues to help us all be a success. ::

Tyler E. Kent

Walter J. Kent Funeral Home | Elmira, NY



The changing landscape of the association industry, whether it be statewide or local associations, hinges on progressive technology and social constructs that have been altered as a reflection of the impact made by technology. In the position of association leadership, it will always be important to stay ahead of cultural, technological, legal, and social advances in order to maintain advantages for the members of the association.

Funeral directors are now entering our profession with a profound affinity and knowledge of information gathering technology and have more often shunned the traditional concept of relying on others in a world where information is freely available. Despite the growing trend for self-reliance, an association can still provide relevant and beneficial information as long as that association strives to ensure the knowledge base available to its membership is current and concise.

Laws and regulations are in constant evolution and carry deadlines and consequences to business owners and professionals who do not keep up with the most current legal requirements. Associations are a major benefit in this arena, especially to smaller businesses; it is much easier to turn to an organization that makes it a priority to stay up to date with all regulations and then provide that data to members.

By taking away the workload from firms or individual members, membership value is created by providing the service of cataloging and presenting all relevant legal requirements.

Another concern that most businesses share, although some are not even aware they have the need, relates to changing social structure of communication and engagement with consumers. The concern that a business will become stagnant or out of touch with their target audience of consumers is a constant threat in any business, but funeral directors are especially susceptible to being blissfully ignorant of new opportunities or capabilities to reach consumers and benefit families.

In the case of funeral service, younger future association members will likely be drawn to an organization that not only offers assistance and knowledge of cutting edge possibilities, but can also help show the veteran directors in a firm how to build a firm's market share and consumer value through marketing, communication, branding, and social media presence. A professional association is always serving the membership; however, the membership can often be split between younger, ambitious, modern thinkers and the experienced industry veterans that may not see a need for any adjustment. Striking a balance to offer the opportunity to expand and improve the membership firms is a worthy goal of an association and its leadership

One concept that must also remain in focus for an association and the leadership is to engage members on current issues. By gathering concerns and viewpoints of the constituents served by the board, the association will best know how to develop its strategies and focus efforts to deliver the best information and resources to members in a fiscally responsible manner. Members are always conscious of what something costs, versus the benefit gained by themselves or their firm.

In funeral service, it is not uncommon for local associations to find it difficult to gather feedback, especially if there are no glaring errors or omissions reported. The concept that no news is good news can leave a leadership committee or a board with no direction for the future.

An association without a minimum of a 5 year future plan is dangerous and the leadership should never let members lose sight of establishing an evolving goal structure. Offering competitive industry knowledge and current data relating to firm growth and success makes an association more beneficial and membership more desirable. Still, the focus is to serve member professionals and engaging those members will make sure that leadership in the association stays on track to solve relevant problems and further increase the value of the association to its members. In short, members benefit most when they are collectively tasked to find problems to be solved by their association and the leadership of that association works best for members by being a few steps ahead of any changes in the industry while striving to develop future milestones as fast as they attain current goals. ::

Nicole M. LaRue

LaRue & Pritcher Funeral Home & Cremation Service Ogdensburg, NY



I firmly believe that to be an effective leader you need to remember what it was like to have been an employee.

To have been that newbie nervous resident who answered phones, made coffee a million times a day, and had to mess with the ancient copy machine. That's where you learn the stuff they don't and can't teach you in school, such as what makes an office and its colorful cast of characters tick.

Collectively, those experiences helped me discover what kind of boss I wanted to be. Somewhere between crazy and great, if you want to recruit great people, you need to be great and have a positive approach.

If you listen to negative people you'll never get anywhere.

The single most important thing you can do in business or an association is stay away from negative people. I believe that when you bring your heart and soul to your job, you can't lose, but when you don't, you'll always lose to someone who does.

As mentors and role models you need to develop your own style. I try to tell others to be nice. It sounds simple, but you'd be surprised how rare it is these days. People will respond to you the same way you respond to them, especially if you are upper management responding polite and businesslike to your subordinates. Treat them like they are important. Don't throw your title around. Take the time to talk to people and actually listen.

A lot of young people walk around thinking all the great ideas have been taken or that all their ideas won't be taken seriously. But that's

nonsense. There are opportunities all over the place; we need to lead the younger generation of funeral directors.

