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Saying Goodbye to the State's Last Medal of Honor Recipient

Sgt. Francis S. Currey, one of our nation's last living World War II Medal of Honor recipients, died in his Selkirk, NY home October 8 at the age of 94. Immediately following graduation, Currey enlisted in the US Army. He was only 17. During the war, Currey was an automatic rifleman with Company K, 120th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division. His heroic actions during the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium is credited for helping win the battle and shorten the war. For his valor, he was awarded the U.S. Congressional Medal of Honor in 1945. Currey also received the Silver Star, three Purple Hearts and the Belgian Order of Leopold. Interesting Fact: In 1988, Currey's image was used for a GI Joe Medal of Honor action figure. Rest in peace, Sgt. Currey, and thank you for your service. His funeral service, with full military honors, was held Saturday, October 12th at the Babcock Funeral Home in Ravena, NY.

Photo below courtesy of Thomas Marra Photography.



In Remembrance

Dr. Elissa Ann DeBenedictis, 49, passed on September 18, 2019. Elissa worked at American Academy McAllister Institute for 22 years as a Professor, Director of Academic Support and Coordinator of Clinical Embalming.

Kathie D. Halvey, 67, passed on October 16, 2019. Kathie was the wife of Peter T. Halvey, retired owner of Halvey Funeral Home, and mother of William J. Halvey (Straub, Catalano & Halvey Funeral Home) and Patrick J. Halvey (Riverview Funeral Home by Halvey).

Mark C. Kowalczyk, 54, passed on October 2, 2019. Mark served as President of NYSFDA from 2000-2002 and was a member of the NYSFDA Board of Directors from 1995-2004. He also chaired the Association's Government Affairs Committee at one time. Mark was the Vice President and co-owner, and operated Kowalczyk Funeral Homes, in Utica and in New York Mills.

Arthur J. Sonnick III, 64, passed on October 14, 2019. Arthur was a funeral director at Hempstead Funeral Home for over 30 years.

George James Traub, 77, passed on October 10, 2019. James was the President of Traub Funeral Homes and a longtime member of NYSFDA's Government Affairs Committee.

Presidential Directions



Hello All! Where has the time gone? It's November already!! A new month and closer to a new year. Like all of you, sometimes there are just not enough hours in the day or days in the week to accomplish things, but we somehow manage to accomplish the tasks accordingly.

Certainly, like all of you, we are thankful for the families that we serve and the trust and confidence that they bestow upon us in honoring their loved ones. It is something that we should never take for granted.

Over the last month, I have been able to travel the state and attend Local Association events and meet and greet our Local Leaders and members. I've heard their concerns about the future of Funeral Service and the course that may lie ahead of us. I truly enjoy these times; being able to share ideas, comments and concerns about our profession and to have a connection between the State and Local Associations which is vital for all of us. As your President, I can say that

I and the rest of the Executive Committee, along with the rest of the NYSFDA Board, are here for you, to assist and address any concerns that you may have. Remember, this is your Association and we are your elected leaders. We are here for you!! Please do not hesitate to contact myself, the office, or any one of our board members about your concerns or ideas.

As a side bar, to the Local Association Leaders, please share your meeting/event dates with the office (info@nysfda.org) so that we can make an effort to attend your event and be there for you.

In closing, I would like to take the time to wish a Happy Thanksgiving to you, your families and staff and thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President and remember – "To enhance the environment in which our members operate, and to promote the highest standards of funeral service to the public."

Till next month

"Gobble Gobble!!!

Richard J. Sullivan



Convention Photos

2019 Convention photos are available to download at:

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Executive Directions



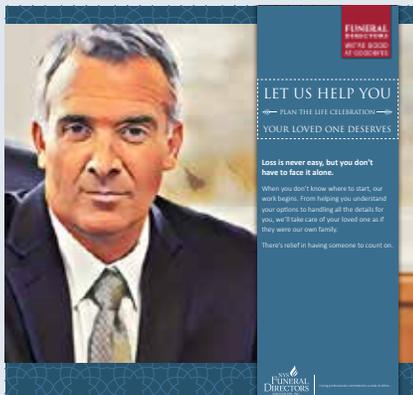
Well it's official. Summer is over and fall is here! If you're a sports fan that means you are knee deep in football and welcoming the start of hockey and basketball seasons. If you're a political junkie, you are eagerly awaiting Election Day. While this isn't a presidential election year, there are certainly a great deal of headlines and stories to follow at the national level. And, a fair amount of uncertainty about what lies ahead. That said, if there is one thing that is certain it is the famous quote by Tip O'Neill "All politics is local". And that is one of our strengths. I have been very impressed by the number of member funeral directors who have close relationships with their local lawmakers. This is an invaluable asset for us and one we must continue to harness and groom. The first step takes place on Election Day. So, I encourage you to take advantage of the Association's election resources and to get out and vote!

