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## Focusing on Maximum Education to Stay Relevant

By Daniel M. Isard

If you are 20-something and love this profession, ask yourself this question: What education will you need to be valuable when you're in your 50s? I don't mean basic mortuary school education but education that makes you valuable in a more holistic sense.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the minimum CEU requirements to keep our licenses up to date, we must also focus on the maximum education to keep our funeral director selves relevant. Education doesn't stop at graduation. Would you want to be treated by a doctor who says, "I graduated 20 years ago and haven't done any continuing education except the minimum

People think funeral directors mostly deal with the dead. Actually, the average licensed director spends about 90% of his or her time dealing with the living.

required"? I think not. If we want to be called professionals, we must adopt the common proactive measures of other professionals.

### PEOPLE SKILLS

People think funeral directors mostly deal with the dead, and that is obviously part of your daily routine. For those who specialize in embalming and restorative arts, it makes up a larger portion of your work. But actually, the average licensed funeral director spends about 90% of his or her time dealing with the living. This includes planning preneed and at-need funeral arrangements and general representation within the community, both of which require strong people skills to be valuable.

Nothing in the mortuary school curriculum really prepares you for this. Occasionally, your state convention will present a speaker talking on the subject of people skills, but this is not training you, it is informing you. So where can you get these people skills?

We can certainly read books on the subject, and there are





many. We can attend classes dealing with psychology, sociology and human behavior at a local college or online. We can attend workshops given by leading funeral minds, such as Dr. Alan Wolfelt, to learn more about how to empathize and understand what families are going through.

But don't just *think* about doing something to gain these skills, do something! What's the worst that can happen? You spent some time and money and don't perceive any benefit. How many fishing lures will you buy and lose? How many golf balls are you going to hit into the woods? As Al Davis, former owner of the Oakland Raiders, said, "Just do it!"

**COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Think about the methods of communication we employ. Are your skills perfect?

- *Speaking* How comfortable are you speaking one-on-one to small and large groups? Is your vocabulary strong? If not, take classes in this area. Learn about various groups, such as Toastmasters, that might be in your area.



- *Writing* Can you write a strong, concise paragraph? Can you formulate a good letter? Unfortunately, email, which started as an informal means of communication, has surpassed writing letters on paper, but writing flaws are just as obvious.

- *Body Language* How you dress, stand and smile while talking says as much as your words do. Go to a high-end

clothing store and look at what business-appropriate clothing looks like. Dress for the person with whom you are meeting at the office, not for those with whom you will socialize at the bar after work.

Remember, communication is saying what you mean and what the recipient of your message needs to hear. If your body language is bad, the receiver of your message will be distracted. If your writing is improper, you will lose credibility. If you

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are not adept at speaking, all else will be lost from that point forward.

Look for resources in your community to help you. Take a community college class in business writing. You are now more than just a kid trying to pass a class.

**BALANCE**

If our society has learned anything from millennials, it's about balance. This profession has missed out on that for a long time. Any profession in which you are known by your profession rather than your surname has this problem. The doctor who is called "Doc" everywhere he goes has the same issue as a funeral director.

For a long time, funeral directors never retired. They died at their desk, working long past normal retirement age. This is because they had no passions outside of professional service. This was wrong. I can see clearly that the next generation of funeral directors will get this right. So start now!

Find your personal passion to balance your professional passion. Someday, someone may introduce you to a group, saying, "This is \_\_\_\_\_, a great \_\_\_\_\_ and our town funeral director." That shows life/profession balance!

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# Enrollment in Mortuary Science Programs Sinks to Nine-Year Low

By Edward J. Defort



New enrollment in mortuary science programs in 2017 was the lowest since 2008, while the number of graduates was the third highest since 2000, according to statistics compiled by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE).

Total current-year enrollment (new, pre-graduate and gradu-

<b>Student Enrollment/Graduation</b>		
Year	New Students	Graduates
1975	2,475	1,852
1980	2,155	1,397
1985	2,222	1,509
1990	2,213	1,622
1995	3,022	2,221
2000	2,368	1,745
2005	2,691	1,483
2007	2,514	1,340
2008	2,361	1,342
2009	2,857	1,278
2010	2,824	1,374
2011	2,917	1,494
2012	2,885	1,589
2013	2,755	1,548
2014	2,567	1,449
2015	2,639	1,713
2016	2,511	1,638
2017	2,411	1,646

*Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education*

<b>Attrition Program Year 2017</b>		
Reason for Withdrawal	Number	Percentage
Remained in mortuary science-related major but transferred to another institution	12	1.96
Changed major but remained in higher education	40	6.53
Left for academic reasons	216	35.24
Left for financial reasons	72	11.75
Left for personal reasons	207	33.77
Left for other reasons	66	10.77
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education*

ate) in the 59 mortuary science programs in 2017 was 5,394, 10.56% lower than the 2016 total of 6,031 and 7.6% below the 2015 total enrollment of 5,837.

Looking at 2017 mortuary science program total enrollment, the 2,411 students is down 3.98% from the 2,511 in 2016 and down 8.62% from the 2,639 students in 2015.

