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Worsham College President Leili McMurrough Honored with 2024 NFDA Inspiration Award for Innovation and Leadership

Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is delighted to announce that Leili McMurrough, the president and program director for Worsham College of Mortuary Science in Wheeling, Illinois, is the 2024 winner of the NFDA Inspiration Award. McMurrough received her award during the [2024 NFDA Professional Women's Conference](#), which is taking place April 28-30 in Savannah, Georgia.

The Inspiration Award is an NFDA recognition that is conferred annually during the Professional Women's Conference on an exceptional woman who has made noteworthy professional contributions to funeral service or a related field. The winner was selected by a distinguished panel of judges that included funeral directors, educators, suppliers, funeral service association leaders and allied professionals.

"Leili McMurrough's dedication to advancing funeral service education is truly inspiring. Her leadership at Worsham College and the ABFSE sets a high standard for excellence and is making a significant impact on the future of funeral service," said NFDA CEO Christine Pepper, CAE. "On behalf of the NFDA Board of Directors, I offer congratulations to Leili for earning this award and being a true inspiration to all who know her."

"As a fellow woman in funeral service, I am thrilled to see Leili McMurrough recognized for her outstanding contributions," said Jennifer Kaset, Vice President of Sales and Business Development at National Guardian Life Insurance Company (NGL), the sponsor of the NFDA Inspiration Award. "Her commitment to innovation and quality education and dedication to student success are evident in all she does. She is a role model for funeral professionals everywhere."

About Leili McMurrough

McMurrough is the president and program director for Worsham College of Mortuary Science and serves as the Chair of the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE). McMurrough is not only a licensed funeral director and embalmer, but also a licensed attorney.

As president of Worsham College, she has exhibited exemplary leadership, steering the institution towards innovation and excellence. She has helped expand the program offerings to include an online Associate of Science degree, more than tripling enrollments. Her commitment to fostering a supportive, holistic learning environment has greatly contributed to the success of students under her guidance. The programs initiated under her leadership have not only met but exceeded quality standards in funeral service education and higher education outside of mortuary science.

In her role as Chair of ABFSE, Leili has played a pivotal role in shaping the future of funeral service education in the United States. Her approach to curriculum improvements and tireless advocacy for the profession have earned her the respect of peers and colleagues across the nation.

Leili's dedication to improving and elevating the standards of funeral service, the preparation of future funeral directors, and ensuring the funeral profession's continued relevance extend far beyond her

duties at Worsham College and ABFSE. She actively engages in training and continuing education presentations for national, regional and state funeral service associations to help them attract and retain today's talent.

Leili also strives to share her expertise with the funeral profession and the public by through interviews with media outlets and podcasts, as well as through presentations during funeral service and higher education events. She speaks on the value of funeral service, the relevance of funeral professionals, the topic of millennials entering the profession and women breaking barriers in funeral home leadership.

In her nomination of McMurrough for this award, Worsham Instructional Designer Heather Braatz said, "Leili McMurrough has consistently demonstrated leadership, vision and a deep commitment to the advancement of funeral service education and the funeral profession ... Her impact is felt not only within the walls of Worsham College, but throughout the entire funeral service community."

Jonathan Acosta, academic dean of Worsham College of Mortuary Science noted in a letter of recommendation for McMurrough, "If you are looking for a strong, dedicated female member of our profession, you must look no further. I have known Mrs. Leili McMurrough for 10 years and she has never stopped pushing education forward and advocating for mentorship in our profession ... She has always strived to ensure we are working on building the future of our profession ... I have been lucky enough to watch her grow into the leader she is today."

About the NFDA Inspiration Award

The NFDA Inspiration Award has its roots in the NFDA Initiative Award, which NFDA conferred for approximately 20 years, beginning in the mid-1990s, during the Professional Women's Conference. The award program was refreshed and reimagined as the Inspiration Award, which is sponsored by NGL and presented annually during the NFDA Professional Women's Conference.

Nominations for the 2024 Inspiration Award were accepted online from January 15 through February 16. NFDA sought enterprising nominees who consistently take the initiative to elevate the funeral service profession; who serve as a mentor to colleagues; whose energy and independent spirit are examples to others; and whose efforts result in significant accomplishments at the local, national and/or international level.

Honorees must also have been employed in the funeral service profession or a deathcare-related field for a minimum of five years with experience working directly with families. They must also:

- Be actively involved in community and professional service organizations.
- Be actively involved in efforts to educate the public about the value of meaningful memorialization and/or funeral directors.
- Actively participate in professional development activities.

The winner was selected by a distinguished panel of judges:

- Tamara Baird, Baird Funeral Home, Troy Ohio
- Matthew Baskerville, Reeves & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory, Coal City, Illinois
- Virginia "Jenni" Bryant, Smith Funeral & Cremation Service, Maryville, Tennessee
- Michelle Fong, Premier Preneed Marketing, Norfolk, Nebraska
- Vicki Jay, National Alliance for Children's Grief, Lubbock, Texas
- Sabrina Joynes, American Academy McAllister Institute of Funeral Service, New York, New York
- Pam Scott, Kansas Funeral Directors Association, Topeka, Kansas

More information is available online at [NFDA.org/InspirationAward](https://www.nfda.org/InspirationAward).

About NFDA

NFDA is the world's leading and largest funeral service association, serving 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit NFDA.org.

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