Speaking of voting, don't forget about the new law that took effect in April 2019 that allows employees to take up to three hours of paid leave to vote in certain elections in New York State. We've sent out several messages to make sure you all know what it means and what you have to do to comply. As a reminder, the new law authorizes employees, who are registered to vote and who provide at least two working days' advanced notice, to take up to three hours of leave, without charge to leave accruals, to vote in any general election, special election called by the Governor, primary election, or municipal election. It does not include school district elections, library district elections, fire district elections or special town elections. And, there is no cap on the number of elections per year an employee may request time off to vote.

The law also requires employers to post notice of time off to vote at least ten workdays before any election. The notice must be conspicuously posted where it can be seen as employees come or go to their place of work. With Tuesday, November 5 as a General Election Day, make sure your notices are up!

Mike
Michael A. Lanotte

Consumer Awareness



Our **Good at Goodbyes** campaign has reached over 17 million New Yorkers in less than a year! We encourage your funeral home to use the ads in your own community too. Visit my.nysfda.org/campaign for more details and campaign materials.

Acting Secretary of the Army Proposes Revised Eligibility Criteria



The Acting Secretary of the Army announced proposed changes to eligibility criteria at Arlington National Cemetery. This begins the process for the federal government to prepare for the public rulemaking process which includes public feedback to the proposed changes.

The nation's premiere military cemetery is at a critical crossroads in its history. Nearly all of the 22 million living armed forces members and veterans are eligible for less than 95,000 remaining burial spaces within these hallowed grounds.

A planned Southern Expansion project will add 37 acres of additional burial space for the nation's veterans. Southern Expansion includes the area nearest the Air Force Memorial and a part of the former grounds of the Navy Annex. However, expansion alone will not keep Arlington National Cemetery open to new interments well into the future. Without changes to eligibility, Arlington National Cemetery will be full for first burials by the mid-2050s.

"The hard reality is we are running out of space. To keep Arlington National Cemetery open and active well into the future means we

have to make some tough decisions that restrict the eligibility," said Executive Director of Army National Military Cemeteries and Arlington National Cemetery Karen Durham-Aguilera.

The Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act directed the Secretary of the Army to establish revised eligibility criteria to keep the cemetery functioning as an active burial ground well into the future, defined as 150 years.

The Secretary established imperatives to recognize the individual's sacrifice, service and impact to the nation's security. The proposed eligibility criteria honors commitment to military service and is equitable across branches and eras of service. Additionally, any change should be easily understood, fair and consistent with Arlington National Cemetery's mission.

Years of outreach have guided the decision-making process. Arlington National Cemetery and its stakeholders – military and veteran service organizations, military, government leaders, Congress, veterans, military service members and their family members – have been working this issue very closely.

“This has been a very lengthy and deliberate process that has been done in the public domain,” said former Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery Katharine Kelley. “We have a Federal Advisory Committee at Arlington National Cemetery, an independent body mandated by Congress to look at very substantive issues related to the cemetery, and they have looked at the question of eligibility for many years,” said Kelley.

The cemetery has maintained an active and ongoing dialogue with military and veteran service organizations over two and a half years of thoughtful deliberation and public outreach. Additionally, the cemetery has conducted public surveys that garnered input and feedback from these important stakeholders, as well the active duty component who serves today.

The cemetery received more than 250,000 responses to these national surveys, and the results offered a compelling look at the opinions and attitudes of veterans, family members and active duty populations. Ninety-five percent of respondents want Arlington to not only remain open, but remain open and active well into the future.

“We’ve made extensive efforts to listen and gather input as part of this process, and that feedback we have received has been part of the Secretary’s deliberations and part of our discussions going forward,” said Kelley.

Now that the Secretary has established the proposed criteria, once cleared, the Department of the Army will publish a draft rule in the Federal Register for public comment, adjudicate public comments and publish the final rule. Federal rulemaking is a deliberative process and is expected to take a minimum of nine months.

“This is a lengthy process, but it’s another opportunity to have a say in what the future of Arlington National Cemetery should be for our nation,” said Durham-Aguilera.

In addition to preserving 1,000 gravesites for current and future Medal of Honor recipients, the proposed revised eligibility criteria for those who honorably serve the nation are as follows:

For below-ground interment:

- Killed in Action, to include repatriated remains of service members
- Award recipients of the Silver Star and above who also served in combat
- Recipients of the Purple Heart
- Combat-related service deaths while conducting uniquely military activities
- Former Prisoners of War
- Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States
- Veterans with combat service who also served out of uniform as a government official and made significant contributions to the nation’s security at the highest levels of public service.

For above-ground inurnment:

- World War II-era veterans, to include legislated active duty designees
- Retirees from the armed forces who are eligible to receive retired pay but are not otherwise eligible for interment
- Veterans who have served a minimum of two years on active duty and who have served in combat
- Veterans without combat service who also served out of uniform as a government official and made significant contributions to the nation’s security at the highest levels of public service

Eventual implementation of revised eligibility will not affect previously scheduled services at Arlington National Cemetery. Additionally, the proposed revisions will not affect veterans’ burial benefits or veteran eligibility at Department of Veterans Affairs 137 national cemeteries and 115 state veterans cemeteries.