This year's figure is 802 students (or 24.96%), fewer than the record 3,213 students enrolled in 1996. It must be remembered, however, that the 1996 figure is considered an aberration since that was the year the associate degree was implemented as the minimum ABFSE standard. Many students

### New Enrollees By Age Program Year 2017

Age	No. of Students	Percentage
20 or under	381	15.80
21-25	773	32.06
26-30	497	20.61
31-35	261	10.83
36-40	184	7.63
41-45	111	4.60
46-50	97	4.02
51-55	49	2.03
56-60	33	1.37
61-65	11	0.46
66-70	2	0.08
71 and over	0	0.00
Unknown	12	0.50
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,411</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

flocked to ABFSE certificate and diploma programs in order to complete their funeral service education before the requirement took effect.

Between 2005 and 2017, new enrollment showed a gradual decline but bounced back in 2009 to post steady increases through 2011 before beginning a five-year downturn.

The 1,646 graduates in 2017 is a 0.49% decrease from the 1,638 graduates in 2016 and 3.91% lower than the 1,713 graduates in 2015.

### NEW ENROLLEE PROFILES

Based on ABFSE statistics, the most likely person enrolling in

### New Enrollees By Prior Education Program Year 2017

Level Completed	No. of Students	Percentage
GED	114	4.73
High school grad	2,291	95.02
Other	6	0.25
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,411</b>	<b>100%</b>
High school or equivalent	718	29.78
1 year of college	503	20.86
2 years of college	577	23.93
3 years of college	185	7.67
Bachelor's degree	357	14.81
Master's degree	44	1.82
Other	27	1.12
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,411</b>	<b>100%</b>

Previously attended a funeral service program 100

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

a mortuary science program in 2017 was a Caucasian female, age 21-25 and a high school graduate with at least one or two years of college.

Does this sound like anyone you know or have met while in school?

The data also reveal that students entering mortuary science programs have more prior education than did previous enrollees. From 1971-2004, the number of students having one or more years of college under their belts ranged between 51% and 62%. In 2009, that figure jumped to 69%. In 2017, it

### New Enrollees By Ethnic Origin and Gender Program Year 2017

Ethnic Origin	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	579	71.31	998	62.41	1,577	66.86
African American	156	19.21	340	21.26	496	20.57
Hispanic American	46	5.67	187	11.69	233	9.66
Native American	8	0.99	13	0.81	21	0.87
Asian/Pacific Islander	8	0.99	19	1.19	27	1.12
Other	15	1.85	42	2.63	57	2.36
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,599</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2,411</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### New Enrollees By Prior Employment Program Year 2017

Employed	No. of Students	Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,411)
Less than 6 months	238	9.87
6 months to 1 year	227	9.42
More than 1 year	610	25.30
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,075</b>	<b>44.59%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### New Enrollees By Family in Funeral Service Program Year 2017

	No. of Students	Percentage of Total Students New Enrollees (2,411)
Parent	235	9.75
Spouse	34	1.41
Sibling	21	0.87
In-law	27	1.12
Other	114	4.73
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>17.88%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

landed at 70.02%, which is slightly lower than the 71.09% in 2016 and the 72.98% in 2015.

Furthermore, in 2017, the number of new enrollees with a bachelor's or graduate degree was put at 16.63%, about 3.3 percentage points lower than the 19.99% recorded in 2016 and about half a point higher than the 16.56% recorded in 2015.

Continuing a 21st century trend, significantly more women than men are enrolling in mortuary science programs. The tipping point came in 2000, when the number of women enrolling in mortuary science programs surpassed the number of men – 51% vs. 49%.

In 2017, out of 2,411 new students enrolled, 1,599 (66.39%) were female. This compares with 2016, when 1,622 (64.59%) of 2,511 students were female, and 2015, when out of 2,639 new students enrolled, 1,670 (63.28%) were female.

Broken down by ethnicity, 65.41% of all new students in 2017 were Caucasian, compared with 63.40% in 2016 and 62.33% of all new students in 2015. The percentage of African-American

enrollees in 2017 was 20.57%, down from 22.54% in 2016 and 24.29% in 2015. Hispanics accounted for 9.66% of new students in 2017, which was on par with 9.56% in 2016 and 9.36% in 2015. Asian-Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.12% of new students (albeit from a smaller base), which compares with 1.35% in 2016 and 1.25% in 2015. The number of new Native American students in 2017 was 0.87%, which is up from 0.48% in 2016 and 0.76% in 2015. The number of new students of "other" ethnic backgrounds in 2017 was 2.36%, which compares with 2.67% in 2016 and 2.01% in 2015.

According to ABFSE statistics, 71.31% of male enrollees and 62.41% of female enrollees in 2017 were Caucasian, which compares with 67.49% male and 61.16% female in 2016. In 2015, 67.39% of males and 59.40% of females enrollees were Caucasian.

Last year, 19.12% of male enrollees and 21.26% of female enrollees were African American, which compared with 24.18% of male enrollees and 21.64% of female enrollees in

### Graduates by Ethnic Origin and Gender Program Year 2017

Ethnic Origin	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	428	73.92	707	62.26	1,135	68.96
African American	104	17.96	199	18.65	303	18.41
Hispanic American	33	5.70	124	11.62	157	9.54
Native American	2	0.35	14	1.31	16	0.97
Asian/Pacific Islander	9	1.55	8	0.75	17	1.03
Other/Did Not Indicate	3	0.52	15	1.41	18	1.09
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### Graduates By Age Program Year 2017

Age	No. of Students	Percentage
20 or under	88	5.35
21-25	576	34.99
26-30	357	21.69
31-35	226	13.73
36-40	164	9.96
41-45	78	4.74
46-50	59	3.58
51-55	52	3.16
56-60	30	1.82
61-65	11	0.67
66-70	3	0.18
71 and over	0	0.00
Unknown	2	0.12
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### Graduates By Prior Education Program Year 2017

Level Completed	No. of Students	Percentage
GED	65	3.95
High school grad	1,568	95.26
Other	13	0.79
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>100%</b>
High school or equivalent	341	20.72
1 year of college	336	20.41
2 years of college	453	27.52
3 years of college	138	8.38
Bachelor's degree	333	20.23
Master's degree	27	1.64
Other	18	1.09
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>100%</b>
Previously attended a funeral service program	57	

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

2016 and 22.91% and 25.09%, respectively, in 2015.

