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TEXAS FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

1513 South Interstate 35
Austin, Texas 78741
512/442-2304
Fax: 512/443-3559
www.tfda.com

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ann Singer
ann@tfda.com

MEMBER AND REGIONAL SERVICES

Joyce Dawson
joyce@tfda.com

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Susi Tyler
susi@tfda.com

LOBBYIST

Bill Haley
bhaley1@gmail.com

PUBLISHER

Sail House Publishing
3510 Crowncrest Dr.,
Austin, TX 78759
512-346-0892
kscheberle@austin.rr.com

PUBLISHER

Kim Scheberle

EDITOR

Alice Adams
rtadams2@aol.com

ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER

Kiki Pantaze

ADVERTISING SALES

Patty Huber
512-310-9795
210-579-7054 - Fax
phuber2@austin.rr.com

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Restoring History

Emmett Till's Original Casket Takes Place
in Newest Smithsonian Museum

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Only Wet Babies Like Change

Since taking the gavel as president of TFDA, I have gone through several emotions: awed by this high honor, thinking of those generous and committed leaders who have come before me and even wondered if I'll be up to leading one of our state's largest professional association when the bar has been set so high by past presidents.

Two quotes come to mind as I write this, my first President's Message. The first, from Doug Adams, author of "The Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy" goes something like this: "Anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job."

And while pondering that, I read a quote from fellow Texan and former President, Lyndon B. Johnson, who was noted as saying: "Being president is like being a jackass in a hailstorm. There's nothing to do but to stand there and take it."

Scary, huh?

Instead, I am beginning to feel comfortable – even excited – about leading TFDA through a successful new term and about working with so many of you who have been so helpful and encouraging as I have moved through the chairs.

Our founders were smart funeral directors. They formed our association around a simple formula for leadership succession that included much on-the-job training. Today we elect three officers, each serving three years (including their tenure as president) learning to lead the country's largest asso-

ciation of funeral directors.

As NFDAs Randy Anderson – who installed our new officers – mentioned, the Texas convention was one of the best attended state conventions in the country. One middle-sized state reported a convention attendance of only 40 and a smaller state's association has had better attendance at their mid-winter meeting than their summer convention. Many associations are realizing the way they've always done things is no longer attracting their members to serve and participate.

After hearing what Mr. Anderson said, and knowing of other states' low attendance at their conventions, the handwriting on the wall pushes me – and I hope you, too – to make some calls, make some visits to firms in your community and encourage your colleagues in funeral service to consider joining TFDA and getting involved.

Because when you think about it, funeral service has put roofs over our heads, made college educations possible, financed some nice vacations and paved the way for many of us to be well thought of in our communities.

We as an association must also change with the times, even though – ironically – nobody likes change!

But one exciting change will come within the next month when our new TFDA App will be available for members to receive up-to-the-minute information about our profession

and association activities. This app means you'll know sooner – through your cell phone



– about activities, important dates, our state's mortuary colleges, needed disaster response, funeral service issues, obituaries and general news.

The technology is available... and it just makes sense to explore the value of such an app among our members, but the app is just the beginning of the changes we'll work on together through the year.

Why am I so focused on moving TFDA to the next level?

First of all, I owe it to all of you to do everything possible to keep TFDA a vital part of each and every director's practice. In the coming months, I hope you'll be able to witness these efforts to be responsive to your wants and needs and will want to take part in – or benefit from – some of the new initiatives as they are introduced.

TFDA is our opportunity to give back to the profession that has taken care of us over the years, made it possible for us to take care of our own families as well as the families who come through the doors of our firms regularly.

As I said in Austin, giving back to this association is the right thing to do.

Without a doubt, funeral service continues to change at a rapid pace, and because of these changes, it is more important than ever before for us to stand together, united in our profession, to assist families in celebrating the lives of loved ones...with dignity and honor.

In the meantime, know the honor and gratitude I feel as your president for 2017-18. Know also that I am committed to doing my best in making TFDA the professional resource, network and fellowship you need in order to be your best for every family you serve.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Bill Pierce Golf Tournament at the Panther Trails Golf Course on Aug. 7th and the Leadership Conference that follows, Aug. 8-9th, at The Woodlands Resort & Conference Center, 2301 N. Millbend Drive in The Woodlands...and if you haven't volunteered to serve on a TFDA committee, it's not too late. Just call the office at 512-442-2304 and give them your name.

TFDA needs you – your interest, experience and ideas. We need your passion for our profession and your support for new directors just beginning their careers. Finally, TFDA needs you because we're all unique and with the rich diversity we all bring to the table, we'll always be stronger together.

Until next time... ☆



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A Fond Farewell from Karen

After 15 Years of Serving TFDA, Karen Grice Rides into Retirement Sunset!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has wished me well as I leave TFDA to head into retirement. I was particularly grateful for the wonderful send-off that I received at the TFDA Gala on Wednesday, June 7. I was presented with a lovely gift of Waterford Crystal (bowl and vase) and gift cards to spend as I wished. I decided to purchase a laptop with the money – every time I use it, I will think of my friends at TFDA. Thank you to all who contributed to the purchase.

The past 15 years have been made wonderful by my two cohorts at TFDA, Ann Singer and Joyce Dawson. Although others have passed through these doors to work, Ann and Joyce have remained the steady and faithful companions. The three of us made a



really great team, and I will miss them dearly. I was grateful to get to see Alice Adams, Kim Scheberle, and Patty Huber at convention as well. They are the brains and hearts behind the scenes at the Texas Director, and work hard for all the members of TFDA.

The list of those members that I will miss is too long to include. However, each year has brought a new and exciting group of officers and directors who come with new and exciting ideas. Sometimes the ideas have been a bit challenging for me (social media for example), but always fun. I have made some life-long friends from this group of dedicated professionals. I always know that I will be welcomed with open arms in any funeral home in Texas.

I may be retiring, but I will always hold a special place in my heart for TFDA. I'm sure you may see me popping in at various meetings in the next few years. In the meantime, I plan to rest, travel, and spend a lot of time with my grandbaby!

Karen Grice

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Come Attend NFDA Arranger Training Certification August 2

Calloway-Jones Funeral and Cremation Centers in Bryan, Texas, has been selected to host an upcoming NFDA Arranger Training Certification, taught by Lacy Robinson and scheduled August 2, with registration beginning at 8 a.m.

Are you:

- looking for proven ways to convey the value of the funeral?
- at a loss for words when families ask for direct cremation?
- fearful of where your firm will be in five years?

You're not alone. NFDA's Arrangement Training program offers successful methods for your entire arrangement team to communicate the importance of memorialization and the value of the funeral to every family you serve.

Lacy Robinson, CFSP, NFDA director of member development, addresses these topics and more in this innovative training experience to help your team make the most of the arrangement conference through a five-step process you'll only discover here.



This high-energy, interactive program provides the tools, resources – and confidence! – you need to build trust, provide unforgettable customer service, support families on their journey, and partner with family members to design memorable life tribute events.

Through small- and large-group discovery, problem-solving and creative collaboration, you'll leave with new ideas and an action plan to transform arrangement conferences at your firm.

- NFDA Member - \$475 (CE)
- Nonmember Funeral Director - \$605 (CE)
- Non-Funeral Director - \$475 (No CE)
- Student Member - \$160 (No CE)

Registration fee includes NFDA Arranger Training Workbook, handouts, collaborative presentation, continental breakfast and lunch, CE processing, and certificate of completion.