Arlington National Cemetery will continue to actively engage stakeholders in the important decisions impacting the future of the cemetery.

Source: Arlington National Cemetery

Obituaries Give Glimpses of the Extraordinary



Why the Change?

It wasn't just the disruptive growth of the Internet that led to viral obituaries; a change in the way news organizations handled them was the main driver.

Within the past two decades, news organizations began charging for obituaries. And when you charge for something, the customers get to choose what they want to say. In addition, funeral homes began placing obituaries on their websites, where longer, more personalized tributes didn't cost anything. Since then, we've seen a steady growth of obituaries that describe relentless womanizing, the boring adventures of a man named "Clod" and the alleged mysterious disappearance of a man who just wanted a "glass of grappa." The protocol has been shredded; a new age began.

When Connecticut resident Joe Heller died, his obituary in the Hartford Courant declared his death the man's "last undignified and largely irreverent gesture."

By the time the 1,300-word obituary got to his surviving family, readers had learned that Joe, 82, was a practitioner of "cheap mischief," had "tortured" his siblings, was a "voluminous" snorer, had "embarrassed" his wife daily and liked to pick through trash at the local dump.

The obituary, in its full, a loving tribute written by his daughters about a one-of-a-kind character, went viral, was passed around on social media sites and eventually yielded a story in The New York Times.

Twenty years ago, this never would have happened. Obituaries for people like Heller were staid affairs, a matter-of-fact recitation of the basics of a person's life—the dates and locations of birth and death, the names of survivors, the names of the predeceased parents and funeral arrangements. Nieces and nephews couldn't be included. Pets? Absolutely not. Obituaries, printed for free, followed a strict protocol set by the news organization. Very few deviations were allowed.

The change represents a democratization of the obituary. Featured obituaries, those taking up more space and accompanied by photos in news publications, were usually reserved for those who had accomplished important things or were well known. Politicians, actors, scientists, writers and even notorious criminals. These obituaries had a certain form to them. They focused on a person's achievements or notoriety. Family was mostly relegated to a short paragraph.

"Not everybody, after all, gets an obituary in [The New York Times]; much of the point of the paper's heavily curated obit section is that very few, only the most exceptional of the great swath of humanity that dies every day, are deemed worthy of the honor," wrote Megan Garber in 2013 for The Atlantic.

But the Internet has equalized things, has given us all the potential to be worthy. Those funny, highly personal obituaries, if the circumstances are

right, can be read by more people than one about the doctor who tried to save President John F. Kennedy's life after he was shot in Dallas.

And why not? Why is Joe Heller's life any less significant than Dr. Robert McLelland, the heroic physician who held a bullet-shattered Kennedy as his life slipped away? Who is to say that Heller, in a sort of butterfly effect, hasn't touched many who never met him but now want to live their lives with a little more verve than before?

Beyond the practical jokes, hoarding and poor fashion sense, Heller left friends with "decades of fond and colorful memories," grandchildren he "relished" and three daughters who remember a father who built their doll houses and allowed them to "do" his hair in their playtime beauty parlor.

Garber wrote that "obituaries function not just as good reading, but as structured morality tales, their interfaces subtly guiding human behavior. This is how to be. This is what we prize." In the obituaries of decades past, those things we prize were hard to



find. In this new and more free-wheeling age, we see the exceptional in the previously ordinary, the impact in the previously obscure.

The "great swath of humanity" is finally getting its due in death.

Source: NJSFDA

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How SEM Helps Increase At-Need Calls ASAP

By Welton Hong



search results, and the best way to rank highly in those results is to have great SEO. However . . .

Before you start thinking that “SEM” in the headline was a typo, it’s not. This column isn’t about SEO. It’s about SEM.

These tools are related, but they’re also very different. And if you want to generate many more at-need calls, you really must incorporate both into your marketing plan.

While SEO is focused on helping your funeral home obtain the pole position in the organic listings of search engine results pages (aka SERPs), SEM – which stands for search engine marketing – buys you excellent real estate on those pages through paid advertisements.

Or, to make it simpler:

Great SEO = you rank among the top free listings on SERPs.

Great SEM = you appear (as an ad) at the top of SERPs.

In other words, SEM lets you attract more at-need clientele (and preneed clientele, for that matter) by putting your funeral home front and center on SERPs regardless of whether your SEO is any good or not.

Granted, it’s better if you do have good SEO, because you attract a lot more business if you have both an ad for your business and the free organic listing for that business at or near the top of the SERP.