In 2017, 5.67% of male enrollees and 11.69% of female enrollees were Hispanic. This compares with 5.40% and 11.84%, respectively, in 2016, and with 2015, when 6.3% of new enrollees were males and 11.14% of females were Hispanic.

Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 0.99% of new male enrollees and 1.19% of new female enrollees in 2017, compared with 1.24% of new male and 1.42% of new female enrollees in 2016, and 2015's 1.34% of new male enrollees and 1.2% of new female students.

Native Americans accounted for 0.99% of new male enrollees and 0.81% of new female enrollees in 2017. This compares

with 2016, when 0.22% of new enrollees were male and 0.62% were female, and 2015, when 0.72% of all new enrollees were male and 0.78% were female.

In 2017, ABFSE reported 1.85% of all male new enrollees and 2.63% of all new female enrollees as "other/did not indicate." This compares with 1.46% of all male new enrollees and 3.33% of all new female enrollees in 2016, and 1.34% of all male new enrollees and 2.40% of all new female enrollees in 2015.

Nearly 18% of new enrollees in 2017 seemed to be carrying on or getting into the family business. In 2016, just 14.3% of all new enrollees had a relative (or other) in funeral service; in 2015, it was 13.16%.

### Graduates Who Work While in School Program Year 2017

Employment	Number	Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,646)
In funeral-related services	1,060	64.40
Other non-funeral service employment	380	23.09
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,440</b>	<b>87.48%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### Graduates By Family in Funeral Service Program Year 2017

Employment	Number	Percentage of Total Number Grads (1,646)
Parent	180	10.94
Spouse	28	1.70
Sibling	10	0.61
In-law	17	1.03
Other	56	3.04
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>17.68%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

### New Enrollees/Graduates By State (Program Year 2017)

State	New Enrollees	Percentage	Graduates	Percentage
Alabama	51	2.12	24	1.46
Alaska	3	0.12	1	0.06
Arizona	24	1.00	22	1.34
Arkansas	43	1.78	30	1.82
California	121	5.02	53	3.22
Colorado	29	1.20	31	1.88
Connecticut	45	1.87	25	1.52
Delaware	22	0.91	3	0.18
District of Columbia	1	0.04	2	0.12
Florida	63	2.61	83	5.04
Georgia	71	2.94	63	3.83
Hawaii	0	0.00	0	0.00
Idaho	7	0.29	4	0.24
Illinois	134	5.56	116	7.05
Indiana	116	4.81	70	4.25
Iowa	44	1.82	28	1.70
Kansas	22	0.91	11	0.67
Kentucky	71	2.94	37	2.25
Louisiana	50	2.07	27	1.64
Maine	15	0.62	9	0.55
Maryland	49	2.03	35	2.13
Massachusetts	61	2.53	28	1.70
Michigan	66	2.74	47	2.86
Minnesota	28	1.16	32	1.94
Mississippi	42	1.74	21	1.28
Missouri	34	1.41	27	1.64
Montana	8	0.33	2	0.12
Nebraska	14	0.58	8	0.24
Nevada	6	0.25	4	0.24
New Hampshire	8	0.33	2	0.12
New Jersey	87	3.61	55	3.34
New Mexico	8	0.33	6	0.36
New York	206	8.54	91	5.53
North Carolina	27	1.12	45	2.73
North Dakota	6	0.25	6	0.36
Ohio	82	3.40	59	3.58
Oklahoma	52	2.16	21	1.28
Oregon	19	0.79	14	0.85
Pennsylvania	119	4.94	78	4.74
Rhode Island	7	0.29	5	0.30
South Carolina	39	1.62	38	2.31
South Dakota	8	0.33	5	0.30
Tennessee	76	3.15	32	1.94
Texas	247	10.24	168	10.21
Utah	21	0.87	21	1.28
Vermont	2	0.08	0	0.00
Virginia	68	2.82	65	3.95
Washington	31	1.29	32	1.94
West Virginia	13	0.54	12	0.73
Wisconsin	36	1.49	34	2.07
Wyoming	2	0.08	2	0.12
Unknown	2	0.08	0	0.00
Foreign	5	0.21	12	0.73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,411</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: American Board of Funeral Service Education

A total of 235 new enrollees in 2017 (or 9.75%) had a parent in the business, 1.41% had a spouse, 0.87% a sibling, 1.12% an in-law and 4.73% “other” relative.

## GRADUATE PROFILES

In 2017, there were 1,646 graduates from accredited programs; in 2016, the number of graduates was 1,638, and in 2015, 1,713 graduates. These graduates represent 49 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and five hailed from foreign countries. The only state that did not have a graduate was Hawaii.

Texas led all states with 247 grads, followed by New York with 206, Illinois with 134, California with 121, Pennsylvania with 119 and Indiana with 116. These were the only states to post triple-digit graduate numbers.

