

# DEATH CARE BUSINESS ADVISOR

Route to:

*For Funeral, Cemetery and Cremation Professionals*

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 9

OCTOBER 24, 2006

## In This Issue

### Cremation:

- Understand zoning concerns before proposing crematory ..... 4
- Reevaluate documentation at your cremation facility ..... 4
- Make sure you request proper information from crematories ..... 5

### Idea File:

- Make sure your funeral home is compliant with OSHA ..... 2
- Update your Web site to attract customers ..... 2

### Cemetery Management:

- Don't forget to back up your records at your facility ..... 3
- Consider automation for your cemetery ..... 3

### Technology:

- NFDA develops notification system for federal employees ..... 7
- Association addresses questions about new system ..... 7

### Aftercare:

- Encourage honesty, make accommodations for survivors ..... 8

### Human Resources:

- Avoid mistakes when managing your funeral home's staff ..... 9
- Make sure you thoroughly train your new employees ..... 9

### Cemetery Grounds:

- Learn answers to common questions about winter lawn care ..... 10

## Emerging Trends

### Events at your funeral home, cemetery can build relationships in community

Hosting charity events is a good way to get noticed by the public

**F**uneral homes and cemeteries are always looking for new ways to get their names out in the community. **Olinger Mortuaries and Cemeteries**, a chain of eight funeral homes and seven cemeteries in the Denver metropolitan area, has found many ways to do just that. The chain, owned by **Service Corp. International**, employs a full-time coordinator to plan community events and locate outreach opportunities.

**Stacie Schubert**, Olinger's director of community care, said for the past six years she has worked with the company to create dozens of events each year, including hikes raising money and awareness for hospices, concerts benefiting Alzheimer's research funds,

(See **COMMUNITY** on page 6)

#### Inside

Want to learn strategies to help your funeral home build community events? See page 6.

## Aftercare

### Educate yourself to better understand issues tormenting suicide survivors

Be sensitive to differences, prepared for religious questions

**F**uneral directors are familiar with grief. Every day, directors help people grieve while they arrange the services of a family member or loved one.

But working with those who have lost someone to a natural death or long-term illness can be different than helping family members who have lost someone to a death as traumatic as suicide.

**Sister Rose Troy**, the bereavement support coordinator for **Dimbleby, Friedel, Williams and Edmunds Funeral Homes** in New Hartford, N.Y., began a suicide support group after learning of four or five suicides in just a six-week period in her

(See **SUICIDE** on page 8)

#### In The News

- Florida funeral director sentenced for selling without license. See page 11.
- NFDA hires new coordinator for communications. See page 12.

**Edmunds Funeral Homes** in New Hartford, N.Y., began a suicide support group after learning of four or five suicides in just a six-week period in her

## Make sure your home is compliant with OSHA

Maintaining a safe workplace is crucial in the funeral industry, especially in the embalming room. The



**Occupational Safety and Health Administration** monitors funeral homes to ensure they are protecting their employees. To

make sure you're doing everything possible to keep workers safe, OSHA recommends funeral homes:

- **Clearly label all solutions.** To prevent accidents or the mixing of reactive chemicals, make sure everything is sealed in its original container and clearly labeled for all employees to see.

- **Identify employees who might be exposed to formaldehyde.** This chemical, which is common to funeral homes, can lead to irritation of the eyes, throat and nose, can cause respiratory infections, and can lead to cancer and reproductive problems. Make sure the embalming room is safe for employees to work in without using respirators.

- **Train employees.** Make sure you're only employing licensed embalmers and funeral directors to work in your embalming room. Ensure interns, apprentices and office workers are aware of the dangers of the embalming room.

- **Provide appropriate protective equipment for employees.** Embalmers should have impervious clothing, rubber gloves, plastic aprons and goggles to prevent exposure to embalming liquids and bodily fluids.

- **Hold safety meetings.** Let employees know you mean business. Institute policies that require employees to immediately clean up any spilled fluids, use appropriate disposal containers, keep solutions securely closed when not in use, and thoroughly clean the workspace after an embalming. □

*For more information on how to make your funeral home OSHA-compliant, visit the agency's Web site at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).*

## Update your Web site to attract customers

If your firm's Web site is looking outdated, it might be time to revamp it. More and more consumers are doing their research online before entering a funeral home or cemetery to make arrangements. To gain this percentage of the market, funeral homes and cemeteries need to include more to make their Web sites stand out from the crowd.

- **Look at your market.** If you are in a large city, a Web site may be a must. Few people are loyal to their

neighborhood funeral home. Many choose a firm based on services and price, not location.

- **Update regularly.** Stagnant Web sites don't do you or the consumer any good. Make sure your site is updated weekly, preferably daily. Address issues that are going on in the world as they relate to grief to make people want to come back to your site.

- **Include obituaries.** One of the biggest trends for both cemetery and funeral home Web sites is sections where family members can post obituaries and photos of their loved ones. It's a nice added service to provide and directs more traffic to your site.

- **Create a page of bereavement resources.** A calendar of support groups located at your firm or a nearby school or hospice can be helpful for clients and their friends. Include links to bereavement Web sites to help people find an appropriate outlet for their grief. You could also create your own grief discussion board.

- **Make your Web site user friendly.** You don't want to overwhelm the client. Make it easy for individuals to find information and flip between pages.