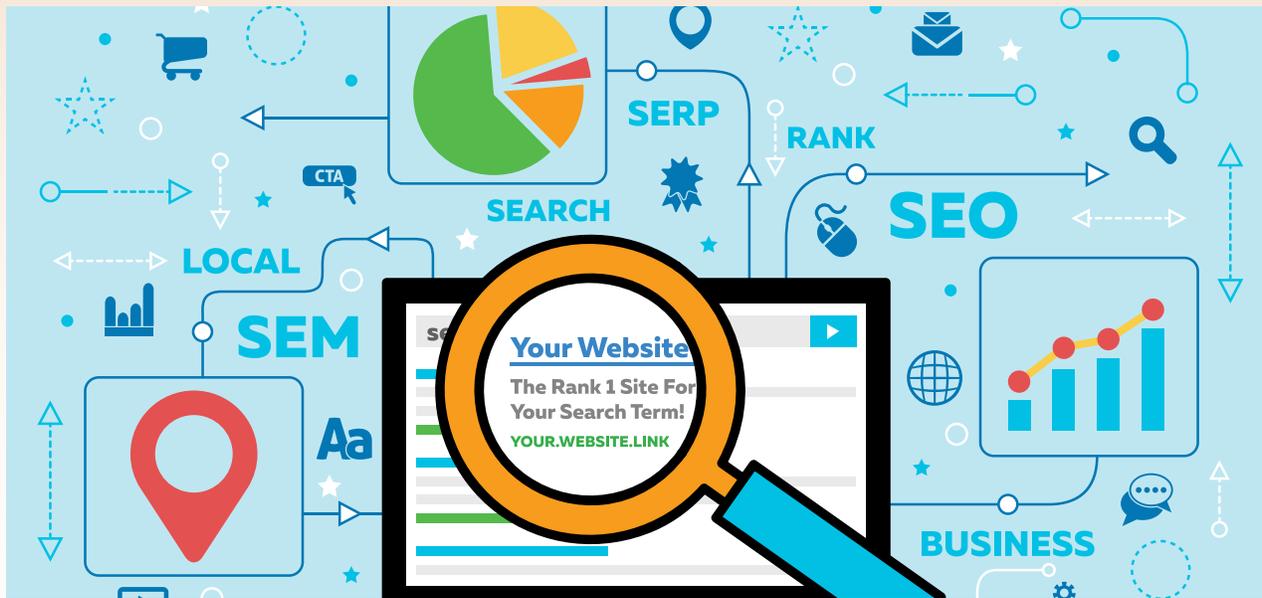
You know what SEO is. For the last 20 years or so, no business owner – even a funeral home owner – has been able to escape that term.

You’ve heard what everyone says: To be successful, you need great SEO. Make sure you’re always improving your SEO. Not enough calls? You must need better SEO.

On the other hand, if you’ve been paying attention to marketing gurus over the past several years, you’ve likely heard that SEO isn’t very important anymore. Some so-called experts have even decreed that “SEO is dead.”

That’s ridiculous. Here’s the truth:

Search engine optimization remains incredibly important. Every successful, high-converting funeral home website has solid SEO. Most people still prefer to click on organic (free)



However, SEO can take a while to kick in. If you've never worked on improving your funeral home website's SEO before, it could be six, nine, or even 12 months until you move up substantially in the local rankings. (How quickly you rise typically depends on how many local competitors you have – and how good their SEO work has been.)

SEM, on the other hand, goes to work virtually immediately. If your funeral home really needs to increase calls right away, you can have pay-per-click ads at the top of Google SERPs in just a couple of days. In most areas, you really can see a major difference in less than a week.

The key is to keep strengthening your SEO while your SEM is generating traffic. Once your SEO has improved to the point that you're dominating all (or at least most) of your competitors in local searches, you can choose to ease up on the SEM, saving you money. Or you can keep using both to really become the "go-to" deathcare service provider in your area.

SEM tools such as Google Ads (formerly Google AdWords) can include text-based or image-based ads (or product listings) that appear somewhere on a search results page.

Note that search engines still have relevancy and quality requirements for SEM. You aren't guaranteed a particular placement. You bid for it. The amount you're willing to pay per click, along with the quality and relevancy of your ad and

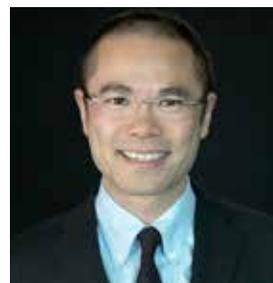
on-site content, determine where your ad appears on the page.

SEM gets you in front of families who are searching for your services even when organic SEO doesn't. And one of SEM's greatest benefits is the ability to target search ads to your audience or segments of your audience. To do that properly, you must understand who your audience is.

As you know, older adults commonly preplan to remove this burden from their families. Younger adults might be helping their parents preplan. Families in general might be searching because they have an immediate need.

Also, remember that your ad isn't the final sales tool. Its purpose is to show up at the right time for the user and persuade them to click on your link.

A comprehensive approach to SEM ensures that you have high-quality pages on your funeral home website and other on-site content. There's no benefit to traffic – even lots of it – if your website fails to convert visitors into clientele.



Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing® (funeralhomeprofits.com) and the author of "Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes," 2019 Edition.

NFDA Introduces Remembering A Life Self-Care Boxes to Help the Bereaved



- **Thoughts:** Confusion, difficulty concentrating, increased mental “noise,” disbelief, or preoccupation with a loss.
- **Physical sensations:** Dizziness; fast heartbeat; fatigue; headaches; hyperventilating; nausea or upset stomach; shortness of breath; tightness or heaviness in the throat or chest; or weight gain or loss.