Overall, 64.82% (1,067) of the 1,646 graduates from accredited mortuary science programs were women. This is up from 2016, when 63.18% (1,035) of the 1,638 students were women, and 2015, when 62.40% (1,069) of the 1,713 graduates were women. As noted earlier, 2000 was the year in which the scales tipped toward women on the enrollment side, but it wasn't until 2005 that there were more women than men graduating from mortuary science programs. That year, of 1,661 graduates, 52.2% (867) were women.

According to ABFSE, 68.96% of all graduates in 2017 were Caucasian, which compares with 71.18% in 2016 and 71.86% in 2015. The percentage of African-American graduates in 2017 was 18.41%, which is up from 16.36% in 2016 and 18.15% in 2015.

The percentage of Hispanic graduates in 2017 was put at 9.54%, which is up from 9.34% in 2016 and 6.65% in 2015.

The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander graduates was 1.03% in 2017, a tick down from 1.04% in 2016 and 1.11% in 2015.

In 2017, the percentage of Native American grads was put at 0.97%, up from 0.49% in 2016 and 0.35% in 2015. “Other/did

not indicate” ethnic backgrounds dropped slightly to 1.09% in 2017, down from 1.59% in 2016 and 1.93% in 2015.

Broken down by gender, in 2017, 73.92% of male graduates and 66.26% of females were Caucasian. This compares with 76.78% of male and 67.92% of female graduates in 2016 and 78.42% of male and 67.91% of female graduates in 2015.

In 2017, 17.96% of male graduates and 18.65% of female graduates were African American. In 2016, the percentages were 13.93% of male grads and 17.78% of female grads, while in 2015, 15.68% of male graduates and 19.55% of female graduates were African American.

Furthermore, in 2017, 5.70% of male graduates and 11.62% of female graduates were Hispanic. This compares with 6.63% and 10.92%, respectively, in 2016, which was a significant gain over the 3.11% of male graduates and 8.79% of female Hispanic graduates in 2015.

Native Americans accounted for 0.35% of male graduates and 1.31% of female graduates in 2017, compared to 0.33% of male and 0.58% of female graduates in 2016 and 0.16% of male graduates and 0.47% of female graduates in 2015.

In 2017, 1.55% of all male graduates and 0.75% of all female graduates were Asian/Pacific Islander, which compares with 1.0% of all male graduates and 1.06% of all female graduates in 2016 and 1.09% of all male graduates and 1.12% of all female graduates in 2015.

ABFSE reported that 0.52% of all male graduates and 1.41% of all female graduates in 2017 were classified as “other/did not indicate,” which compares with 1.33% of all male graduates and 1.74% of all female grads in 2016, and 1.55% and 2.15%, respectively, in 2015.

In 2017, 17.86% of graduates had a relative in funeral service, an uptick from 16.24% of graduates in 2016. A total of 10.94% of graduates had a parent in the business, 1.70% had a spouse, 0.61 had a sibling, 1.03 had an in-law and 3.04% responded “other” relative.

## Student Perspective

# Can You Run Faster Than a Lion?

By Jessica Keller

Have you heard the folk tale about survival and the difference between the lion and the gazelle? If not, today's your lucky day because I'm here to share it with you.

Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up and knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. It knows this is essential. Every morning, a lion wakes up also,

and it knows it must outrun the slowest of the gazelle or it will starve to death. Thus, it doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle because when the sun comes up, you'd better be running for something.

Now, I didn't create this story, but I'd like to use it as a way to challenge you to think. I ask you: What motivates you? This is

Despite how difficult death is to deal with, it is natural, and I'm an advocate of education and facts. Death is not new, but there are new ways to react toward death and new ways to help us grieve.

essential because if you don't know what motivates you, then what is your purpose for waking up every morning? Others around you may provoke you to be motivated by things they are offering, but these offerings may not always be for the right reasons or for your benefit. Bribes, offers and incentives can all sound enticing, but if you are that easily persuaded by superficial things, as easy as the wind blows a blade of grass, then who are you actually living for? You or someone else?

Something I've encountered since I entered the mortuary field is the question of why I chose this career. I used to be intimidated by the question because I didn't think my reasons would be viewed as good enough. But then I thought to myself, why does it matter if people think my reasons are inadequate? Their opinions don't matter because these are *my* reasons and I know I am still going to pursue my dream and goal of becoming a funeral director.

I understand my motives for wanting to pursue this career and know that I have the determination and dedication to get there. I have a desire to want to live, and being around death every day certainly encourages me to want to live on as long as I can, making the most of my life by being every ounce of myself daily.

Being able to help family members who may feel the urge to want to die or feel they can't go on because someone they love has died motivates me even more because I want to be able to help provide an everlasting memory for them and help them heal.

Despite how difficult death is to deal with, it is natural, and I am an advocate of education and facts. I believe it's important to help spread the news that death is not new but

that there are new ways we can react toward death and new ways that can help us grieve.

Education helps eliminate ignorance. And since ignorance creates fear, by eliminating ignorance, we get rid of the fear. I want to truly help develop better ways to educate the public on what we do and try to eliminate some, if not all, of the negative stigmas the funeral service industry endures. I could write an entire paper on why I am passionate about what I do and what I will be doing, but I'll leave you with some suspense in your mind about who I am.

Understanding what motivates you gives you that ability and advantage of being able to set goals. Goals are important because they help you focus on strengthening your skills and knowledge. They also help you keep track of your progress, as well give you a sense of accomplishment once you've reached a goal. This delivers personal growth. Many people get discouraged too quickly when they see that their goals aren't being met right away or at all. What goes wrong at this point is that people typically give up or move on to the next one the minute they experience failure.