- **Include a price list.** Even if you are a higher-priced, higher-service oriented funeral home, consumers want to see prices. Explain why your prices might be higher by detailing the additional services you provide. □

## DEATH CARE BUSINESS ADVISOR



Publisher: Kenneth F. Kahn  
 VP Editorial: Claude J. Werder  
 Executive Editor: Candace Golanski  
 Editorial Director: Daniel Gephart  
 Managing Editor: Lanie Simpson  
 Editor: Joshua Clifton

VP Marketing/Customer Service: Jana L. Shellington  
 Marketing Director: Lee Ann Tiemann  
 Product Group Manager: Courtney Ingram  
 Production Director: Joseph Ciocca  
 Publications Director: Roberta J. Crusemire  
 Washington Bureau Chief: Patrick Harden

Copyright © 2006 LRP PUBLICATIONS

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information regarding the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that the publisher and editor are not engaged in rendering legal counsel. If legal advice is required, the service of a competent professional should be sought.

*Death Care Business Advisor* (ISSN 1092-6461) is published semimonthly, except one issue omitted in July, September, November and December for \$225.00 per year by LRP Publications, 747 Dresher Road, P.O. Box 980, Horsham, PA 19044-0980, (215) 784-0860. Periodicals postage paid at Horsham, PA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Death Care Business Advisor*, 747 Dresher Road, P.O. Box 980, Horsham, PA 19044. Editorial offices at 360 Hiatt Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418. Tel: (561) 622-6520, ext. 8732, fax: (561) 622-9060.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by LRP Publications, for libraries or other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) for a \$5-per-document fee and a \$3.75-per-page fee to be paid directly to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923. Fee Code: 1092-6461/06/\$5+\$3.75.

## Don't forget to back up the records at your facility

Most businesses in the United States today rely on the computer for everything — inventory, sales records, billing and more. Many cemeteries, however, still conduct business the old-fashioned way — by keeping records on paper.

While becoming technologically up-to-date can be a great asset, ensuring that records are backed up is crucial for protecting your cemetery.

**Brandon Finley**, the director for Cemetery Information Management Systems at **Ramaker & Associates** in Sauk City, Wis., worked with a cemetery in the Gulf region after Hurricane Katrina decimated the coastal areas of Mississippi and Louisiana. Cemeteries in that area that did not have additional copies of their files elsewhere lost everything and had to start from scratch. Years of burial records blew away. Maps were gone. Records of presold plots vanished.

Finley said regardless of the system your cemetery uses to record and maintain records, these backup solutions are available:

- **Make copies of your records.** One of the most basic ways cemeteries can back up their records is by simply making copies of everything. “I know one cemetery, for example, that once a year, they go through and make photocopies of their entire recordkeeping system,” he said. These thousands of pieces of paper are then stored in a bank safe. This option is inexpensive and won't change the way your cemetery conducts business. However, the process is time-consuming, and these off-site records will likely be ignored unless necessary and can quickly become outdated.

- **Scan your records.** After each transaction, scan the record into a computer. “Burn that to a CD, and take it to another location,” he said. Creating a CD with all your new records can take just minutes and can help your cemetery get back on track in no time after a devastating event.

### Recovering records isn't impossible

What if your cemetery has already suffered a devastating loss? What if those records are not backed up? While it's always easier to be proactive, there are ways to help cemeteries recover at least some of the lost records:

- **Use ground-penetrating radar.** This equipment can be dragged over the ground to locate where remains are buried, which can then help cemeteries generate a map.

- **Call your customers.** Those with loved ones buried that may have purchased adjacent plots should be contacted to ensure the plot, if purchased, is in fact reserved for them. They also may be able to help you locate others that have pre-purchased plots in your cemetery. □

- **Create a database and back it up.** Even for the computer-shy, entering information into an Excel spreadsheet or Word document and creating periodic backup CDs is simple and effective. The computerized documents are searchable, making locating the name of someone buried on your grounds easy. “Cemeteries that do this still often are working with a paper map,” Finley said. If this is your situation, don't forget to keep a backup of that map as well.

- **Computerize your map and link it to the database.** Larger cemeteries are moving toward using Geographic Information Systems to create a map of the cemetery that is linked into the database. When someone purchases a plot, it is recorded in the database and the GIS map is automatically updated. With databases of this nature, an automatic backup function is often included, which will protect not only the database but the map as well. □

*For more information, contact Brandon Finley at (608) 643-4100 or e-mail at [Brandon@ramaker.com](mailto:Brandon@ramaker.com).*

## Consider automation for your cemetery

If your cemetery is still conducting business the way it did at the turn of the century, it might be time for a change.

**Brandon Finley** of **Ramaker & Associates** in Sauk City, Wis., said computerization can help cemeteries in many ways, including making their businesses more efficient, keeping records up to date and preventing accidents from happening.

Cemeteries that still run on paper may not back up their files, which risks damage in the field, misplacement in the office, being blown away by a hurricane or tornado, or being incinerated in a fire.

Without properly updated files and maps, it's also easier

to lose track of where someone is buried — leading to lawsuits.

Some cemetery managers hesitate to purchase a software package because of the expense, but just entering sales records and burials into a basic spreadsheet can help. And don't think you can't computerize current information just because the past century is on paper.