Online Registration is available at nfda.org under the Education tab.

South Central to Host CEU Course August 3

TFDA's South-Central Region is sponsoring a CEU course—Safety in the Workplace.

This class informs attendees about current gun and license-to-carry laws in Texas. In addition to gun laws, it covers: danger recognition and perpetrator identification; conflict de-escalation; and critical incident stress management.

WHEN: Aug. 3, 2017, 8 a.m. to noon

WHERE: The Moon Building, 1125 N. College St., Belton 76513

COST: \$35/person

REGISTRATION: Must be registered by July 26th. To register, call Bryan Davis - 254-541-0975

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Now that everyone has returned back to their firms from the TFDA Convention & Expo, we wanted to take this opportunity to give our readers a list of all of the exhibitors who traveled to Austin to share their products. Thank you to all of our exhibitors for their continued support of our profession.

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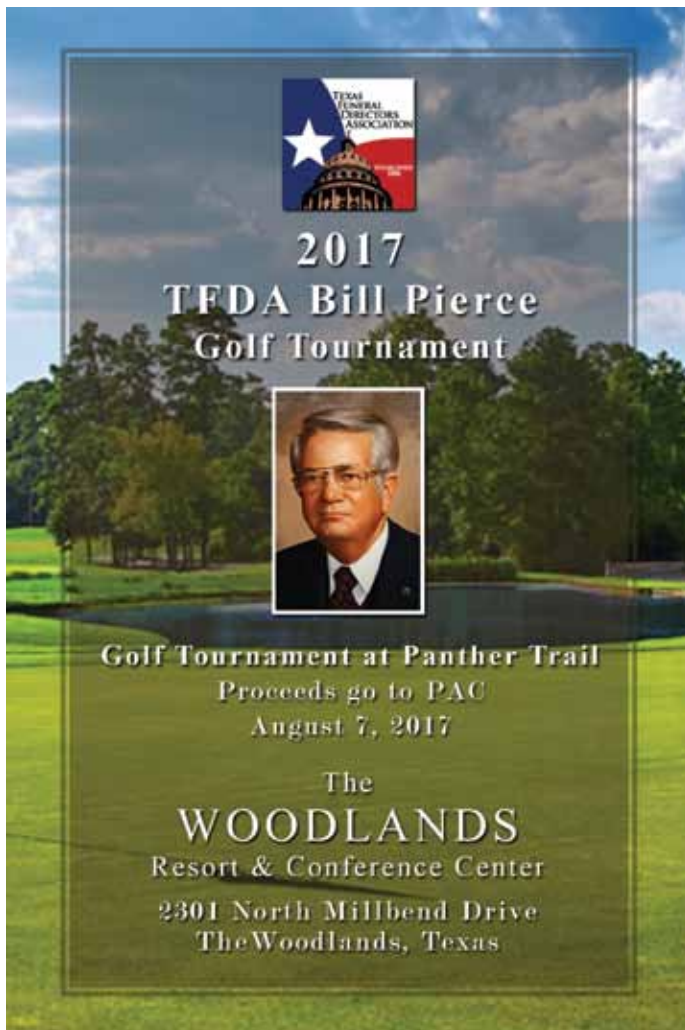
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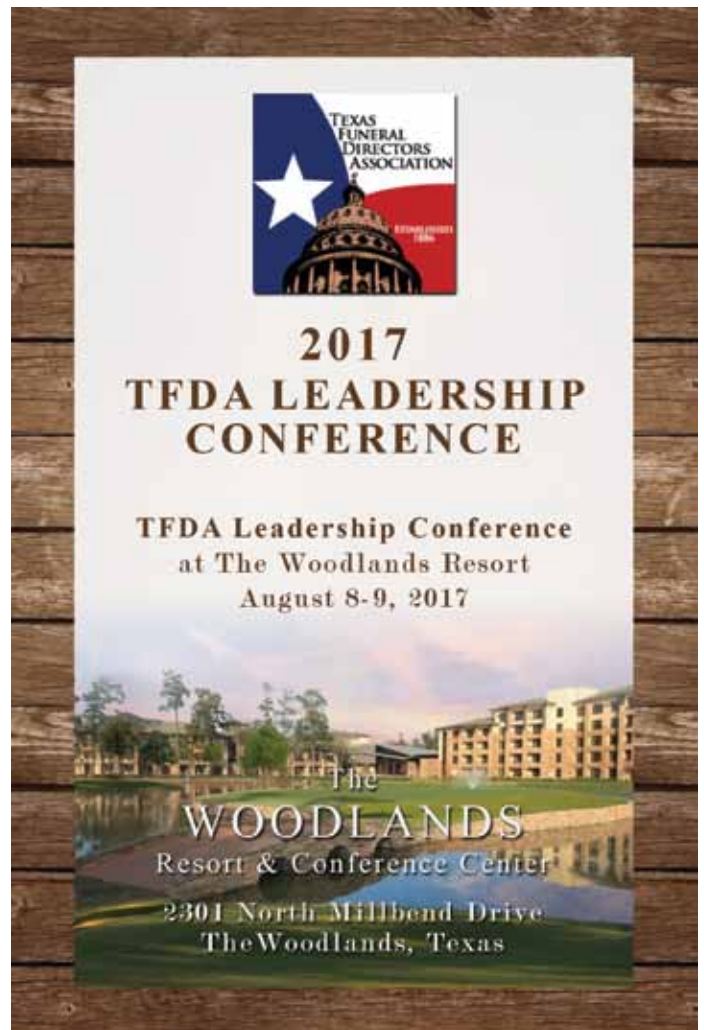




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Restoring History

Emmett Till's Original Casket Takes Place in Newest Smithsonian Museum



owner Emmett and his cousins visited during a trip to his great-uncle's home in Money, Mississippi.

(As a side note, it was released in January 2017 that, during an interview conducted in 2008 with a historian writing a book on the case, Carolyn Bryant Donham admitted she had largely lied about the claim that Till made physical advances towards her. The interview also included information about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband, and how his family hid her in the weeks following the murder so authorities couldn't find her to give her testimony.)

While many of the precise details of Till's actions remain unclear, he was perceived to have offended a white woman, and thus had crossed the racial boundaries of Mississippi in the mid-'50s.

Visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., you'll find a concentration of historical exhibits and one-of-a-kind objects on the first floor.

There's the circa 1918 segregation-era railway car and an early 20th century guard tower from Angola prison in Louisiana. By the opening in 2016, the museum had collected about 37,000 historical objects, including an 1800s slave cabin from Edisto, SC, a collection of Harriet Tubman's possessions, a Tuskegee Airmen's biplane from World War II, the Soul Train neon sign used in the TV show, Chuck Berry's Cadillac and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and Coretta Scott King's Congressional Gold Medal.

However, the crown jewel of the museum's collection is the story of the brief life of Chicago teenager Emmett Till and his casket, restored to its original condition.

Historian Lonnie G. Bunch III, was a teenager, himself, when he heard the story of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old nephew of clergyman Moses Wright who was beaten and killed in 1955 for whistling at Carolyn Bryant, a white woman and wife of a mom-and-pop store

Four days after the alleged flirting occurred, Carolyn's husband and half-brother kidnapped, beat and murdered Till before dumping his body into the Tallahatchie River. He was found a couple of days later by two fishermen, his face unrecognizable. The murderers were acquitted by an all-white jury.

