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Leadership Starts Here: NFDA Announces 2025-26 Class of Emerging Leaders

Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is thrilled to introduce the 18 funeral service professionals selected to participate in the 2025-26 [National Emerging Leaders Program](#). This year-long leadership development experience empowers participants to grow as visionary, values-driven leaders in their funeral homes, communities and the profession at large.

Since its inception, the National Emerging Leaders Program has nurtured nearly 60 promising professionals, providing them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to lead with purpose. Through a combination of in-person and virtual learning, mentorship and invaluable networking, participants are equipped to inspire meaningful change in funeral service.

The 2025-26 program will begin with a retreat at NFDA headquarters in Brookfield, Wisconsin, in June, and will conclude at the 2026 NFDA Leadership Conference. Participants will also engage in a series of approximately seven virtual learning sessions throughout the year, led by top funeral service leaders and experts from outside the profession.

The members of the 2025-26 National Emerging Leaders Program class are:

- Kerri Bittner, Elm Ridge Funeral Home & Memorial Park, Muncie, Indiana
- Elijah Bragg, Heritage Funeral and Cremation, Spokane, Washington
- Dane Chasca, McPherson Funeral Services, Cranbrook, British Columbia, Canada
- Renee Childs, A.A. Rayner & Sons Funeral Home, Chicago, Illinois
- Madison Crihfield, Covington Funeral Home, Covington, Tennessee
- Desirae Delgado, Harrell Funeral Homes, Austin, Texas
- Ryan Drake, Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Owosso, Michigan
- Daniel Gelhaus, Kozlak Radulovich Funeral Chapels Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Monica Hall, Hill's Mortuary, Statesboro, Georgia
- Caitlin Johnson, Evanson Jensen Funeral Home, Lemmon, South Dakota
- Nicole Lutz, Mueller Memorial, Saint Paul, Minnesota
- Michael McGaffigan, McGaffigan Funeral Home, Pepperell, Massachusetts
- Andrea Rief, Hoy Kilnoski Funeral Home, Council Bluffs, Iowa
- Tina Spedden, Lee Funeral Homes, Owings, Maryland
- Loran Spence, Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Windsor, Connecticut
- Jarell Springfield, Calumet Park Funeral Chapel, Merrillville, Indiana
- Katlyn Tauetia, Coleman-Taylor Funeral Services, Cecil, Pennsylvania
- Tyler Wilson, Arch L. Heady & Son Funeral Home – Okolona Chapel, Louisville, Kentucky

“Leadership is not about a title – it’s about service, vision and impact,” said NFDA President Christopher P. Robinson, CFSP, CCO. “NFDA’s National Emerging Leaders Program is one of the most important ways we’re preparing the next generation of professionals to carry our profession forward with integrity and innovation. I congratulate this year’s class and look forward to watching their growth and leadership in the years to come.”

The program is open to all licensed funeral professionals in the United States and Canada – regardless of NFDA membership – who are in the early stages of their careers. Participants are selected through a competitive application process.

NFDA extends its sincere thanks to the Funeral Service Foundation for its generous support of the National Emerging Leaders Program.

“The leaders we cultivate today will shape the future of funeral service,” said John Heald, chair of the Funeral Service Foundation Board of Trustees. “That’s why the Funeral Service Foundation is proud to support this transformative program: it equips talented professionals with the tools, connections and confidence they need to grow, lead and make a lasting difference in the communities they serve.”

To learn more about the program, visit [NFDA.org/EmergingLeaders](https://www.nfda.org/EmergingLeaders).

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](https://www.nfda.org).

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