Ramaker said a range of solutions is available for cemetery managers who want to computerize their records. Some will take past records and computerize everything for you — for a price. But to save money, Finley said cemeteries can enter historical records at their own pace by themselves. □

## Understand zoning concerns before proposing crematory

Getting into the crematory business can be a big undertaking. Crematory owners need to learn about zoning restrictions and permit compliances before contemplating the construction of a crematory. Then, it's the minefield of rules, regulations, policies and procedures. Once all of that is up and running, operators have to consider their recordkeeping policies and ensuring they're protecting themselves from litigation.

**Paul Rahill**, the president of **Matthews Cremation Division**, said there are many areas that need to be considered before a crematory is opened. To help new owners learn the ropes and help current operators update their procedures, Rahill and other crematory experts will be presenting an **Owners/Managers Legal Seminar** on Nov. 7 at the **Rosen Plaza Hotel** in Orlando, Fla.

Rahill, whose session will focus on the issues those getting started in the crematory business will face, said it's crucial for interested people to understand the issues that might evolve when it comes to opening a crematory.

"Property zoning is becoming more and more of an issue as crematories continue to be installed in populated areas," he said. "As the public becomes more aware of their environmental surroundings, there's more tension between the funeral director who wants to install a

crematory, the zoning commissions, and the public in general."

Nearly every month a newspaper around the country prints a story about a city council blocking the construction of a crematory. Community members argue that a crematory will decrease the value of their home and that it emits dangerous pollutants into the air.

Rahill said those who would like to build a crematory need to be prepared for these fights and come armed with the data to inform the public.

"Crematories tend to be somewhat of a mystery still," he said. "Zoning hearings are an opportunity for funeral professionals to present information on crematories and their impact."

Rahill said property values also tend to be a common concern. However, using county sites that assess property and property appraisal sites,

one can look at houses adjacent to a relatively new crematory and see if the property has gone up or down in value.

"They can use that to help their cause," he said. "Many folks think the value goes down, but properties continue to go up regardless of a crematory going up in that area." □

*For more information on the seminar, call CANA at (312) 245-1077 or visit [www.cremationassociation.org/html/events.html](http://www.cremationassociation.org/html/events.html). Paul Rahill can be reached at (407) 886-5533.*

### Use available data

Some citizens might have concerns about the amount of pollution created by a crematory. **Paul Rahill**, the president of **Matthews Cremation Division**, said much of this data is available from the **Environmental Protection Agency**. □

## Reevaluate documentation at your cremation facility

Since 2000 several big-name crematory cases have been in the news. The owners of **Tri-State Crematory** in northwest Georgia were prosecuted and convicted in criminal court for entering into contracts with funeral homes to cremate hundreds of bodies that were dumped on the property rather than being incinerated.

More recently **Bayview Crematory** in Seabrook, N.H., was accused of cremating multiple bodies at once and leaving bodies to decompose in broken refrigerators, among other violations.

While these are extreme cases of negligence, these highly publicized cases have put everyone in the death care industry a bit more on edge. Crematory operators are analyzed more closely and need to make sure they have the records in place to protect themselves if they are ever accused of negligence.

**Bill Sucharski**, the president of **Philadelphia Crematories Inc.**, will be speaking about the importance of documentation at the **Cremation Association of North**

**America's** upcoming **Owners/Managers Legal Seminar** in Florida.

In the 1990s, CANA released a recommended cremation authorization form that was much more technical than most funeral directors and crematory operators expected.

"Some funeral homes were used to going to the crematory garage — they had a key — and dropping someone off," he said. "There were no signatures, no documenting the receipt."

Today, that way of doing business is not safe or practical — even if it is more convenient.

"Security and convenience are kind of opposites," he said. "As we've instituted more and more policies and procedures to be more secure, it has cut down on the convenience and the old way of doing things."

Sucharski said documentation is crucial to protect both the funeral director (*see opposite page*) and the crematory operator. □

*Contact Bill Sucharski at (215) 708-7747.*

## Request proper information from crematories

Just as crematories need to ensure they are in compliance with rules and regulations regarding their sector of the death care industry, funeral directors, too, need to take responsibility and ensure they have chosen a reputable crematory and have the proper records to protect themselves from litigation if an unfortunate event occurs. **Bill Sucharski of Philadelphia Crematories Inc.** in Philadelphia, encourages funeral homes to use this form to ensure they are procuring necessary records from crematories:

### Crematory Records Request

Name of crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact and telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of funeral home: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of funeral home: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact and telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

The funeral home is requesting that the crematory provide copies of the records listed below or, if the records are not available, please explain why in the space provided. The funeral home needs the requested records as part of its due diligence investigation to make sure that any crematory it uses is operating in a lawful and professional manner.

1. Policy and procedure manual for crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

2. State crematory license or permit: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Copies of membership certificates from the Cremation Association of North America, Better Business Bureau or other organizations: \_\_\_\_\_

4. List of crematory operators employed by crematory and a copy of their operator certifications: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Copies of crematory's liability insurance policy and professional liability (errors and omissions) insurance policy: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Copies of cremation authorization form and any release used by crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Copies of all body acceptance forms and cremated remains receipt forms used by crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Copies of all price lists used by crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Copies of any state inspection reports of the crematory: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Copies of recent maintenance logs used internally by the crematory for its equipment: \_\_\_\_\_

*Source: Bill Sucharski and the Cremation Association of North America.*

## Use strategies to build community events

If your cemetery plans to start hosting events to get involved in the community, **Stacie Schubert**, the director of community care for **Olinger Mortuaries and Cemeteries** in the Denver metropolitan area, has some advice:

- **Start small.** “I always encourage folks to start small with attainable goals,” she said. A renowned artist isn’t going to come to your first concert, and you shouldn’t expect to have a packed house for the first event. By being realistic, you won’t be disappointed and you can build off of that first event.