"Like Emmett, I grew up in the North and had Southern relatives. For males of my age, [his] was a cautionary tale," Bunch said. "I didn't know the name, but I knew about a Northern kid who went South, ran afoul of the etiquette of the white South and was murdered.

"I never forgot that," added Bunch, who would go on to become founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Before Bunch accepted this position, he was president of the Chicago Historical Society, where he became friends with the late author and historian Studs Terkel, who seemed to know everyone in Chicago, including Emmett's mother, Mamie Till Mobley. Bunch had wanted to meet her, so in early 2003, Terkel set up a lunch.

"She was very short. Her feet didn't touch the floor when she sat



in the chair," Bunch recalled. "She told me about her fears of letting Emmett go into the South, but she thought she had convinced him how to behave."

After her son was murdered, Mamie Till Mobley had to fight to get his casket. It arrived in Chicago locked in chains. "When it got to the funeral home, she said, 'Open this casket,'" Bunch recalled. By that point, Bunch was crying. Till Mobley, who died later in 2003, continued on, stoically describing her son's unrecognizable face and mangled body, as she saw it, lying in the glass-topped casket.

In her words, she wanted to "let the world see what has happened because there is no way I could describe this. And I needed somebody to help me tell what it was like."

The open casket brought not only awareness to this singular incident, but also has been described as a metaphor for segregation during that time in the racially charged south. "I wanted the world to see what they did to my boy," his mother said.

Till's murder and the images of his body were first published in Jet Magazine and carried around the world by the news media. According to Smithsonian Magazine, seeing Till in the casket "motivated a lot of people that were standing what we call 'on the fence' against racism. It encouraged them to get in the right and do something about it."

The funeral photographs and the resulting public reaction to the highly-publicized killing of the African American teen are considered by historians to mark the beginning of the civil rights movement in America.

Emmett Till was buried in Burr Oak Cemetery in the Chicago suburbs.

Reopening of Till Investigation

In 2004, the FBI reopened the investigation into Till's murder as part of a push to bring

civil-rights-era cold cases to justice. Investigators exhumed his body for an autopsy. With state laws preventing burial in the original casket after exhumation, the teen's remains were reinterred in a new casket in 2005. The old one was placed in a cemetery shed in Chicago,

Thacker Caskets

Carl C. Thacker founded Thacker Caskets – a relatively small funeral supply jobber – in 1939 on North Capitol Street in Washington, DC. Originally called Old Dominion Casket Company, the name was changed to Thacker Caskets in the early 1970s.

Carl Thacker's ingenuity was evident as he pioneered a number of advertising and promotional strategies. He was the first to photograph his product line and transfer the photos to slides to be used as a vibrant slide show, displaying his caskets with a projector.

Audrey Thacker, is Chief Financial Officer and Vice President of Thacker Caskets, Inc. and Thacker Casket Manufacturing. While working for a local casket manufacturer, Audrey met and later married Carl Thacker.

She moved to Washington and became active with the firm. Following her husband's untimely death in 1981, Audrey took the reins and kept the company viable until her young son, CJ, was able to come on board with the firm full time.

He began his career with Thacker Caskets, Inc. while still in high school. Upon graduation and his father's death, CJ came on board to help his mother run the family business.

Under CJ's guidance and management, the company has realized remarkable growth. This expansion includes serving 33 states from 13 distribution centers, and the opening of a new manufacturing plant in Florence, Alabama.

Today, a third generation of the Thacker family is already involved in the company looking forward to continuing the legacy for generations to come: Justin Thacker, in charge of the factory and a graduate of Franklin & Wright College in Pennsylvania; Danielle, head of sales and marketing who completed her degree at Villanova, and Sarah, responsible for the company's IT infrastructure and a graduate of York College.

"It has been quite a journey from the streets of Washington, DC to presently being the largest family-owned casket company in the United States," Audrey said, "but my late-husband's commitment to providing exceptional value and exemplary service has never wavered. It is this dedication and commitment to our customers that has been the guiding spirit at Thacker Caskets."

Then she added, "Three grandchildren in the business...that's almost unheard of, and I am so very, very proud to see these three working in this office. In any business, it's awfully hard to get everyone, much less three generations of one family, on the same page."

"Whenever we're all here, it's just a blessing," she added, "and now we're beginning a fourth generation with our three great-grandchildren. ★"



Audrey Thacker



CJ Thacker



Justin Thacker



where it fell into disrepair.

In the summer of 2009, the Cook County sheriff's department received a tip from a groundskeeper that skeletal remains were being found in unexpected parts of the Burr Oaks grounds. Following up, police detectives discovered some plots at the cemetery were being sold multiple times. In some cases, caskets were stacked one on top of the other, while in others, grave diggers would reportedly remove and crush the bodies before dumping them elsewhere.

The glass-topped coffin was found in poor condition in a storage shed on the cemetery grounds during a police search, following the arrest of cemetery employees accused of digging up more than 300 graves and reselling the plots. Till's plot was undisturbed.

Later in 2009, Till's family contacted Bunch at the almost-completed museum about taking the casket and preserving it.

Simeon Wright, who was with Emmett Till, his cousin, on the night of the murder, led the family's efforts to donate the casket. "If we didn't have this casket, no one would ever believe this could happen in America," Wright said.

"Some people would say this is just a wooden box, scuffed up on the outside and stained on the inside. But this very particular box tells a story, lots of stories. And by sending it to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, we—Emmett's few remaining relatives—are doing what we can to make sure those stories get told long after we're gone."

The deed of gift notes the family made the donation "In memory of Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till Mobley."

"We are both honored and humbled the Till family has entrusted this sacred object to the museum for preservation and safekeeping," said Bunch, director of the museum. "The death of Emmett Till shocked the conscience of the world and fueled the civil rights movement. It is our duty to ensure that this iconic artifact is preserved so that we will never forget."

As the first step to entering the casket into the Museum's collection, it was transported by truck from Chicago to a Clinton, Maryland, facility, where its condition was assessed by the conservation staff at the facility where it was housed.

The Restoration Process

Justin Thacker, director of manufacturing at Thacker Caskets in Clinton, Maryland -- just four miles from the Smithsonian's research facility -- knew the story of Emmett Till and the impact of the teenager's killing, thanks to a course in African American history while he was a student at Franklin and Marshall University, but when researchers first visited Thacker's office, they offered no specifics about the project they were planning.

"In 2010, museum curators simply visited our facility, saying they wanted to learn more about the funeral profession and caskets," said Justin Thacker, grandson of the casket company's founder. "After the Smithsonian decided to officially add the casket as an exhibit, the curators again reached out to our company, this time looking for help with the restoration of the Till casket. At that point, I realized the importance of the task ahead."

"Beginning in 1939 with my grandfather, Thacker Casket Company has been committed to serving the funeral profession," Justin said, "and that had to include providing the restoration efforts to this historically significant civil rights icon and meaningful symbol."

"I visited the Smithsonian Research Center soon after the decision was made and I got to see the casket in its original state," Thacker remembered.

Because the casket had been exhumed and then put into a shed in the Chicago cemetery without protection, it was rusted, discolored and the fabric was rotting and in very poor shape.