I like to encourage people, when they hit what they think is a roadblock, to challenge themselves. Self-analyze why you aren't there yet. What I have found when I practice this exercise is that I always end up coming back to not knowing what was motivating me to want to reach the goal. I'm not saying to give up if you can't figure out the root of your motivation, but really give yourself a chance to think deeply about what your motivators are; after all, you had the notion to try in the first place, so that must mean something.

The lion's motivation to run is the drive and need to eat in order to survive. The gazelle's motivation to run is for survival, to avoid being killed by the lion. Motivation is natural – you just need to channel yours and harness it for the best use.

Now that we've discussed motivation, let's talk wealth. Who doesn't love wealth? Would you like to know what one of the wealthiest places in the world is? The graveyard. I bet you're dying to know why. The graveyard holds the permanence of death and all of the hopes, dreams, goals and aspirations people buried long before they died. Then, when these people actually die, none of those buried treasures will ever be exposed or uncovered.



Each time we pass up one of our ideas, a small death occurs in us. Said Shakespeare: “A coward dies a thousand times before his death, but the valiant taste of death but once.” I love this quote because its powerful simplicity speaks miles of truth about people who are fearful and deny themselves of opportunities and new experiences. Because they were scared, they die over and over again within their soul. All of these little deaths add up and can equate to the same magnitude as when someone actually dies. What is the purpose of your life if you’re dying every day anyway? “If you live life casually, you’re going to end up as a casualty. So be bold” (motivational speaker Les Brown), be authentic and use your life wisely.

Too many times, I hear people say, “I don’t have time right now.” Make time then. “I’m not strong enough.” Make yourself stronger. “I’m not smart enough for that.” Make yourself smarter. If there is a “can’t,” then there’s also a “can” – the simple basics of balance. In order to be great, you must be teachable and have a willingness to learn. Who else is a better teacher than you? You have the ability to teach yourself how to do what you think you can’t, and the willingness to learn just needs to be there. Are you willing to expand what you can do in life?

So many people think wealth defines their greatness just because their bank accounts reflect it. If you are solely driven by the thought of money and honestly think that will define your greatness and success, I’d beg to differ.

Although we live in a world in which our livelihood is practically dependent on the monetary system, there are other components that make up the foundation, walls and roof of success, not just how much the materials cost. I always hear people say, “Well, money equals power,” and yes, there is some truth to that. Money does give you the ability to deliver resources and options much more quickly, as well as allow you to control and manipulate the outcomes, if that is your agenda.

At the end of the day, what actually matters is how you choose to handle that power and control. Unless you’re Donald Trump or the IRS, most people really don’t care what’s in your bank account. People are known for who they are and for the legacies they leave behind, not their material property.

For anyone who has ever been part of a funeral or memorial service, please tell me if you’ve ever discussed a decedent’s bank account total during the service – not during the arrangement conference but during the actual service at which family and friends are gathered to remember and mourn the life of their loved one. I know I personally have never witnessed that. My point is, when you die, in most aspects, your money will be irrelevant.

I have also witnessed people who I thought had (and some still have) the potential to be great but who somehow just bottom out because they became discouraged due to feeling defeated. When I inquired about PIMS before I started

school there, I was warned that the academic workload can be intense. Hearing that is one thing; actually experiencing it is another. The words don’t really ratify until you’re going through it.

**The lion’s motivation to run is the drive to eat in order to survive. The gazelle’s motivation to run is to avoid being killed by the lion. Motivation is natural – you just need to channel yours and harness it for the best use.**

For those of you who have graduated, congratulations. It was not easy, I’m sure, and you should always remain proud of that accomplishment. For those currently in school, I’m sure you are experiencing the waves of a massive thunderstorm. Just hold out – the storm won’t last forever. Lastly, for those interested in entering the world of mortuary science, just know that mortuary school is no joke, and I don’t say that lightly. Make sure you devise a plan of action in order to devote yourself to this journey.

Discouragement doesn’t just come from the outside, it actually more often than not comes from within us. We can be our own worst enemy. In any great movie, book, video game, etc., the objective is to defeat the enemy, no? Once you start the battle, the war is halfway over. Do not – I repeat, do not – let your enemy keep you from reaching greatness. When you want an A but get a B instead, just accept it and move on.

But there is a next step – to recognize what snatched away that unobtained perfect grade. Perhaps it was your study methods or a lack of understanding of the material. Whatever is causing these lower achievements, keep striving for improvement, not just to reach that A but so you can allow yourself to learn and grow from it. If you always got an A, you’d never try to better yourself and your growth would be limited.

At the end of the day, what matters more – the character you built getting to that success or the academic transcript that few people will see? Be mindful of how you got there because your character goes everywhere with you.

If you are willing to experience growing pains, then you are ready for this journey. Even if your journey takes you somewhere other than where you intended, take hold of that opportunity and strive for greatness. Also, remember that in order to reach greatness, in order to be great, we must be teachable. You set your own limits and define your own greatness. If there is ever a time along the way that you feel like giv-

ing up, take a step back and remember why you started your journey in the first place. I'll leave this section with another of my favorite quotes: "Learning is a gift. Even when pain is your teacher" (Maya Watson). Don't take your ability to learn for granted.

It's easy for the daily components of our lives to carry on in the same way they always have because that's all people know. If we allow ourselves to open up to other people who are interested in sharing their ideas, opinions and experiences, we open up ourselves to options.