“Self-care is perhaps never more important than while grieving,”

said Gail Marquardt, NFDA vice president of Communications. “The Remembering A Life Self-care Box provides a thoughtful way to thank a family for trusting you to serve them, while helping them as they begin to process the death of a loved one. It’s the perfect way to leave a lasting impression on the families you serve.”

The items in the Remembering A Life Self-care Box were carefully selected to help grieving individuals grieve and heal in a healthy way. How and when they are used is up to the individual – there is no “right” or “wrong” way or time. The important thing is to use them when ready to do so, whether that’s immediately or in the weeks – even months – after the death of a loved one.

Funeral professionals can find more information about the Remembering A Life Self-care Boxes, suggestions on how to use them with the families they serve, and purchase a box or select items by visiting www.nfda.org/box.

Consumers are able to purchase the Remembering A Life Self-care Box and select items by visiting www.rememberingalife.com/store.

Source: NFDA | Image Credits: NFDA

To help those who are grieving the death of a loved one reflect, remember and find relaxation, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) has introduced the Remembering A Life Self-care Box. The box, which makes a meaningful gift for families served by a funeral home, are part of NFDA’s Remembering A Life consumer outreach and education initiative. Consumers are also able to purchase a box through the Remembering A Life website in the new Remembering A Life online store.

The death of a loved one is a stressful life event, and the resulting grief can trigger many uncomfortable feelings, thoughts and physical sensations. These are normal and necessary responses to the loss of a loved one, however, and might include:

- **Feelings/emotions:** Anger, anxiety, blame, confusion, denial, relief, depression, fear, guilt, irritability, loneliness, numbness, sadness, shock, or yearning.



The Remembering A Life

Self-care Box, which itself can be used to hold mementos and other cherished items, retails for \$50, and includes:

Remembering A Life Grief Journal –

Keeping a journal can help a grieving individual reflect on the life of a loved one, the relationship they shared and the impact he or she had on family and friends. (Also sold separately for \$15.)

Memory Jar –

Life is full of many special times and experiences. Those memories can be jotted down on small pieces of paper and placed in the Remembering A Life Memory Jar. (Also sold separately for \$10.)

Candle –

This pear-and-redwood-scented candle can be lit and enjoyed when an individual misses a loved one most, or to mark a special day, such as a birthday, holiday or other significant moment. (Also sold separately for \$10.)

Essential Oil Roller –

Aromatherapy can heighten feelings of healing, relaxation and mindfulness. This roller

features the calming scents of lavender, orange and sweet marjoram. (Also sold separately \$10.)

Dragonfly Keychain and Story –

The story of the dragonfly and its rebirth is one of hope and comfort. This keychain can be used as a reminder that a loved one is still present in spirit.

Rose Quartz Stone –

Called the “Crystal of Unconditional Love,” rose quartz carries a soft feminine energy of compassion and peace; tenderness and healing; nourishment and comfort. It can be kept in a pocket or purse as a reminder of an individual’s unconditional love for their loved one.

Water Bottle –

Staying hydrated is always important. Using the Remembering A Life water bottle at home or on the go helps ensure a person is drinking enough water throughout the day. (Also sold separately for \$5.)

Source: NFDA | Image Credits: NFDA



Tell Us About Yourself . . .



STUDENT MEMBER: La'Shawn Mitchell

Hometown: Freeport, NY

Mortuary School Attended:
Nassau Community College

Graduated: May 2019

What made you interested in a career in funeral service?

I just knew that my calling was to help people. My mother (Deborah O. Whipper) who is a funeral director also kept saying to my identical twin sister (Shawnette Mitchell, also a Funeral Director) and me, "who's going to take over because I'm ready to retire." It was then that I decided to join her in the ranks, and I am so very glad that I did. I would have never imagined how rewarding it is to help these families in their most difficult times.

What activities do you like to do outside of school and studying?

Outside of school I really enjoy spending quality time with my children and my closest friends and family.

What do you hope to accomplish as a licensed funeral director?

My hope as a funeral director is to help to maintain the integrity of this industry. We are somewhat of a dying breed; with technology joining us. We must find a way to create a balance where we can still offer care and compassion whilst utilizing the growing technology as support and not as a replacement for human contact.

What do you wish people knew/understood about funeral service?

I would like for people to know and understand that we (Funeral Directors) are not just here to prepare the dead but to take care of the living.

What was your biggest takeaway from attending the NYSFDA Student Day?

My biggest takeaway from NYSFDA Student Day was that we as students need organizations like this. Having been a part of student day really made me as well as several of my classmates feel that we are not alone. The team of mentors and staff welcoming and encouraging us with genuine hearts made us all feel that we were not just becoming members of an industry but joining a family.

What did you like most about attending the NYSFDA Annual Convention?

I loved the way that the events were set up at convention because the students were not excluded in any way. Being able to meet and greet with everyone no matter their station allowed us to mingle and get to know our senior counter parts with out title or experience allowing for real and true connections.