"The Smithsonian curators had disassembled it to do analyses on the entire casket including its paint, head panel, and even down to the fibers in the fabric of the lining and mattress," Justin Thacker recalled. "The casket was analyzed for about a year at the Smithsonian research facility where every original piece of the casket was cataloged by Smithsonian team members to ensure the restoration was as period-correct as possible."

When researchers finally released the casket -- still in pieces -- it was trucked to the Thacker Casket Company's manufacturing facility in Florence, Alabama, where the restoration work began.

Justin Thacker met with the museum conservators in Alabama to begin the restoration process. Thacker said more than 15 employees eventually worked on the project, which took four years to complete. "They realized this project would be seen by millions," he remembered. "They realized they were responsible for an important part of American history."

As the painstakingly-precise restoration took place, a majority of the casket components and parts were restored directly by Thacker crafts people, but for those that could not be restored, Thacker used its network of connections in the funeral profession to find and source time-period casket components so the casket would be as original as possible.

In addition, select members of Thacker's sewing department worked diligently to sew the interior using a method specific to the time-period method no longer used in casket production today.

"Our team at our manufacturing plant was honored to be a part of restoring the Till casket because it is such a pivotal piece of African American history. This casket will be seen by millions and Emmett Till's tragic story will continue to educate people from around the world as they visit the National Museum of African American His-



tory & Culture.”

Hundreds of hours went into the project. Thacker said he didn't know exactly how many but the casket company's employees were thrilled to have the opportunity.

Defending Freedom

Museum director Bunch admitted he initially was worried people might consider it ghoulish to display the casket in the museum. Then he thought back to his conversation with Mamie Till Mobley.

With her words echoing in his mind, he made it the centerpiece of a exhibition titled, "Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom: Era of Segregation, 1876-1968." The display about Till and his mother continues to encourage visitors to remember the nation's history of racial violence.

A pre-opening event at the museum was held prior to its grand opening in September 2016.

Audrey Thacker, widow of the casket company's founder and vice-



president of the organization, attended the event. "The museum was not quite completed so there were areas we weren't able to see during the evening. The Till casket was one of them," she said. They made plans to take the Thacker Casket Company to the exhibit later in the year, so they would have the opportunity to see the casket within the entire exhibit. ★

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Whom Do You Serve?

By Dylan Stopher



Before I get started into this topic, I want to state that I am not going to push any sort of religious belief upon anyone. That's not how I get down, and if you are a friend of mine, you know that's true. I will, however, state that I am a Christian. Now that we've got that out of the way, let's get to the main question I have for every funeral service professional right now: whom do you serve?

No, I'm not talking about a specific deity or ideology... I'm referring to the families. Because there seems to be some confusion in some firms around the nation recently about who it is we're supposed to help. One article I saw was about a firm refusing to serve a family based upon sexual orientation. I've seen others where some firm or some director refused to serve someone for their beliefs or their ethnicity. And I want to be perfectly clear for those of us in the great state of Texas (and for anyone else who

might get their hands on this article through sharing), **WE SERVE EVERYONE!**

Yes. Everyone. And if that isn't clear enough, then let me paint a solid picture for you with a few key words. Ethnicity is irrelevant. Religious affiliation is irrelevant. Sexual orientation is irrelevant. Prior affiliations with other firms is irrelevant. Economic status is irrelevant. Celebrity status is irrelevant. We serve everyone. And we should approach every single family as if they had billions to spend, press wanting to record the service, and attendees to fill Times Square. **THAT** is how you actually "treat every family the same" in our profession.

Otherwise, I would be willing to tell you very plainly that you are not a professional.

So now that I've thrown down the gauntlet on who we're supposed to take care of, let me make the process very clear for how I have always done it, and how I've trained

apprentices, students, and directors to do it. And hang on, because this is gonna get interesting.

A first call comes in, and it needs to be addressed. The team who is sent to bring that person into our care is reminded that this is a loved one of someone, and that they matter. Great care and concern are taken, even in a morgue where no one is looking or watching, because we're professionals. A contact phone call is made, and an appointment is set to make arrangements. On this call, information is gathered so that the appointment time can be reduced. The family comes in, and the appointment is handled professionally, on time, without distraction, because in that moment there is **NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT IN THE WORLD THAN THAT FAMILY.** And they know it. All services are scheduled, and all agreements are clearly explained.

As a professional, I leave the family to choose their merchandise. If they cannot afford what they've chosen, we work to find a solution that fits into the best marriage of what they want, what they need, and what they can afford. We shake hands, we handle financial items, and we get signatures. The family leaves.

They come in for visitation and are met by someone they know. They have their DVD already done, pictures and flowers out and on display, and their loved one is ready to be seen. The book is already finished. There's no need to delay. Ever. The evening goes as they would like, and the doors are opened to the public when the family is ready. The funeral follows the same protocol. The music has been checked to ensure it's the right version. The service folders have been proof-read by more than one person. Our attendants are out and ready to serve. The officiant has a clergy record. Everything is ready **BEFORE** the family arrives. Following the service, we go out to the graveside, which has been inspected for perfection. And then we conclude.

Did you notice something, though? In that entire diatribe of things that every one of you reading this knows, nothing was said about gender, ethnicity, orientation, wealth,

or any other such ridiculous identifier. Why? Because the oath we all took was to serve the families of those who have passed away, and that is no respecter of those things that we place upon people.

We are to serve, and serve openly. We are to assist every family in the grieving process by helping to build a once-in-a-lifetime service to commemorate their loved one. And if that cannot be done, then I would challenge you to think about whether or not this is the right profession for you.

Now I know... there are people already upset and reading this with their myriad of "what if" scenarios running the gambit of possibilities with so many variables. I get that. Truly, I do.

And it is in those moments that we truly shine, in my opinion, because we are professionals who are dedicated to the service of the families who have lost someone, and nothing will stop us from being the best that we can be. We won't stop. We can't stop. Honestly, there's a host of you who are like me, and cannot even help yourself from trying to help when a friend loses someone, even if they're not doing services through your firm. I know.

And there's others of you who are thinking that all the prep work before the family sees anything isn't necessary, because you think you've got it all covered. Let me just tell you, you're wrong. A professional knows that teamwork is vital, and he/she takes advantage of every resource possible. You know why?

Because it's not about you. It's about the family. So get things done early, and have time to proof and check them. Finish things when you're supposed to, like you're supposed to, and focus on the people you're here to care for. I guarantee you, no one on your team will be offended when you ask them to assist as long as you return the favor... you know, like a professional.

And it is in that way that we have to examine the original question again, and recognize that while we are definitely here to serve the families we are also here to serve each other. We need to serve each other well, and it all needs to be done for the benefit of the family being served, regardless of who gets the credit.

That brings us back to the original question, too, and we have to look at whether or not we're only concerned for the accolades and attention we'll receive for delivering a fantastic service.

This is a heart issue for each of us, and needs to be carefully examined by each of us. I'll say it openly that if you're in this to get noticed, you definitely need to quit before you hurt a family. Because that's what will happen.

But then, of course, we have to return to the focal point of whether anything should stop us from serving a family. And we bring it all together in this final thought: nothing in this world should stand in the way of a funeral professional serving a family in need. Nothing. Ever. We serve. And if people ask me who it is that I will serve, I will tell them

every time that I will serve anyone. ★

The author, Dylan Stopher, is the regional sales representative for Wilbert Vaults, based in Houston. A funeral director for the past 13 years, he graduated from Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service in 2002. Dylan is a member of TFDA as well as the Emerging Leaders group. He also serves on six TFDA committees. He resides in Friendswood with his wife, Mollie, and three children. He has enjoyed writing his entire life, and has published three books (all found on Amazon) and multiple industry-related articles.