Let's pretend for a moment that everyone in this world is a book of their own and the planet is a bookshelf; as books, we sit on these shelves. There would be so many to choose from, offering unique stories, unique intellect and concepts we may never have thought of before.

By taking the time to read the book of someone else – opening our minds to what someone else has to offer – enables us to write a new page in our own story, adding resources that can help us expand. The point is, by welcoming newcomers to funeral service who come with an outsider's perspective, we can enhance the way we operate as a business and offer more to the families we serve because we have allowed people to enter this field who are more like them and less like what they would expect to see because that's how it's always been.

## Resigned to Resign

By Heather Braatz

I usually don't talk about my funeral director internship. When I recall my time learning how to meet with families and center a casket on a church truck, I typically refer to the last funeral home for which I worked, which was leaps and bounds a better experience. No one there threatened my safety or my job there. And at no point in time did I see live people naked there.

When I started my internship, I had no idea what I was doing. I hadn't gone to mortuary school, and although I'd been working in customer service for more than a decade by then, I had limited knowledge about deathcare. A few months prior to my internship, I had started work as a receptionist at a quiet, rural cemetery. They offered me the opportunity to become office manager at a new satellite location that was being launched. For a \$1.50 per hour raise, I'd work anywhere; jobs weren't exactly bountiful at the time. I didn't even care if it didn't allow for overtime.

I was energized and enthusiastic about learning a new job. The location was staffed by two people: me and a managing director. At first, working on the funeral home side of things was not much different than cemetery work – be friendly, keep or-

Anybody can look spectacular on paper, and especially if they have the right name attached to it. I'm not saying to disvalue anyone who comes from funeral service already or who may look great on paper. What I am saying is to take more time investing in who is entering this profession. Since the start of my research on this journey of becoming a funeral director, I have encountered those who fear that the industry is on its way to a watered-down version of what it once was. If this is a fear, what can we do about it? We need people to enter who are enthusiastic and have a passion for what they will be doing. So, going back to what I said about investing more time in who is entering this field, it needs to be looked at from multiple angles.

A thought for anyone who is a part of the hiring process for your firm – don't just grab that book off the shelf that looks familiar, the same style of book you always read or the book with the same name you always go to. I challenge you to try something different and see where it leads your business. Difference brings change, and although no one except a baby with a wet diaper likes change, acknowledge that change is important, necessary and essential for growth.

*Jessica Keller is currently a full-time student at Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science and a member of the student senate. She is enrolled in PIMS' Associate in Specialized Business degree program.*

ganized, hug people if they're crying. Common-sense stuff, so I thought. They asked if I'd be willing to take on an internship so I could also meet with families. "Of course!" I said.

My manager told me I needed to give everyone a price list when they walked in the door, and I sat in the corner when she did arrangements for the first month we were open. Then, after a week of watching me meet with families, I was on my own. It seemed I had snagged a pretty decent gig – hugging widows, answering price shoppers and doing removals at night.

Working with my manager was easy, in the beginning. She wanted the workplace to be a casual, friendly place. Those first few months, we would go out to sports events after work, and she gave me a bunch of her old suits that were "too big for



her to fit into anymore; I think they'll fit you." She would even let me watch her dog and house-sit for her when she was on vacation. I didn't mind the 13-hour workdays when she was out of town because I was allowed to call the main funeral home if I had questions.

She had mentioned that she was fast-paced, thrived on stress and was generally described as a go-getter, so I'd better get used to that. She talked at length about her peeves and triggers, especially how she hated slow talkers, and if I were to pause or take too long in answering a question, she'd snap her fingers to prompt me to speed up. "You should really come to the gym with me after work. Your clothes will fit better. Don't you want to be my gym buddy? I thought we were friends..." And she would pout until I relented, just to make her happy.

**My manager seemed happy as long as I didn't disagree with her or challenge her authority. If I did voice a disagreement, she would snap and scream for hours.**

She did seem happy, just as long as I didn't disagree or challenge her authority, as that would incite Dr. Jekyll to turn into Ms. Hyde. If I voiced a disagreement, she would snap and scream for hours, pulling me into the garage or the room where we stored the urns. Heaven forbid I let a family use a Costco casket instead of convincing them to return it and order one from us (even if the deceased had picked it out himself prior to passing). She would remind me that "every dollar counts" and that if I liked having a job, I ought to be more concerned with selling product.

She considered the atrocity of failing to answer a ringing phone unforgivable, even if you missed it because you were in the restroom or on another line with a family, as the phone would ring through to the answering service, which would then transfer calls to her while she was "at the gym." She'd make a special trip back from the gym, as I was leaving for the day, to tell me what a piece of crap I was.

She informed me that the worst thing a young director could do was "throw their boss under the bus," and she often regaled me with the story of the one time she superseded the chain of command, went over her boss' head directly to his boss and was almost fired for "just trying to help." She wanted to make it known that, should a bright-eyed, young intern ever feel the need to speak out of turn, that young intern would invariably be fired and she would personally ensure that the intern would never work at another funeral home again. As soon she could get a nod or a smile, with a "Yes, boss!" it would be back to giggles, "can you take my car to get detailed?" and coffee runs.

Thus, I generally kept my mouth shut and my nose to the grindstone.