- **Invite other groups.** Involve veterans’ groups and city officials to help plan events.

“Partner with others that have an interest in what you’re doing,” Schubert said.

Asking organizations such as Alzheimer’s groups, hospices, churches and schools to partner for an event can help make it a success. For instance, a funeral home might hold a seminar on death and dying with the help of a local school or church.

“Try things that are easy to accomplish and lower on time,

money and effort to start with,” she said. “As you accomplish things, things will blossom and bloom without trying.”

- **Don’t necessarily hold the event on-site.** Although it’s always good to bring the community to your property, it can be difficult for people to come to a funeral home or cemetery. “When you’re trying to capture an audience, you have to realize how difficult it is to come back (to the funeral home or cemetery grounds),” she said.

- **Look at your calendar.** There’s a week or month for practically every cause. National Hospice Month. National Fire Prevention Week. National Safety Week. Focus your community outreach on those particular times and take the opportunity to reach out to groups that might be interested in spreading the word about themselves during those particular months. Likewise, take advantage of holidays such as Veterans Day, Memorial Day and Mother’s Day. Create a memorial service or pass out flowers for people to place on graves. □

Contact Stacie Schubert at (303) 445-4151.

### COMMUNITY (continued from page 1)

and holiday memorial services for those who want to remember their deceased loved ones.

“We have many different events that Olinger puts on in the community,” Schubert said. “Our entire history is about being a good community partner. We don’t spend a lot of money — instead we put money into our people and the community.”

### Get your name out

Four times a year, Olinger hosts a concert series highlighting different musicians. Several of the firm’s cemeteries also host historical tours and help people understand the changes that have happened around death, dying and memorialization over the years, which draws the community into the cemetery and allows employees to show off cremation gardens and explain how rituals have changed to meet the needs of today’s population.

This helps the cemeteries and funeral homes build relationships with individuals in the community.

“From a business standpoint, we know people make decisions based on relationships,” she said. “Especially in

the death care world, those choices are very difficult to make. They’re very personal choices. We nurture those relationships so that when the time of need comes, they do think of us.”

### Create beneficial events

Cemeteries often hold events to get people to their grounds, but few routinely host events that financially benefit other community groups. One of Olinger’s cemeteries recently held a benefit concert, raising \$16,000 for a local hospice center. The firm also hosts an annual hike at its mountaintop cemetery, donating all services for the event, which also benefits area hospices.

“Whether it’s helping build a new hospice, supporting events, or donating dollars, time, education or information, we believe it’s important to be in the community,” Schubert said.

Employees at Olinger are also encouraged to volunteer their time at nonprofits in the area and to sit on charity boards.

“We know we grow market share by constantly being present,” she said. “You can get your name out through advertising, but also by being that face in the community.” □

For more information, contact Stacie Schubert at (303) 445-4151 or via e-mail at [Stacie.schubert@sci-us.com](mailto:Stacie.schubert@sci-us.com).

### Be mindful of the cost

You might think having a big event is a great way to get your name out, but make sure you’re not exceeding your budget. Know what kind of return on investment you’re going to get from your event. Ask yourself these questions: Are we growing brand awareness? Are we growing relationships? Are we growing market share? □

## NFDA develops notification system for federal employees

The **National Funeral Directors Association** has developed an online notification system to help the U.S. government identify when retired federal employees die.

The system, which was developed in coordination with the **Office of Personnel Management**, allows the federal agency a secure, online way to utilize the expertise of funeral directors in the notification process. This system allows the OPM to stop retirement benefits and begin survivor benefits to the families in a timely manner. The OPM is responsible for administering benefits to retired federal employees. This includes, but is not limited to, those who worked in the **U.S. Postal Service** or in any executive department, such as the **Department of the Interior**, the **Treasury Department**, **Border Patrol**, **Federal Communications Commission**, and **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**, as well as civilians who worked in the **Department of Defense**.

"The Online Government Death Notification system is an innovative system bringing together both the public and private sectors in a win-win partnership," said **Christine Pepper**, NFDA chief executive officer. "It allows funeral homes to provide an extra level of service to families, while increasing government efficiency. We're thrilled to be able to provide such a critical resource."

The system, which is accessible to all licensed funeral directors, was created after the NFDA was approached by the OPM in August 2005. The agency was looking for a more efficient way to process death notices for retired federal employees. The new system allows funeral directors to input death notices at any hour of the day, increasing their level of service to families, while also cutting benefit processing times anywhere from two to five weeks.

### Help families identify benefits

Funeral directors can help families identify survivor benefits. To provide this service, you need to obtain a letter signed by the surviving spouse or next of kin that authorizes you to obtain this information on his behalf. The signed letter must include the deceased's name, date of birth, Social Security number and, if available, civil service claim number. Once completed, send the letter via fax to (724) 794-1112. Once the **Office of Personnel Management** receives the authorization, you can call within one to two days to get the information over the phone at (888) 767-6738. The family will then be sent the information within five to seven days. □

The program is initially focused on funeral directors in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia, where the concentration of federal retirees is highest. However, the OGDN system can be accessed and used by any licensed funeral director.