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Director of Mortuary Science Program at Northeast Texas Community College Looks to the Future

By Alice Adams



Rebecca Gardner is a woman who knows what she wants, doesn't mind working to get it and is fearless when it comes to challenges.

As the director of a new mortuary science program at Northeast Texas Community College in Mount Pleasant, the Connecticut-born Gardner jumped at the chance to build the new program from the bottom up. "I count myself truly fortunate to have this opportunity," she said, "and watching this program develop is not only exciting but fulfilling as well."

Moving to Round Rock, Texas, with her family at age 12, Gardner graduated from Stony Point High School in 2002 and began studies at Texas State University in San Marcos, majoring in special education. Then, as with many of us, a life-changing loss set her on another path.

"My grandfather died in 2006. His service was held back in Connecticut and between the visitation, the service and travel through

a couple of counties in procession, I had the opportunity to watch an amazing funeral direction in action," she remembered.

"Because of the various county laws regarding processions, that director got out of the lead car and stopped traffic, himself, so our family could arrive at the cemetery for the committal service at the same time and would not have to wait for the rest of the procession. That was amazing – and inspiring," the educator said.

Years earlier, when Gardner was 17, she had applied for a part-time job at an Austin funeral home, but was turned away because of her young age. Now she was old enough to resurrect that dream of becoming a funeral director.

After much thought and research, she de-

ecided to enroll in the mortuary science program at San Antonio College in 2007.

"My experience there was over-the-top," she said. "The instructors were so good at sharing their passion for serving families – and all of them continued to work in funeral service, so we were given tremendous insight into real-world experiences. Once again, I was in the right place at the right time."

Pursuing her license the hard way, Gardner lived in Georgetown, completed her apprenticeship at a funeral home in Georgetown and commuted to San Antonio for school. "My family has always been supportive of my educational goals. The funeral directors in Georgetown encouraged me and I had great instructors at school. How could I do anything but succeed?" she asked rhetorically.

After earning her license, Gardner worked in community-owned firms before going to work for SCI in Austin.

"I completed my bachelor's degree in 2013 before taking time out to expand our family and then moving to Brenham, where we helped with family care."

"Because I needed a graduate degree to teach, I began working on my master's while teaching part-time at Commonwealth. When San Antonio college had an opening for full-time instructor, I taught there for a year and when my contract was completed, I was committed to funeral service education and its importance," she said. "So when they announced a new program at Northeast Texas, I applied."

Her thoughts after arriving in Mt. Pleasant?

"I was excited about the opportunity to build a new program," she said. "The area around the school is very rural, so there are



Rebecca Gardner

A Brief History of Northeast Texas Community College

In January 1984, voters in Camp, Morris, and Titus counties in northeast Texas approved a community college district for the area.

The campus (centrally located among the county seats of Daingerfield, Pittsburg and Mount Pleasant) and facilities were quickly chosen and constructed. By the fall semester of 1985, students were enrolled and the first classes were held.

As a relatively modern campus with all new construction, NTCC has kept its main campus buildings of uniform appearance – all buildings are constructed of earth-tone brick with copper-tone metal roofs.

In 2010, the College opened the new Elizabeth Hoggatt Whatley Agriculture complex, a Platinum-LEED certified classroom complex featuring the latest in alternative energy and environmentally-friendly technologies.

In addition to the main campus, the College has the Industrial Technology Training Center in Mount Pleasant, which houses the mortuary science program.

In a recent press release, the Northeast Texas Community College (NTCC) administration announced the school is one step closer to having a fully accredited Funeral Service Education Program, as the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) recently granted the program candidacy.

Rebecca Gardner, NTCC Director of Funeral Service Education, and Dr. Shannon Cox-Kelley, NTCC Dean of Health Sciences, traveled to Myrtle Beach, S.C. to defend the program's self-study curriculum submitted to the ABFSE late last year.

"This is a major milestone on the path to initial accreditation," Gardner said. "We still have another year until initial accreditation can be received, but this is a good indication our program is heading in the right direction."

The next step in the accreditation process is to develop a new self-study this year, starting the process of retaining initial accreditation with the ABFSE. The program will have another visit early next year and hopes to gain full accreditation by April 2018. ★

more trees than I've ever seen, and it's a great place to raise our three children," she said.

The NTCC Mortuary Science department opened in the fall of 2016 with classes beginning in August of that year. The inaugural class consisted of 10 students, and Gardner said she wants to keep classes small until the program is accredited, a process that requires approximately two years.

Gardner said the embalming lab for NTCC students will open this coming fall and she has been able to design this, the merchandising area and the restorative arts lab, as well as the classrooms, to fit the purposes of the program. "We are so fortunate to have such great facilities," she said, adding because it's a new program, all supplemental materials – everything – has been created from scratch. This, in addition to the teaching load, is a tremendous time commitment.

For the Fall 2017 semester, the program will enroll 15 students. "We are fairly restricted by our rural location because there are not as many funeral homes to serve as clinical sites within an easy driving distance from the college," the director explained. "We are not competitive with existing programs because we are all so far apart. I can say the existing four programs in Texas have been extremely supportive and positive of our new program."

How is the training at NTCC unique, compared to the training Gardner received as a student in the early part of the century?

"Like everything else, funeral service is evolving at a speed we have not witnessed in our lifetimes," the director said. "Society has changed, more people are comfortable explor-

ing their options when it comes to the funeral ritual...and our program is unique because of the location of our school. Since we are not situated in a metro area, most of our students are from rural areas and are performing apprenticeships in rural funeral homes."

"There also are noticeably fewer gen-

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erational firms,” Gardner continued, “and more people are choosing to enter funeral service rather than following in the family’s footsteps. Making this choice has made a difference in the classroom because many students don’t have the advantage of growing up around the business.”

“Our students come here because of our location,” Gardner said, “and we are seeing a few students coming from rural Oklahoma as well (NTCC has dorms on campus). Most of them must work full-time, so they have no time to commute to Dallas. Those who wanted to become funeral directors

who couldn’t afford tuition now can go to school close to home, plus they will have an opportunity to take online courses, work in a funeral home while they are students – and tuition is, indeed, much less.”

Students coming into the program will be required to take an entire class in cremation because, as Gardner points out, the true cremation rate in rural Texas is higher than the numbers bear out. The remainder of the curriculum includes:

- Contemporary practices
- Internship Orientation
- Management 1

- Management 2
- Crematory Operations
- Thanatochemistry
- Technical Procedures 1
- Technical Procedures 2
- Mortuary Jurisprudence
- Internship
- Special Topics
- Human Anatomy
- Funeral Service Board Prep-Arts
- Funeral Service Board Prep-Sciences

Coming in the Fall Semester of 2018 will be a 10-month Certificate Program for those who would prefer to study funeral directing. Certificate students focus on merchandising, business management and practices, accounting, and psychology.