Those first few months were slow and steady; we were a new location with a new brand, so my manager spent most days marketing to local hospice and skilled nursing facilities (colloquially referred to as "sniffs"), dropping off gifts with the people who would influence a family to call us when a death occurred. I would only see her on visits to the office to pick up more marketing materials or on the occasional stop to change into gym clothes. Some weeks, she wouldn't come in at all. I mentioned this to the local human resources manager in passing, which granted me an hour-long training lecture at top decibel in the garage. She often mentioned that she could take away my internship, and if I started crying, she made fun of me for being "weak." This left a lasting impact on me. There was no way I could lose my job, and I was so close to finishing my intern requirements. Then she'd brush it off and ask, "We're still friends, right?" The local human resources manager got fired.

The funeral home was a small, galley-style building with a restroom in the far back. Halfway between the front door was the urn room, and right up front, with floor-to-ceiling windows, was our office. My manager was always running late and as such would run full speed to the back restroom to change into gym clothes around 4:00, then sprint back out to a running car, yelling, "Bye" while passing my desk. After the first year, she started changing in the urn room, which cut the sprint in half but was uncomfortable, as the funeral home was open until 5:00, and I'd have to knock and say, "Hey, the Smith family is here for Mrs. Smith..." and wait until the door cracked open and an arm shot out with the requested urn.

A few months of this went by, and sometimes when my manager would be giving me directions or telling me what needed to be ordered, she'd ask me to come with her to the urn room so we could carry on the conversation while gym clothes were donned. Multiple times while I stood in the hallway frowning, I'd ask why the restroom wasn't good enough to change in.

"Too far, no time," she would answer.

During the second year of my internship, I'd be asked to get the urn myself, an awkward situation as my manager would be fully disrobed and still talking to me, unabashed. "Remember to call the crematory and see if that jewelry's been filled yet!" Sure thing, boss, as soon as I give this family the urn before they walk in and see you naked... After a month of that, I'd just make the family wait until the room was "unoccupied."

Then she started changing in the front office. I couldn't understand for the life of me why anyone would want to do that. Our office was all windows, and for some reason, she thought it would be acceptable to "change quickly," so there was no need to even close the blinds. Reminders about the excellent restroom at the back of the funeral home, the locking urn

room or the fact that families, clients and passersby could clearly see into the office fell on deaf ears.

“No one’s going to see. It’s just us,” she’d chuckle.

I would grit my teeth so hard that I ended up with TMJ. Then I got the bright idea to start yelling out, “The Johnsons just pulled up!” or “FAMILY!” to scare my manager into thinking that someone was about to walk in. That prompted her to start closing the blinds but didn’t stop the undressing. Expressing my discomfort now caused dismissive laughter and taunts: “What’re you going to do about it?” Then, with a turn of personality, she’d show up with a coffee and tell me that we made “such a great team,” full of praise and encouragement. She’d sometimes take extra care to write something on my desk pad – while topless – the crass, threatening tone and reasons to call me names forgotten with each new day.

She tended to make fun of different cultures, often doing racist and offensive impersonations of the families and making fun of them for “being too high-maintenance,” “being late” or “not having money.” She said racist things about Filipinos especially, even though I had to repeatedly remind her that I was Filipino and that saying those things was offensive. On occasion, she’d switch courses and tell me she was a “big fan” of Filipinos, telling me how “sweet and easy” they are and how she “thinks they are just so cute and never argue.”

The funeral home was getting busier. I was excited because I only had a few more days left before taking the National Board Exam, and my friend from back home made me a CD of all the glossary terms from the study guide, which I listened to in my beat-up Dodge to and from work. Everyone who was salaried got a work iPhone 3, which I was geeked about. I won a scholarship to attend a week-long conference and celebrant training across the country. Things were good.

When I returned from the conference, my license had arrived in the mail. I remember my manager telling me, as she handed me the envelope, that she couldn’t offer me a raise because we were all going to get a 99 cent cost of living adjustment instead. Apparently, my face said everything I couldn’t.

She accused me of being ungrateful, telling me multiple times that I didn’t deserve to be called a funeral director since I didn’t attend mortuary school and that anyone else would kill for my position. She said I needed to pay my dues and that I shouldn’t be such a baby about it, that I didn’t appreciate how lucky I was and that I’d need luck finding a job this good elsewhere.

With my manager seldom in the office, I was unable to meet with all of the families that were coming in in a timely manner. I told her I couldn’t work like this anymore, that it was too busy and I needed help, that I was tired of coming in on the weekend to lessen the load on Mondays and that families were starting to complain about having to wait until the following week to meet with a director. Hesitant to change her demand-

ing gym schedule and losing calls to funeral homes that could serve families faster, she said I could put an ad on Craigslist.

The minute we hired the office assistant, my blood pressure went down 10 points on the systolic. She was great – really compassionate and empathetic on the phone, a quick learner, a natural. Families loved her and I envied her bright-eyed enthusiasm. She was inquisitive and observant. It took her less than a week to ask me, point blank, if our manager was cheating on her husband when she told us, “I’m off to the gym!”

Before, without a witness to have my back, there was no accountability. Now, with another co-worker, there was a second set of eyes and ears whenever one of us was being harassed. We started to stand up to our manager when she mistreated us, but this caused her to try to exert her control and power plays more forcefully than before. Our boss felt threatened. I updated my résumé.

Sometimes she’d take extra care to write something on my desk pad – while topless – the crass, threatening tone and name-calling forgotten with each new day.