The OGDN system does not file a death certificate and is currently not affiliated with any other federal government agencies. Pepper said it is merely a way to reduce waste by notifying the OPM almost immediately when a death occurs, allowing families to start receiving survivor benefits more quickly. NFDA has worked hand-in-hand with the agency to deliver a system that both meets their needs and is easy to use and understand by funeral directors, she said. □

*For more information on the new Online Government Death Notification system, visit the NFDA's Web site at [www.nfda.org/ogdn.php](http://www.nfda.org/ogdn.php).*

## Association addresses questions about new system

The **National Funeral Directors Association** provided answers to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding the new Online Government Death Notification system. These questions include:

• **Do I need to be an NFDA member to utilize the system?** No. However, you must be a licensed funeral director in order to enter death notifications.

• **Do I need to set up an account in order to use the system?** Yes, you need to have an account in the system and provide your name and contact information for verification purposes should there be a question about the notification submission. Submissions must be made under the direction of a licensed funeral director.

• **Does the licensed funeral director need to personally**

**enter the data?** The funeral director can direct another staff person to enter the data under her supervision. However, the record must be submitted under the name of the licensed funeral director who is ultimately responsible.

• **Will I be able to save a copy of the submission for my records?** Yes. You will have the opportunity to print out a copy of the notification to place in your files after the information is submitted. The printer-friendly copy will include the date that the notification was submitted. It is highly recommended that you print a copy for your records.

• **Is the U.S. Social Security Administration notified through this system?** Currently, the system is not designed to notify Social Security of the death. This notification must still happen separately. □

**SUICIDE** (continued from page 1)

community. She already ran support groups for widows and widowers and bereaved parents, but wanted to reach out to those she thought were underserved in the area.

"The basic grief process is the same no matter what death it is, but there are differences for each type of death," she said. "When there's a traumatic death such as suicide, they need to first deal with that trauma that they've been through before they can begin to grieve."

Troy said it can take even longer to deal with that trauma if family members discovered the loved one who died by suicide.

And frequently there's blame. Troy said a large percentage of the survivors who attend her suicide support group talk about a relationship that may have broken up just before the suicide.

"You know the old saying, 'The straw that broke the camel's back?'" she asked. "People will look at that and blame the wife, the girlfriend, the husband or the boyfriend, when the reality is, just because the relationship broke up and the person chose to die by suicide, there were other issues."

### Religious beliefs

Years ago, many Christian churches held the belief that a person who chose to take her own life would not go

to heaven. Troy, who worked for years as a pastoral associate before joining the funeral home and resides at **St. John's Convent** with the **Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet**, said the church's views on suicide have changed. Although she never brings up the topic of religion in her bereavement groups unless another raises the issue, she is often asked about God by suicide survivors.

Some people ask, "Why did God allow this? They're tormented because they think that their loved one has gone to hell," she said. "The religious factor is a very important one in terms of what a person was taught to believe and it can add to their suffering."

When people start questioning the state of their loved one's soul, Troy tells them that God understands.

"I try to help them see that God is a loving God and a God who loves us unconditionally," she said. "Obviously, most people who die by suicide are tormented by something and don't see any way out. If we're talking about a God who is loving and compassionate, they're not going to be punished for that. I believe that a person who dies by suicide is immediately embraced by God and brought out of their torment." □

*For more information, contact Sister Rose Troy at (312) 724-2221 or via e-mail at [rtroy@dimblebyfriedelfuneralhomes.com](mailto:rtroy@dimblebyfriedelfuneralhomes.com).*

### Recommend support group

You can help families with the grief process by recommending a suicide survivor-specific support group. Find out if a suicide support group exists in the community and have the number on hand. **Sister Rose Troy**, the bereavement support coordinator for **Dimbleby, Friedel, Williams and Edmunds Funeral Homes** in New Hartford, N.Y., said that because of the anger, questions and blame experienced by suicide survivors, a specific support group is best. □

## Encourage honesty, make accommodations for survivors

One of the reasons suicide survivors can have an even more difficult time with grief is because of the social stigma attached to suicide.

"It's almost an unconscious thing, and I don't think people mean to, but they look at the family as if there had to be some dysfunction there," said **Sister Rose Troy**, the bereavement support coordinator at **Dimbleby, Friedel, Williams and Edmunds Funeral Homes** in New Haven, N.Y. "That's not always true, but that's the perception and it's very difficult for the family."

Troy suggests the following for working with families who lost a loved one to suicide:

- **Encourage family members to be honest with others.** Because suicide remains such a sensitive issue in society, a family may not know what to say to others who want to pay their respects.

"They should not feel that they have to hide what hap-

pened — it becomes an extra burden for them," she said. "It really creates some distance between the people that are grieving and the friends trying to reach out to them. They don't have to tell gruesome details, but simply say, 'He chose to die by suicide.'"

- **Avoid the word "committed" or "killed himself."** Rather, Troy chooses to use more gentle words to describe the tragedy, such as "choosing to die by suicide."