The director said she is extremely pleased with the opportunities now being offered to students who want to be funeral directors in rural areas, especially because there are so many rural funeral homes in Texas. “We stand out as a program because our students want to practice as rural funeral directors,” she said. “But wherever our students eventually serve families, our program assures they will be able to be compassionate guides for those who have experienced loss.” ❄️



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What Directors Should Know about Dehydration

In February 2017, Margaret Perkins traveled to Texas to attend the funeral of her cousin, Helen. Arriving several days before the service, the following morning, Margaret wasn't feeling her best. Thinking she'd caught a stomach bug from her brother, who traveled with her, Margaret decided to stay in bed rather than going to breakfast with him and his family.

"I ended up passing out in the bathroom," she said, "hitting my face on the wall and getting a black eye."

The 35-year-old Bend, Oregon, resident was told by the hotel's doctor she was dehydrated by the change of environment, a stomach bug and breastfeeding.

"I thought I had been drinking enough water, but clearly that wasn't the case!" she said.

Apple juice, water and a day of rest later, Perkins was back to her normal self and able to attend the funeral, but she also baffled that something as simple as traveling could cause her to pass out from dehydration...and as we enter some of the hottest weather of the year in Texas, funeral directors should know the signs of dehydration as well as what to do if someone attending a funeral collapses or exhibits other signs of dehydration.

Dehydration Can Be Serious

Most of us think dehydration happens because you don't drink enough water or you have food poisoning. But a lot of things – like medications, advancing age, alcohol and caffeine intake – can cause it, and it's responsible for sending hundreds of thousands to the hospital each year.

According to the latest research, 75 percent of Americans are walking around in a chronic state of dehydration from consum-



ing less than the recommended daily fluid intake. The Institute of Medicine determined that an adequate intake (AI) for men is roughly about 13 cups (3 liters) of total beverages a day. The AI for women is about 9 cups (2.2 liters) of total beverages a day.

Experts say dehydration should be taken seriously, especially in the summer months. As the weather gets warmer, the number of dehydrated patients ticks up at emergency rooms across the country.

"In the summer, dehydration is related to hot temperatures and being active outdoors, losing salt and water at a rate higher than you can replenish it," said Renee Garrick, executive medical director at Westchester Medical Center. "In the winter, hospitalizations due to dehydration tend to occur when someone is sick and losing fluids through diarrhea or vomiting...possibly too sick to keep fluids down or feel too weak to drink water."

People can excrete too many fluids by "sweating excessively due to being in the sun or working out or simply not consuming enough liquids," said Neel Kapadia of Duke University's division of emergency medicine.

Dehydration can also stem from pituitary

or kidney disorders that affect water balance, from hormone disorders, and from adrenal insufficiency.

Most people know that excessive alcohol consumption can lead to dehydration, but too much caffeine can have the exact same effect.

"I once had a construction worker show up in my ER in the middle of the summer who would only drink Coke while working outside in crazy heat and humidity," said Tiffany Clemmy, an ER nurse in Sneads Ferry, North Carolina. "Theme park guests are another group that I see a lot. They walk around and don't drink enough ... and then they drink soda or alcohol."

Another contributor to dehydration is prescription medications. Certain pills – like blood pressure meds and supplements that contain diuretics – can prompt dehydration. "As a general rule, be mindful of any drug listing 'diarrhea or vomiting' as a potential side effect," the ER nurse said.

Signs of Dehydration You May Not Know

Funeral directors should know the classic signs of dehydration: a feeling of extreme thirst, dry mouth and dry lips. But there are far more ways your body may be trying to communicate its dehydration to you.

A lack of fluids can cause you to feel lightheaded, particularly when changing positions (i.e. from sitting to standing). Dr. Kevin Miller, professor at Central Michigan University College of Health Professions, said there are other common signs to look out for – like "headaches, elevated heart rate [and] passing out."

"Lesser-known signs of dehydration can include a reduction in urine output, dark urine, muscle weakness/cramping, seizures, and a drop in blood pressure," Dr. Miller said.

Garrick said if a person's fluid intake is low, their body may cease to sweat, blood pressure can drop and impaired thinking and irritability may be experienced.

What You Can Do if a Mourner Shows Signs of Dehydration

If someone overdoes alcohol and forgets to drink a glass of water between beers, or go too long without H₂O, they will most likely survive. Clemmy noted that "a lack of fluid intake – unless it's extreme – is a condition



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that you can bounce back from rather easily.”

The best way to treat dehydration is to replace lost fluids and electrolytes. For adults, it's best to rehydrate by drinking more water or other liquids that contain electrolytes.

If an electrolyte solution is not readily available, eating salty snacks – like salted peanuts or saltine crackers – while drinking water can be an effective way to take in some necessary salt.

While dehydration can wreak havoc on a person's body, it's also “one of the most preventable conditions out there,” said David Parish, director of sports and rehabilitation at Logan University in Missouri.

Educating yourself on the possible effects of improper fluid consumption can inspire anyone to fill up their water glass. At least that was the case for Perkins, who left Texas with a black eye that lasted several weeks and a little less dignity. “You better believe I'm chugging water all day every day now!” she said.

Quick Check List in Case of Dehydration

The best approach to dehydration treatment depends on age, the severity of dehydration and its cause.

- For dehydrated infants and children, rehydrate with Pedialyte or Hydralyte. These solutions contain water and salts in specific proportions. Start with a teaspoon (5 milliliters) every 1 to 5 minutes and increase as tolerated. Older children can be given diluted sports drinks, such as Gatorade.

- Most adults with mild to moderate dehydration can improve their condition by drinking more water or Gatorade.

- During outdoor events, such as graveside services, during hot or humid weather, having mourners hydrate with cool water is your best bet. Sports drinks containing electrolytes and a carbohydrate solution also may be helpful to older mourners weakened by

dehydration as are salty snacks, such as salted peanuts, saltine crackers or potato chips.

NOTE: Children and adults who become severely dehydrated should be treated

by ambulance crews, such as EMTs or in a hospital emergency room. Salts and fluids delivered intravenously are absorbed quickly and can speed recovery. ★



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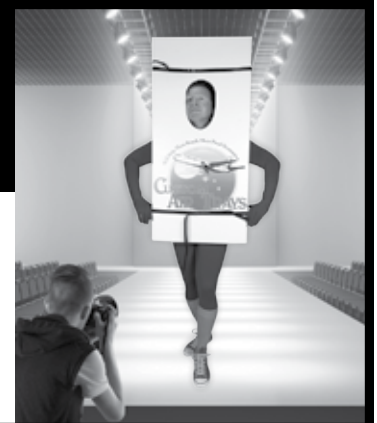
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Velma Sue and Leon De Leon Attend United States Congressman Vicente Gonzalez' Fundraising Golf Tournament

Velma Sue and Leon De Leon recently attended a fundraising golf tournament for U.S. Congressman Vicente Gonzalez. During the tournament, they had the opportunity to visit with several lawmakers. Velma Sue and Leon serve on the Legislative Committee of the Texas Funeral Directors Association (TFDA) and are the owners of Memorial Funeral Home in San Juan and Edinburg.

Pictured are (from left to right): Congressman Vicente Gonzalez - 15th District of Texas, Congressman Filemon Vela - 34th District of Texas, Velma Sue and Leon, and Congressman Joaquin Castro - 20th District of Texas.



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Passare Announces Integration with CFS

Passare®, Inc. has announced its integration with Consolidated Funeral Services (CFS), a provider of custom websites for funeral homes.