Do you know of a Student or Resident that would like to be featured in Directions?

Email Dannielle@nysfda.org



NYSFDA MEMBER: Megan Geroux

Position: Director of Communications & Marketing

Hometown: Guilderland, NY

Education: BA in English from Marist College & MA in Public

Communications from the College of St. Rose.

Before NYSFDA: I managed the marketing and communications efforts for the National Association for Pupil Transportation - a ~2,000 membership organization based in Albany.

Three things you (probably) didn't know about me:

1. I love to travel and had the opportunity to study in Ireland for a semester in college.
2. My husband and I have two young sons who love soccer, superheroes, and all living creatures (prehistoric and present).
3. Bruce Springsteen is one of my favorite musicians and it was a thrill to see his Broadway show.

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A Few Thoughts On Memorialization

By Richard O'Shea | President of the Nassau-Suffolk Funeral Directors Association



When I was 12, my parents took the family on vacation to Ireland. I got to meet a few cousins, tour some castles and kiss the Blarney Stone. But, the most interesting part of that vacation came during a brief visit to a local graveyard. The cemetery itself was a rather small field alongside a white-washed cottage that sheltered the headstones from the soft rain of the day. My Dad pointed out a recognizable name on one of the headstones - Richard O'Shea - with dates spanning 60-or-so years in the 1800's.

That brief moment was important to me then and became more so over the years. I now had a fixed position on where I came from, both historically and geographically, and it helped bring my heritage into focus. It conveyed a sense of belonging, and of community, to a land and a people I thought I was only visiting – like a tourist.

As a funeral director, I've used that experience to keep me more attuned to the impact of memorialization. At the first Funeral Celebrant Conference, I had a conversation with Doug Manning about 'the disappeared' - people who were cremated and scattered and never traditionally memorialized. We talked about what might happen to people when they have no focal point for their grief. We also spoke of my experience when I was on vacation – how a simple headstone in a cemetery can be a guidepost for future generations, if only we let it.

Traditionally, cremation families would place the ashes in a cemetery or a columbarium, ensuring some form of memorialization. But today, we have families that may not be exactly sure what they want to do, or can do, with the ashes? Why is that? Because many families today are new to cremation and may either overlook or be unaware of their options for memorialization. As experts, they look to us for guidance about their funeral options. Yet, we do our families a disservice when we, as the experts, do not include memorialization options in that conversation.

At last year's NSFDA Symposium, Robert Boetticher stressed the importance of memorializing the deceased following cremation. He encouraged us to ask families "Where will the ashes will be in five years...15 years...and 50 years?" Similarly, at the 2018 NYSFDA Convention, presenter Julie A. Burn, noted in her research that funeral directors generally fail to address memorialization when answering questions about cremation.

Families new to cremation may find comfort in traditional memorialization. But not every family wants to bury ashes beneath the granite stone slabs of yesteryear. Memorialization may not seem to apply to those families who choose to scatter ashes. However, the desire for some form of memorialization is still there. These families are looking for meaning and memorialization in the unconventional or original. They know they want to do something – just not the 'same old thing'. Will they choose a DNA registry, Fingerprint Keepsakes, Eternal Reefs, Space Scattering, a Memorial Brick at Disney World? I don't know what the next step will be. And while I encourage you to stay aware of new forms of memorialization, be mindful of how that non-traditional memorialization may impact future generations.

USPS Updated Process for Shipping Cremated Remains



International Service utilizing either a USPS-produced or customer-supplied shipping package. If using a customer-supplied shipping package, it must be strong and durable to withstand transportation handling. When mailing cremated remains internationally, the primary inner container must be an urn.

Shippers must pack the remains in a primary inner sift-proof container, cushioning material and an outer shipping package. USPS notes that a sift proof container is any vessel that does not allow loose powder to leak or sift out. There are many options available to store cremated remains – from simple wooden boxes to decorative urns.

For convenience, USPS has a Priority Mail Express Cremated Remains box that may be used for domestic or international shipments using the applicable Priority Mail Express service. The box can be ordered online and is available as part of a kit.

Before closing and sealing the shipping package, USPS recommends adding a slip of paper with both the sender’s and recipient’s address and contact information inside the package. This extra step will help to identify the sender and receiver in the event the shipping label becomes detached.

Source: NFDA

New postal requirements for the shipping of cremated remains go into effect September 30, according to the latest revision to the United States Postal Services’ **“How to Package and Ship Cremated Remains”** pamphlet.

According to T. Scott Gilligan, NFDA general counsel, the most significant change is that USPS will now require Label 139 to be applied to all sides of the shipping box, including the top and bottom. Currently, it is simply a recommendation, not a requirement. Label 139 is available at the Postal Store on www.USPS.com or can be obtained at a retail post office location.

The new requirements are designed to make the package more visible, in turn making the mailing process more secure.