- **Offer to relay the news to others.** Troy said when a well-known family man in his 40s died by suicide that the widow did not know what to say to those paying their respects. Many in the community did not know how the death occurred. Rather than answering questions at the visitation, the funeral director stood at the door, greeted everyone and explained the circumstances of the death. "Years later, she said that was one of the most helpful things the funeral director could have done for her and her family," Troy said. □

## Avoid mistakes when managing your funeral home's staff

As the head of your funeral home or cemetery, you want your staff to look to you for answers and leadership. But no one is perfect. **Tim Connor of Connor Resource Group** in North Carolina said there are several common mistakes funeral home and cemetery owners make that have negative consequences on the performance of staff members, and can even affect the entire organization.

To avoid these errors when managing your employees, Connor recommends funeral home and cemetery owners:

- **Listen to staff and care about their issues.** Your staff members, like you, spend most of their day at the funeral home or cemetery. You want them to care enough about what happens at your organization to feel comfortable to raise any issues they may have and feel passionate about their ideas. By listening carefully, you can hear some great ideas that can improve the way work gets done.

- **Host a monthly brainstorming session with all employees.** Pose a question or a topic, such as preneed sales strategies, and go around the room and have each employee contribute an idea or strategy, no matter how crazy it may sound. This type of creative thinking can generate new strategies and give employees the confidence and satisfaction that you value their input.

- **Don't let your ego get in the way of good decisions.** In the long term, making good decisions will reflect better on you than anything else. Think about what is best for your staff and your funeral home or cemetery.

- **Give credit where credit is due.** Recognizing staff members who do a great job will inspire them to do even better. When something goes wrong, use the incident to improve a staff member's performance.

- **Maintain open, honest and consistent communication.** No one can do their job well without the necessary information. And worse, if an employee believes you have been dishonest with him, it will be hard to earn back his trust and loyalty.

- **Communicate organization direction and goals.** Your staff members can be much more effective if they see how their work helps accomplish the overall goals of your

### Thoroughly train new employees

As a head of a funeral home or cemetery, it is important to get off on the right foot with new employees. Funeral directors typically believe new employees know how to arrange and conduct a funeral, but don't assume they know all the ins and outs of your organization.

Train new employees on the way your firm operates, even if you think the information is common sense. This could be something as simple as how your funeral home expects employees to greet people. A new employee may not realize that addressing an elderly woman in your community by her first name could be insulting to her, or may not know your firm has a specific way of answering the phone. Training should include a variety of information on conducting the funeral, from where employees should sit, to who dismisses the people at the end of the service. □

funeral home or cemetery. Your staff will take greater pride in their work if they understand how important it is.

- **Give adequate and consistent positive appreciation.** Your staff members need to know when you like their work. Getting regular, specific feedback will help them stay enthusiastic about their work.

- **Hire strong candidates.** The staff members you hire reflect positively on you, whether they eventually move on to other positions at your organization or take over your position when you leave. Part of your legacy could be that you left the funeral home or cemetery in great hands.

- **Empower your employees.** While it may be hard to relinquish control, your staff members will be much more motivated if they have the authority to make decisions and get results. □

For more information, contact Tim Connor at (704) 895-1230 or visit [www.timconnor.com](http://www.timconnor.com).

### Learn from exit interviews

You can learn a lot about your management techniques if you conduct exit interviews for employees who are leaving your funeral home. When conducting the interview, let the individual know that your goal is to better understand his perspective so that you can make changes to benefit the funeral home. Ask questions that will illicit answers about your funeral home's environment and your job as a manager. □

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation of *Death Care Business Advisor*. Published semi-monthly - except one issue omitted in July, September, November and December - by LRP Publications, 747 Dresher Rd., Suite 500, Horsham, PA 19044-0980. Publisher is Kenneth F. Kahn; owner is Kenneth F. Kahn (100%). The average number of copies of each issue sold and distributed to paid subscribers during the preceding 12 months was 379. There was no distribution through dealers or news agents. Actual number of copies of a single issue published nearest to filing date: 353. Total paid and/or requested circulation: 316. Free Distribution by mail: 22. Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 15. Statement signed and certified to be true by J. Todd Lutz, CFO.

## Learn 5 answers to common questions about winter lawn care

The weather is changing in many parts of the country and, for cemetery owners, it means time to make final preparations for winter lawn care.

The **University of Illinois Extension** offered the following answers to five of the most commonly asked questions you may have when preparing your cemetery lawn for winter and when looking ahead to preparations for next spring:

**1. Can I seed my cemetery lawn now, so that it will be in place for next spring's growing season?** This process, according to the UIE, is called dormant seeding. This is where grass seed is planted late in fall so it stays dormant until spring. Then as conditions warm, the seed is already in place and ready to germinate.

Although conditions will depend on your location, the time to dormant seed for cemeteries in the Midwest would be the last week of November. Experts said the seed should be planted so there is good seed-to-soil contact.

Dormant seeding doesn't come without its share of risks. If a large area is to be planted, the UIE recommends that you wait until spring to do so. Winter weather can be extremely unpredictable. Ideally, a snow cover is desired over a dormant seeded area to help assure that the seed stays in place. Remember, however, that if your area receives an early snowfall before you have seeded, it is best to wait until spring. In addition, warmer-than-normal conditions without snow cover can also be a problem for dormant seeding.

**2. Can I still fertilize my cemetery lawn?** If you are intending to fertilize your lawn in late fall, the UIE recommends waiting until the lawn stops growing, but before the ground is frozen. The later it gets into the fall months, the less likely the fertilization will be beneficial. If you aren't sure, the UIE recommends you skip the application.