“Passare is now able to send information

such as the obituary, service dates and times, types of services, and much more directly to CFS websites with just one click,” said Passare Vice President and Chief Product Officer Chris Baber. “This very simple process helps funeral homes save time, reduce errors, and streamline their process for each family served.”

Passare launched its collaboration platform in 2014 to help funeral homes and families connect and collaborate in an interactive, online environment designed to simplify the funeral planning process. The collaborative platform is also a fully functioning funeral administration system built on a web-based platform, which is accessible anytime, anywhere, from any Internet-connected device.

With Passare’s integration with CFS, funeral directors can send the data gathered on a case, such as the obituary, vital statistics, and funeral options, straight to the funeral home’s CFS website. The integration will allow for a single point of data entry, eliminating the need to reenter data that is already available on Passare.

Alleghany Capital Corp. To Invest In Wilbert Funeral Services

Alleghany Capital Corp., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Alleghany Corp., has announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire a 45 percent equity interest in Wilbert Funeral Services Inc.

The transaction, which is subject to customary closing conditions, is expected to close early in the third quarter of 2017.

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John C. Nance

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Cummings

Helen L. Cummings, 93, died Thursday, May 25, 2017 at Covenant Health Systems in Lubbock, TX. She was born February 27, 1924 in Roby, TX. She married Robert "Bob" Cummings on Dec 15, 1946 in Lubbock, TX. She was a banker with First National Bank in Lubbock and a member of First Methodist in Lubbock.

Survivors Include: son Robert "Kelly" Cummings with wife Thresa of Lubbock; two daughters, Kathy Ann Lusk with husband Stan of Wolfforth, TX, Carol "Jan" Flowers with fiancé Sherman Gossett of Lubbock; sister Doris Gaylon Rogers of Hurst, TX; seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her parents, Clarence Everton (Bay) Headstream and Helen Mae Miniken, six sisters, and two brothers.

Graveside services were held May 30, 2017 at Peaceful Gardens under the direction of Dr. Marcus Murphy of Oakwood Baptist Church of Lubbock.

Garza

Margaret Ann Garza was born on March 21, 1986 to Fred and Carmen Garza. She formerly worked at Texas Service Life Insurance Company in Austin.

She was the epitome of love, and she was so very loved by all. Besides God, her family and close friends were always first. She was a loving daughter and a true friend. Margaret was thoughtful, kindhearted, unselfish, and genuine. She had a beautiful smile, but beyond that, a beautiful heart. She always gave her time to anyone who needed her. She was either sharing a good time celebrating friends, comforting friends, or just there

when someone needed a friend.

Margaret dared to dream big. She did things most people only aspire to. She loved pageantry, singing, acting, and modeling. Margaret was crowned Ms. Texas Belleza Latina in 2007 and Ms. Belleza Latina International in 2008. She appeared in various ads in television and in print. She had several acting roles and most recently appeared in the nationally televised series, "The Son," as well as Mercury Plains with Scott Eastwood and Pizza Joint, which will premiere this June.

She enjoyed life and worked hard to achieve her goals. Margaret attended Alexander High School in Laredo. She graduated from TAMU with a BS in Interdisciplinary Studies. She was a driven, motivated and dedicated professional who believed in self-discipline and hard work. She recently obtained her broker's insurance license.

Margaret enjoyed the simple things in life and knew their worth. Everything big and small was worth its weight in gold to her. She was beauty without presumption, intelligence with humility, and unyielding perseverance without rest.

Margaret was a self-proclaimed "Daddy's Girl" who loved every moment with him. She gained her love of nature, riding horses, shooting guns, and all things cowboy from her #1 Cowboy, her Daddy. And from her mama, it was having pride in a nice clean home, her love of cooking, and her respect for others. Margaret had a lovely bond with her mother. Above all, she and her mother were best friends. Both her parents loved, cared, and nurtured Margaret. Their love made Margaret the beautiful human being she was inside and out.

Margaret touched our hearts, empowered us, and inspired many people. She was a "Once in a Lifetime Kind of Woman" who left us too soon. We celebrate her life, and mourn her passing. Margaret Ann Garza passed away on Tuesday, May 30, 2017 in Round Rock, TX.

She is preceded in death by her paternal grandmother: Alicia Garza; maternal grandparents: Frank and Margarita Wolter.

Left behind to cherish her memory are her beloved parents: Juan A. "Fred" & Carmen W. Garza; paternal grandparents: Alfonso (Isabel) Garza; aunts and uncles: Beto (Kathy) Garza, Rene (Margaret) Garza, Mario (Amada) Garza, David (Dane) Garza, Cesar (Gwen) Garza, Daniel (Debra) Garza, Carlos (Alma) Garza, Ana Maria (Marco Tulio) Cruz, Tere (Jose Luis) Resendez, Martha (+Bernie) Cortez, Vicente J. (Johanna) Leija, as well as an extended number of cousins, relatives and beloved friends.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held June 3, 2017 at St. Patrick's Catholic Church.

Rite of Committal and Interment follow-rf at the Calvary Catholic Cemetery.

Arrangements were entrusted to the funeral service professionals at Joe Jackson North Funeral & Cremation Services in Laredo.

Henkes

Melvin Franklin Henkes was born in Indian Gap, Texas, on July 31, 1934 to Louise Marwitz Henkes and Herman D. Henkes. He passed away June 6, 2017. He was the former owner and funeral director of Riley Funeral Home in Hamilton, Texas.

He attended school at Indian Gap until eighth grade when his family moved to Hamilton where he graduated from Hamilton High School in 1952.

He was employed by the A&P Grocery for 10 years. He then graduated from Dallas Institute of Mortuary Science and became a part of Riley Funeral Home in Hamilton after graduation. He purchased Riley Funeral Home later, and eventually bought Evant Funeral Home. Riley Funeral Home was a part of his life for 45 years. He retired in 1996, remaining as a consultant to SCI.

A member of First United Methodist Church in Hamilton, he served on the board for several years. He served six years on the Hamilton School Board and was a member when the present building bond was passed. He served on the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, was a volunteer



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fireman for twelve years and served as chairman of the Hamilton American Red Cross. Melvin was a member of Rock House Masonic Lodge for over 50 years. He coached Little League baseball for 14 years and Teenage Baseball for 5 years. He has been a member of Bulldog Boosters since 1973, and he filmed games for the football team for nine years. One of his greatest honors was being selected by the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce as its Citizen of the Year for his service to the town.

He enjoyed his farm and going to the cattle sale on Tuesdays during his later years.

On March 22, 1953 he married Martha (Marty) Riley in Hamilton. They lived most of their married life in Hamilton with their five children.

He is survived by his wife Marty, and by his children, Mel and wife Mary of Bedford, Mona and husband Hank Gloff of Hamilton, Marsha and husband Kenny Worthington of Gatesville, Marvin and wife Brenda of Quitman, and Marla and husband Stuart Burleson of Riviera.

Surviving grandchildren are Jaime and Bill Howell, Mark and Nancy Henkes, Charles and Dawn Johnson, Amanda Henkes, Randi and Femi Ojo, Brian Worthington, Kate

Worthington, Hannah Burleson, Kendall Henkes, Haley Burleson, Mason Henkes and Chandler Henkes.

Great grandchildren surviving are Abigail Howell, Madison, Morgan and Myles Henkes, Colter and Emma Johnson and Kathryn Ojo.