For both domestic and international shipping, cremated remains must be shipped by USPS Priority Mail Express or Priority Mail Express

To read pamphlet go to my.nysfda.org/USPSCremains

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NFDA Debuts New PSAs

Promoting the Value of Funerals and Funeral Directors



The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) has debuted two new public service announcements (PSAs) created to educate families about the importance of meaningful funerals and the value of funeral directors. These new PSAs are part of NFDA's Remembering A Life consumer outreach and education initiative and are available for use by association members at no charge.

Individuals often have specific ideas about what they want at their funeral (or whether they even want a funeral), but who is the funeral ultimately for? How, if at all, should the needs of loved ones be considered when planning a service? In the "Funerals Are for the Living" PSA, we see two real families and a group of friends explore this and other questions.

When a member shares this PSA in his or her community, they will motivate family members and friends to get involved in the conversation and express their wants and needs as they begin the grieving process and inspire people who didn't want a funeral to reconsider their decision.

Funeral professionals know the value a funeral can provide to families as they begin the grief journey

following the death of a loved one. Funeral directors also know the value they provide in creating a meaningful experience. It can, however, sometimes be difficult to express this to a family. The "Value of Funerals & Funeral Directors" PSA shares this message in an eloquent way. Thoughtful words and imagery beautifully communicate the healing power of funerals and the important role funeral directors play in guiding families through the process.

When an NFDA member shares this PSA in his or her community, they will encourage families to have meaningful funerals, inspire families to incorporate creative elements into funerals and educate families about the important role of funeral directors.

Both PSAs also encourage people to visit NFDA's consumer education site, www.RememberingALife.com to learn more about meaningful funerals and start the conversation. Two additional Remembering A Life PSAs will debut later this year.

These new PSAs complement the two others that made their debut during the 2018 NFDA International Convention & Expo. These PSAs, which

targeted people who lose a loved one under tragic circumstances, encourage families to memorialize their loved ones, regardless of how they died.

When a someone dies of an overdose, it can lead to strong emotions, especially among children. The PSA “When a Parent Dies of an Overdose” shows that having a funeral gives the family, particularly children, an opportunity to remember their loved one and the good times they had.

Families may not always agree with the life decisions made by a loved one, especially if they involve illegal activity. The second PSA, “Remembering A Good Friend Who Made Bad Decisions,” discusses the importance of coming together to reflect on a loved one’s entire life history and remembering happier times.

NFDA is sharing all four PSAs with consumers on the www.RememberingALife.com website and social media sites. Consumers who, after viewing a PSA choose to visit www.RememberingALife.com, will find a wide range of information about planning a meaningful

funeral. Consumers can also search for an NFDA-member funeral home using the “Find a Funeral Home” feature.

The PSAs are also available to NFDA members for use in the community, such as by posting them on a funeral home website, sharing them on social media, using them as part of community presentations or working with local or cable TV stations to run the spots as public service announcements on broadcast television. The PSAs may also, in certain circumstances, be appropriate to share with a family that is planning a service.

Source: NFDA

Funeral professionals can view the PSAs by visiting the NFDA website, www.nfda.org/psas. Association members who are interested in using any or all of the PSAs in the outreach efforts can find information about obtaining them on www.nfda.org/psas.

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Year - End Digital Marketing Checklist for Funeral Homes

By Kelly Fiddner | Fiddner & Co. Smart Marketing



If competition and the diversity of digital marketing are leaving your funeral home behind, here are some year-end digital marketing tips to help you increase online visibility for your funeral home without spending a lot of time and money. Investing in small efforts with your funeral home marketing can help you create lasting relationships with your customers, create a loyal fan base for your products and services, and get your funeral home positioned for increased visibility in the coming year.

Develop a great website and keep it updated.

A company website is no longer a nice to have, it's a need to have in funeral home marketing. Your customers expect to find information about you and your products and services online. Websites play an important role in winning new business and providing services to existing clients.

Your website design needs to make a great first impression, be clean and functional, and must be mobile responsive; you can expect more than half your traffic to come from mobile devices. Nowadays, you don't need extensive coding skills to create your own website. Tools like Wordpress, Wix, and Squarespace offer useful templates for non-techy users that can be customized according to your business needs.

Use local search tools and online reviews.

Since funeral homes rely on local business, you can optimize your local search presence using online directories. An important first step in any funeral home's local marketing strategy is to claim and verify your Google My Business listing by visiting <https://www.google.com/business>.

This step is almost as important as having a website because it influences your visibility on more than just Google. It can increase your chances of showing up in Google's Local Pack, Local Finder, Google Maps, and organic search rankings. As a qualifying local business, you can claim this free listing on Google and include information about your company.

In addition to Google My Business, you'll want to add your business listing on other major directories such as Yelp, Better Business Bureau, Yellow Pages, Angie's List, etc. that allow you to post information about your business. Claim your listings so you can control the information that is displayed and make sure you complete all the information it asks for. If you don't fill out that information, particularly with Google, someone else could.

Encourage customers to review your funeral home on Google, Yelp, Facebook, and other

directories. Most online consumers are influenced by reviews, but many businesses don't directly ask for them. The more customer reviews you have (ideally, positive reviews), the more visible you'll become in search results and feeds.