**3. Can dandelions and ground ivy still be controlled in November?** For cemeteries located in northern Illinois

### At what height should you keep lawn?

To maintain a healthy lawn this winter, it is important to mow the turf until it stops growing. According to the **University of Illinois Extension**, cemetery owners should keep their lawn mowed to a height of 2 to 2½ inches. If your lawn gets too tall, it can mat under the snow, leading to problems caused by diseases such as snow mold. However, if your lawn is too short, it can limit its ability to store food for growth in the spring. In addition, you can prevent mold by raking off excess leaves. They can be used to mulch around roses or other perennials. □

### Prevent repeat of winter mice damage

One of the dangers associated with lawn care during the winter months is damage from field mice or voles. According to the **University of Illinois Extension**, cemetery owners cannot completely eliminate the problem, but there are a few simple steps you can take to minimize your risk, including:

- Make sure the lawn has been mowed right up until it stops growing.
- Avoid excessively tall turf during the winter months.
- Continue to clean up fallen leaves to prevent them from piling up under the snow.
- Rake away leaves and debris under shrubs, which provide cover for voles. □

and other comparable areas, November is too late for effective use of herbicides. Although the weeds may still be green, the UIE said they will likely not take in the herbicide to provide control. Ideally, September and early October is the best time for controlling perennial broad-leaf weeds.

**4. Why do some lawn areas turn brown or tan but others are still fairly green?** The UIE said one main reason for this phenomenon is the presence of warm and cool season grasses together in the lawn. Warm-season annuals, such as crabgrass and foxtails, die early in the fall, leaving brown areas. Perennial warm-season grasses, such as nimblewill and zoysiagrass, turn light tan in late fall because they have gone dormant with cooler temperatures. Cool-season grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, usually stay green until very late fall or early winter, depending on the weather conditions.

The UIE said areas of your lawn may vary in color due to microclimate factors. A sheltered area may be greener than an exposed portion, even if the same grasses are found in each. Areas with more available moisture may also appear greener in color.

**5. Can I keep lawn products, such as fertilizer or grass seed, to use next season?** If stored properly, the UIE said most products will still be viable next season. Keep grass seed cool and dry. Fertilizer bags, if already opened, should be securely sealed so moisture is not absorbed from the air. In addition, protect bags from moisture. Pesticide products, in particular liquid formulations, should not be allowed to freeze. Choose a secure storage location away from direct heat or flame. Consult the product labels for more precautions. □

*For more information, visit the University of Illinois Extension's Web site at [www.urbanext.uiuc.edu](http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu).*

## StoneMor acquires funeral homes, cemeteries with multiple transactions

**StoneMor Partners LP** recently completed the acquisition of 21 cemeteries and 14 funeral homes through multiple transactions with **Service Corporation International** and other entities for the aggregate purchase price of \$11.750 million. StoneMor paid \$5.875 million in cash and issued 275,046 common units representing limited partner interests in StoneMor Partners LP, in connection with the additional \$5.875 million. In addition, StoneMor will assume the merchandise and service liabilities associated with certain prearranged bonded contracts valued at approximately \$2.8 million related to the properties.

The properties are located in 10 states: Alabama, five cemeteries and three funeral homes; Oregon, five cemeteries and six funeral homes; Michigan, three cemeteries; Kansas, two cemeteries and one funeral home; Colorado, two cemeteries; Washington, one cemetery and two funeral homes; West Virginia, two funeral homes; Kentucky, one cemetery; Illinois, one cemetery; and Missouri, one cemetery.

In conjunction with this transaction, StoneMor received control of merchandise and funeral trusts of approximately \$30 million and perpetual care trusts of approximately \$16 million related to these locations.

### About StoneMor

**StoneMor Partners LP**, headquartered in Bristol, Pa., is an owner and operator of cemeteries in the United States, with 175 cemeteries and 27 funeral homes in 21 states. StoneMor is the only publicly traded death care company structured as a partnership. StoneMor's cemetery products and services, which are sold on both a preneed and at-need basis, include burial lots, lawn and mausoleum crypts, burial vaults, caskets, memorials, and all services which provide for the installation of this merchandise. □

### Contact us

Do you have an interesting idea for a story or would you like to see a particular issue addressed in an upcoming issue of the *Death Care Business Advisor*? If you do or would simply like to offer feedback regarding a recent issue, contact:

Joshua Clifton, editor  
360 Hiatt Drive

Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418

Send an e-mail to [joshuaclifton@hotmail.com](mailto:joshuaclifton@hotmail.com). □

In the aggregate, the 21 cemeteries and 14 funeral homes annually perform approximately 4,300 interments and 2,000 calls, respectively. In 2005, these locations produced annual cemetery revenues of approximately \$9.9 million and annual funeral home revenues of approximately \$6.1 million. □

For more information on the transactions, visit StoneMor's Web site at [www.stonemor.com](http://www.stonemor.com).

## Florida funeral director accused of selling without license

A Florida funeral home director is facing felony charges that he sold a preneed funeral services contract without a license to a woman he met at church and then pocketed the money.

**Tebbie Singleton**, owner of **Singleton Funeral Home** in Tampa, negotiated a contract for \$3,855 for funeral goods and services and received a check for \$3,155 with the remainder to be paid when the services were provided. An investigation by the state's **Department of Financial Services, Division of Insurance Fraud**, and the **Division of Funeral, Cemetery and Consumer Services**, determined Singleton never forwarded the money to complete the deal and was not authorized to enter such a contract.