He is survived by step-grandchildren, Angie Dickie and husband Lee and family, Wendy Pausewang and husband Michael and family and Josh Adams and wife Lisa and family.

Surviving also are step-great grandchildren, Garrett and Haley Dickie; Luke and Clayton Adams; and Derek, Makaela, Logan, Miranda and Emma Pausewang.

He is also survived by his only sister Aadelene Voges of Hamilton, by his brother-in-law and sister-in-law Dr. Jack and Edna Riley of Temple, and a large number of nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, and his wife's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Riley, by a son-in-law, John B. Johnson, and a brother-in-law, Glenn Voges.

Donations may be made to The First Methodist Church of Hamilton, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Friends of Hamilton ISD, Hamilton Masonic Lodge, or Hamil-

ton Volunteer Fire Department.

Arrangements were under the direction of Riley Funeral Home, Hamilton, Texas.

Nance

John Charles Nance was born Jan. 3, 1953, in Dilley, Texas to Oscar Henry and Alyce Joyce Lann Nance. He grew up in Big Wells with his parents and brothers. He graduated from Carrizo Springs High School in 1971. After graduation he attended Uvalde Junior College while working at Rushing-Estes Funeral Home. John married Stella Louise Neisler on April 21, 1972, and they lived in Carrizo Springs and he worked at Leonard Funeral Home until he enrolled in the Dallas Institute of Mortuary Science. He graduated from mortuary school in 1974. He then went to work at Fry-Gibbs Funeral Home in Paris where he served many families until his retirement in 1999. John then worked part-time at Bright-Holland Funeral Home.

John and Stella purchased Spanglers, a bridal and gift store in 1994. They met many wonderful people and helped many happy couples start their lives together with wonderful memories. Christmas open house at Spanglers became a downtown tradition with lots of food, fun, and laughter. John and Stella sold the store in 2014, and moved to Corsicana to be near family.

While in Paris, John was in Paris Jaycees, Kiwanis Club, Leadership Lamar County and the Texas Funeral Directors Association.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his brother, Oscar Henry Nance, III.

Survivors include his wife of 45 years, Stella, his sons, Geoffrey and wife Brandy of Corsicana and Jeremy and wife Emily of Hewitt, and the great joy of his life his seven grandchildren that became his social agenda; Braden, Eli, Kendall, and Allie of Corsicana and Hogan, Miller, and Cecilia Claire of Hewitt, his brother, Jim & wife Candy of Crawford, his brother-in-law, Auddie Neisler & wife Vicki along with many nieces, nephews, cousins and a host of wonderful friends.

Services were held June 9 at Bright-Holland Funeral Home with Rev. Geoffrey Nance and Dr. Bryan Fellers officiating. Burial followed in Evergreen Cemetery. John's uncanny sense of humor and funny remarks will be missed by many and remembered by all whose lives he touched.

Casket bearers included: Travis Nance, Kyle Rudy, Matt Kruger, Andy Neisler, Jesse Neisler, Dr. Terry Kilgore, Doug Smith,

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It's all well and good to look back after the fact and see what we should have done, but we rarely know what path is best when we take that first step.

— *Christine Feehan* —

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2017 TFDA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 7,8,9	TFDA Leadership	The Woodlands
September 6, 7 12 Tu 14 28	South Texas Meeting Texas Funeral Service Commission Southeast Texas Meeting South Central Meeting	McAllen Austin Houston TBD
October 24 Tu 25 W 29 – Nov. 1	TFDA Services, Inc. Board TFDA Board Meeting NFDA Convention	Austin Austin Boston, MA
December 12	Texas Funeral Service Commission	Austin



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Where the (Pizza) Dough is Buried

The Great Michigan Pizza Funeral story is one of loss, terrible maladies, and spilled marinara. But it's also a classic tale of the obstacles immigrants may face in their new home countries. In this specific case, Mario Fabbrini's American dream was inconveniently and temporarily halted by mushrooms...canned mushrooms...bad mushrooms.

Immigrating after World War II, Fabbrini and his family arrived in Michigan from Fiume, Italy. He had grown up under Mussolini's Fascist regime. As he told a reporter from United Press International, "They put the black shirt on me when I was six years old."

Mario and his wife, Olga, assimilated quickly, and after adapting Mario's family pizza recipe for American dining, they opened Papa Fabbrini's Frozen Pizza.

The demolition of his dream began in January 1973, when employees checking inventory at Ohio's United Canning Company noticed some of the warehoused cans containing mushrooms had swollen, a situation most consumers know as a bad sign.

Testing found the cans contained mushrooms infected with *Clostridium botulinum*, a nasty strain of bacteria that causes botulism.



After the canning company reported their findings, the FDA recalled the affected products from store shelves, but to ensure a comprehensive removal from public consumption, they made some calls to food businesses used United Canning's mushrooms.

Mario Fabbrini remembered the call in an article in the *Detroit Free Press*: "Everything went dark," he said, feeling he could lose the business he had worked so hard to build the last decade. "All I could think was, 'Oh my God. Not me.'"

After that call, he stopped his shipments and submitted his mushroom pizzas to a crude test: feeding slices to FDA lab mice, which promptly died. That's when Mario Fabbrini had his own recall of his mushroom-topped pizzas, collecting them from local restaurants and grocery stores.

By the time the botulism scare arrived at his pizza factory, Fabbrini had spent a decade building his business. By 1973, he was churning out tens of thousands of pies per week with

22 full-time employees and a state-of-the-art factory.

There were some people, as there always are—at least 17—who went public, saying they had become ill after eating Papa Fabbrini's Pizza.

In order to get rid of the spoiled pizzas he had collected, he decided to have a funeral, partially as good optics for his business but also because he wanted people to know he was standing accountable for the poisoned pies.

By March 5, 1973, arrangements were completed and "mourners" headed to a nearby farm to witness the burial of an estimated 30,000 frozen, family-size mushroom pizzas.

The mood was somber. William G. Milliken, the Governor of Michigan, reminded the assembly to have "courage in the face of tragedy." Then a bevy of bulldozers began shoving pizzas, delivered earlier by a parade of dump trucks, into an 18-foot hole.

Besides the governor, scores of community leaders attended the funeral, including Chamber of Commerce members and bank presidents. Governor Milliken called Fabbrini "an example for all of us."

Gary Johnson, the farm's owner, reportedly said,

"I guess by next fall there won't be anything but the cellophane," as the last pizza found a resting place in the mass grave.

At the end of the unusual ceremony, Mario Fabbrini laid a floral tribute atop the grave: red gladioli for sauce, white carnations for cheese. He then offered slices (of non-contaminated pizzas) to all who had witnessed the event.

In the end though, it was all for nothing.

In the two weeks between the FDA's recall and the funeral in Michigan, the pizzas were exonerated: The mushrooms were not tainted and the mice that died after eating them apparently had died to some common mouse malady.

Fabbrini's frozen pizza business did take a bit of a hit, however. The buried pies cost him about \$30,000 and he lost even more money, trying to replace the now untrusted mushroom flavor with other pizzas. But his business survived. He also sued the canning company for a cool million and won a fairly large chunk of change as a result.

As Journalist Cara Giaimo wrote in her March 14, 2017 *Atlas Obscura* article, "An all-American ending to an all-American story." ★

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