Feedback forms can be included as well that you, in turn, can use to improve your funeral home's service. There is nothing bad about getting a negative review. View it as an opportunity to correct a problem and improve your business. You need to respond to any and all bad reviews in a timely manner which means you need to continually monitor your online presence and reviews.

Get social and start a conversation.

Being active in social platforms is key to funneling traffic back to your website to promote your brand, expertise, or thought leadership in the funeral home and memorial services space. Here are a few tips to increase your online visibility when using social media:

- **Pick two to three social media channels to start.** Choosing the right social media platforms for your funeral home and becoming active can enhance your local visibility. Don't sign up for every social media channel because you won't be able to manage them all at once at first. Watch your competitors and see if you can identify which channels offer the highest chances of quality leads.
- **Join in social conversations.** Tag people in your posts, chime in during online chats, and use relevant hashtags to connect with users who are talking about topics related to your business.
- **Be consistent.** Your followers need to develop trust in your brand—trust that you know what you're doing, that your business is legit, and that you're going to stick around.

Perform basic online reputation management.

Beginning with the basics... when was the last time you Google'd your business? It goes without saying that when someone searches for your funeral home, your website should be the first result. If you're not ranking in position #1, it could be one of a few issues:

• **Google may have not indexed your site (if it's new).** It can take a week or more for a search engine to update search results.

• **You may be blocking search engines from crawling your site.** Wordpress sites come with a built-in feature that allows you to instruct search engines not to index your site. This feature is automatically enabled when you launch a new Wordpress website, so you need to manually disable it. (Visit Settings >> Reading and check the box next to Search Engine Visibility option.)

• **Your keyword market is very competitive.** It's easy to rank for irrelevant keywords in search engines. It's hard to rank for keywords that are profitable for your funeral home. One way to discover which keywords are most valuable to you is to review Google Analytics to see the keywords people used to land on your site (Acquisition > Campaigns > Organic Keywords.)

Add analytics to your website – it's free!

Google Analytics is a program that tracks visitors on your website. It provides information on how visitors found your website, which pages and links they click the most, and much more. If you're involved in Search Engine Optimization (SEO), you'll be able to know how much traffic each of the keywords brings to your website. It's a free service provided by Google. Visit <https://www.google.com/analytics> to get started.

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Straight Ahead . . .



It's hard to believe that it's November. This year has flown by, as many do in PrePlan! We are grateful to all of our participating funeral homes for your business and wish you all the best as 2019 comes to a close.

Within a matter of months, our printers will be overflowing with tax statements. This January, PrePlan will print and mail over 115,000 tax statements. We're asking for your assistance to ensure each consumer receives their statement in a timely manner. If you would kindly review your monthly statements, especially accounts with an "invalid" address, we'd appreciate it. An "invalid" address indicates that undeliverable mail has been returned by the United States Postal Service previously and through our research we've been unable to obtain a valid address. The likelihood of this consumer receiving their tax statement is greatly reduced until their address is updated.

The PrePlan office will receive over 2,500 returned tax statements indicating they are incorrectly or insufficiently addressed. Please take a moment before the end of December to let our office know of any address changes for your consumers. This assists both PrePlan and your firm by eliminating extra phone calls in January when a tax statement is not received.

Have any consumers updated their address on file? Did they inform you that an apartment number should be added? Is there an alternate that should receive mailings? If so, there are several ways to modify or change an address. You may email us with the account number, beneficiary name, and mailing information (preplan@preplan.org), mail or fax a General Administration form.



Did You Know?

You can update addresses right on our website?
Preplan.org

1. Select the contract tab
2. Use the update existing tab
3. Search for the account
4. Select/choose the contract number
5. Update the information
6. Select next on the bottom of screen
7. Choose submit on the bottom of the screen

*Please note all address changes done via the website will be reviewed and approved. The changes will not show immediately.

Thank you for your assistance during tax season!

Upcoming Events



November 2019

Visit my.nysfda.org/Calendar for more details and events

- 11 **Notice of Closing**
NYSFDA offices will be closed in observance of Veterans Day
- 19 **Directors Choice Credit Union - Board Conference Call**
NYSFDA Headquarters | 12:30 p.m.
- 28 **Notice of Closing**
NYSFDA offices will be closed in observance of Thanksgiving
Thursday, November 28 and Friday, November 29



December 2019

- 17 **Directors Choice Credit Union - Board Conference Call**
NYSFDA Headquarters | 12:30 p.m.
- 24 **Notice of Closing**
NYSFDA offices will be closing at 1:00 p.m. in observance of Christmas Eve
- 25 **Notice of Closing**
NYSFDA offices will be closed in observance of Christmas Day
- 31 **Notice of Closing**
NYSFDA offices will be closing at 3:00 p.m. in observance of New Years Eve

There is no time more fitting to say **THANK YOU** and offer our sincere appreciation for your confidence and loyalty.

Wishing you

*A Happy Holiday Season
and Prosperous New Year.*

NYSFDA Leadership and Staff