"It is unconscionable that an individual would take advantage of someone trying to prepare for the end of life," said **Tom Gallagher**, who oversees the department. "If this individual is convicted, we will seek to ensure this victim and any others are repaid and that he no longer works in this industry."

Only one possible victim has been identified so far, but Gallagher said anyone who thinks they may be a victim should contact the department. If convicted, Singleton could face up to five years in prison on each charge. □

For more information, visit the DFS Web site at [www.fldfs.com](http://www.fldfs.com).

### New division

This is the first arrest stemming from a joint investigation between Florida's **Division of Insurance Fraud** and **Division of Funeral, Cemetery and Consumer Services** since the latter joined the department late last year. The new division was created by consolidating the **Board of Funeral and Cemetery Services**, which had operated under **Department of Financial Services**, and the **Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers**, which had operated under the **Department of Business and Professional Regulation**. □

For more information, visit the DFS Web site at [www.fldfs.com](http://www.fldfs.com).

## NFDA hires new coordinator for communications, PR activities

The **National Funeral Directors Association** has hired a new communications coordinator. **Jessica Koth**, of Milwaukee, will now be responsible for coordinating communications programs and community relations activities that promote the association and funeral service.

"Jessica's skills and experience in public relations and communications make her a great fit for this position," said **Christine Pepper**, NFDA's chief executive officer.

"She will be a great asset as we evolve and expand our public relations efforts."

Koth comes to NFDA after working with two Milwaukee-area public relations agencies, **Leum Roberts Inc.** and **Ron Sonntag Public Relations**. At these agencies, she worked with a variety of local, regional and national accounts including those in the nonprofit, health care,

**About the NFDA**

The **National Funeral Directors Association** is the leading funeral service association, serving the 19,000 individual members who represent more than 10,000 funeral homes in the United States and other countries. From its headquarters in Brookfield, Wis., and its Advocacy Office in Washington, D.C., NFDA provides advocacy, education, information, products, programs and services to help members enhance the quality of service to families. For more information, visit [www.nfda.org](http://www.nfda.org). □

food and beverage, and special events industries. Koth also gained experience in association management when she served as the public relations coordinator for the **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology**, a client of **Executive Director Inc.**

Koth graduated from **Marquette University** in Milwaukee with a bachelor of arts degree in journalism.

"I am excited to be a part of the NFDA team, helping consumers better understand the funeral service profession," said Koth. "I am grateful to work alongside the many caring professionals who are members of NFDA." □

## Carriage Services Inc. hires new vice president of HR, counsel

**Carriage Services Inc.** announced that it has hired a new vice president of human resources and general counsel. **J. Bradley Green** was most recently employed as a litigation attorney.

**Melvin C. Payne**, Carriage's CEO and chairman, said he is delighted to add Green to the management team.

"He brings over 12 years of professional legal and human resource experience and will drive our strategic focus on hiring, retaining and developing the best leadership and people," he said. "We look forward to benefiting greatly from his knowledge and experience."

Prior to joining Carriage Services and since 2002, Green practiced law at the Houston firm of **Watt, Beckworth, Thompson & Henneman LLP**. From 1998 to 2002, Green held legal and human resource positions at **Eagle Global Logistics Inc.** □

### SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

**YES!** Please start my one-year subscription (20 issues) to **Death Care Business Advisor** for \$225 plus \$32.50 shipping and handling.

Sales Tax: Residents of PA and IN add 6%; residents of VA add 4½%; residents of Florida add percentage applicable to your county of residence. If tax exempt, please provide certification.

Shipping and handling prices are for the continental U.S. only. Please call for delivery charges outside the U.S.

I understand that I may be shipped, on 30-day approval, future editions, updates, cumulative digests, and/or related products. I am free to change or cancel my order for upkeep services at any time and any update issued within three months of my initial purchase will be sent to me at no additional charge.  I do not want the additional upkeep service.

SOURCE CODE: LR0602-6

CUSTOMER INFORMATION:	
NAME:	TITLE:
ORGANIZATION:	
STREET ADDRESS:	
CITY:	STATE:      ZIP:
PHONE: (    )	FAX: (    )
E-MAIL:	
<small>Your e-mail is used to communicate with you about your purchase(s). Please check here to also receive:</small>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special discounts, offers & new product announcements from LRP Publications.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Offers from carefully selected relevant businesses.	
PAYMENT INFORMATION:	
<b>CHARGE MY CREDIT CARD #:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> VISA <input type="checkbox"/> MASTERCARD <input type="checkbox"/> AMEX <input type="checkbox"/> DISCOVER	
CARD #:	EXP. DATE:
SECURITY CODE: (3-digit code on back of Visa, MasterCard, Discover or 4-digit code on front of AmEx)	
NAME: (as it appears on card)	
CREDIT CARD BILLING ADDRESS: / STREET:	
<small>(if different from above)</small>	
CITY:	STATE:      ZIP:
CARDHOLDER'S PHONE:	CARDHOLDER'S SIGNATURE:
<input type="checkbox"/> CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO LRP PUBLICATIONS.	
<input type="checkbox"/> CHARGE MY LRP ACCT. #:	<input type="checkbox"/> BILL ME. P.O. #: <small>(ENCLOSED)</small>

LRP Publications • P.O. Box 24668  
West Palm Beach, FL 33416-4668