We as owners, managers, licensed funeral directors and associations, need to be training, searching for that next young great funeral director or employee. They can't be great without our help! Change is a wonderful and necessary aspect of business. Remember we all need to adapt, change and grow together. ::

I'm convinced that one of the reasons that I've always been successful is that I've almost always competed against people who were bigger and stronger but who had less commitment and desire than I did.

~ Ted Turner

Julia Goodman O'Brien

Hammill Funeral Home | Winthrop, NY



It is no secret that the funeral service profession, along with the associations involved, is seeing change. For the past 10 years we have seen significant shifts not only in funeral service but in our society as a whole. Surprise!! It's not just affecting us. So what do we do about it?

Being a member of the NYSFDA Leadership Academy (LA) has opened my eyes even more to the fact that we cannot be afraid of change, rather we need to embrace it. How many times have we heard, especially at a Catholic Funeral, "Death is not the end, it is only change." Think about that statement; it is real, relevant and simple to understand.

Essentially, we are the funeral directors of change.

We often talk about how to engage and recruit tomorrow's members. I'd like to think that our association is a few steps ahead of the change. As a member of the 2nd LA class, I feel this was one of the best opportunities for me to see the bigger picture.

I became interested in the LA after I saw a presentation by the first LA class at the 2014 NYSFDA convention. Being a "younger generation" funeral director I thought how cool it was for my friend to be so involved and up there presenting and she wasn't even licensed for 10 years. I wanted to be involved because I thought I was missing out on something.

During the last nine months or so we focused on learning how to communicate better and deal with difficult situations between the generations, public speaking, personal development and how a well-organized board is run and much more.

Before I was involved with LA I never would have even thought of becoming more involved with the association or serving at a leadership level. I didn't think I was old enough nor had nearly enough experience to lead on a board, let alone give a presentation at the state convention!

After being part of this, I realize that a fresh face or even that of a younger generation is just what our industry needs. New and motivated individuals are out there! This LA class has cultivated five association members that are ready to work, learn, and lead together. And that is just the beginning. The LA is just one way we are being proactive about recruiting members to leadership and meeting fresh motivated faces.

A change that I recommend to all NYSFDA members is to be more willing to allow their new employees as well as the “younger” directors to get involved in the association sooner in their careers. Don’t be afraid to let them attend your monthly meeting, or join a new committee. If anything, encourage them to be involved.

Former TV news anchor and motivational speaker Mark Grimm, who we heard from during LA, says to be relevant, relate to people and use simple words when communicating. So I had another thought. Recently when speaking with the owner of where I did my residency, and also my treasured friend, Nancy Eannace, she said, “I’m glad you’re doing this now Jul, doing this while you’re young.” And you know what, that simple statement got me thinking . . . yeah, why not?!

If newly licensed directors, younger generation funeral directors and even students knew the opportunities to be involved early in their careers, I feel it would encourage them to stay involved, want to work, and be a part of a fun organization and a united voice. One simple statement that she said to me and one that I felt was very powerful. ::

We all want our businesses to thrive, and our associations ensure that we can collectively work together to better our business and learn from one another. So whether we are old, young, have 20 years of experience, 10 years, regardless, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

~ Henry Ford



Goals of the Academy include:

To identify, inspire and mentor emerging leaders in funeral service;

To provide leadership development training programs tailored specifically to funeral directors;

To recognize the value of diversity to the future success of funeral director associations;

To develop a lifelong professional network of funeral service leaders;

To facilitate the promotion of new funeral directors into leadership positions at the state and local levels.

The 11-month program involves:

- a competitive application process;
- leadership development workshops;
- monthly web-based training programs;
- a group capstone project; and
- a graduation ceremony at the NYSFDA Annual Convention.

For more information about future NYSFDA Leadership Academy programs, contact Marianne Reid Schrom at 800-291-2629. ::



Graduates from the 2014 NYSFDA Leadership Academy.

From the top:
Heather A. Rauch;
Nicholas Farenga;
Mark J. Nolan;
Jana L. Haldenwang,
CFSP; Peter J. Rose;
Mary J. King; Kelly
Datoush Copp; and
Sabrina Joynes



The NYSFDA Board of Directors recognizes that an organization is only as good as its leaders. To ensure the continued success of the state association, and to develop the funeral service leaders of tomorrow, the Board was pleased to introduce the NYSFDA Leadership Academy in 2013.

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