Sadly, I’d brought these ongoing issues to the attention of the corporate human resources manager and the regional manager. I explained how my boss had confronted me (and other employees) in multiple inappropriate instances that constituted unprofessional conduct. I told them I felt uncomfortable working alone with my manager, that I felt unsafe, that my boss was becoming increasingly out of control and that, when I was in the other room meeting with a family planning funeral arrangements, she would undress in front of the new girl in the office. I then asked the HR manager if she’d gotten any of the complaints I had filed locally. She said this was the first she’d heard of any problems and that she’d take immediate action.

There were a few awkward weeks where the new girl and I kept showing up to work but our manager did not. We hadn’t heard anything from corporate or otherwise but got our hopes up.

Then the regional manager came by and asked to meet with me in the arrangement room. I was briefed on what had been going on the past week, and he told me, “Well, we definitely don’t want to condone anything... uncomfortable.”

When our manager did show up in the office, she was despondent and silent. There was a slideshow of emotions on her face: sadness, contempt, hatred, perhaps jealousy. She made no references to anything ill at ease.

Her disposition had clearly changed. We were terrified.

The regional manager let us know we would all be subjected to a “counseling session.” I thought this was great news! Bring in a third-party counselor and verify, once and for all, that I’m not crazy for thinking that just because we’re all female, this behavior doesn’t constitute sexual harassment. I wanted a legitimate, unbiased voice to tell me that it’s abnormal to get naked at work, not to mention bullying your co-workers with your clearly borderline personality. I wanted affirmation that this was indeed misconduct.

I gave her my letter of resignation in person. She stifled hot, angry tears and growled, “I’m so mad at you for leaving!” After about 10 more times of her telling me how mad she was at me for leaving, I called corporate human resources.

The role of counselor was played by none other than the regional manager. He spoke at length about how we must reframe our ideas of how others are wired. My manager was defensive and spit bitter ultimatums. I was so shocked we were actually doing this fake counseling that all I could do was pour gas on the fire. I mentioned how she would call me names in front of customers and how only an idiot would think it appropriate to become naked in front of co-workers. I quietly relished in her hate and discomfort. I still couldn’t believe this was happening. The regional manager made it clear that we both had to work out our issues for this to be a functional operation. Clearly, he thought this was just two women having a catfight in their work relationship and that we could see past it and look at the bigger picture of our jobs – to make him money.

I started using vacation days to go to job interviews. I bought a new suit and makeup. I was so relieved to be out of the office that I seemed charming, relaxed, even giddy.

The first place at which I interviewed offered me a funeral director position at a place with long-term human resources personnel and a legal team, at a 30% wage increase. I took extreme pleasure at the varied responses to my interoffice email notice of my resignation:

“I cannot believe you stuck it out this long.”

“So, you finally got sick of the abuse? Good for you! You’ll do well at your new firm!”

And my favorite: “Finally. Your manager is such a #@\$\*&\*@#%.”

I gave her the letter of resignation in person. She stifled hot, angry tears and growled, “I’m so mad at you for leaving! They don’t even know what they’re getting.” After about 10 more times of her telling me how very mad she was at me for leaving, I called corporate human resources. A new lady answered; the last manager was gone.

So I called the regional manager (our “counselor”). “What do you want me to do? She just keeps telling me how mad she is at me for leaving, which is fairly uncomfortable...” He let me know he’d take care of it.

An hour later, the regional manager stopped by. “We think you’ve worked hard enough and need a little breather before your foray into your next job. How about the next week off? Paid, of course!” He looked sternly at my manager before helping me clean out my desk and carry my stuff to the car.

“So you’ll stay in touch?” he asked me. “If you ever need anything, just call...” He looked exhausted. I thanked him and nodded. It felt as if I had just shed 130 pounds.

Since then, I’ve had no problem walking away from places that don’t treat me well. I’ll only work in places with more than two employees and preferably with a human resources manager in-house.

*Heather Braatz is NFDA education manager.*

## Student Perspective

# The Issue of Unclaimed Cremated Remains

By John W. Dimpleby

There’s an issue that has plagued the funeral industry for many years. It’s hard to say when it first began, but we can assume that this issue – unclaimed cremated remains – is as old as cremation itself. I imagine you could walk into nearly any funeral home across the nation and somewhere in the facility, they will have several urns and temporary containers tucked away in some untraversed corner, neatly stacked in line like the ghosts of soldiers of some forgotten war.

Before we discuss ways to rectify this issue, perhaps we should take a look at why it may occur. David R. Penepent, director of the Funeral Services Administration Program at SUNY Canton, has written an article in which he discusses unclaimed cremated remains and gives very good input on the reasons the issue persists. “According to some funeral directors, the economic downturn in recent years has had a significant impact on the way people care for their dead,” he said.



A second reason given by Penepent, which holds as much significance as the first, is, “Family conflict is the second most frequent reason for not claiming a loved one’s cremated remains.”

Because I know of some firms that have urns dating to the 1930s and prior, I tend to put more weight on the second reason Penepent offered simply because the issue has been occurring for so long.

Linda Wilson, in another article on the same topic, cites professional courtesy as a reasoning for the accumulation of so many unclaimed cremated remains. She spoke with Jerry Sullivan, a second-generation funeral director and president of the Cremation Society of Illinois, about what he had to offer on professional courtesy. In my opinion, it still rings true today: “In the past,” Sullivan explained, “funeral homes felt an obligation to hold on to the cremated remains as a professional courtesy. Weeks, months, then sometimes years would pass.”

I believe it is for this reason that the issue of unclaimed cremated remains is allowed to persist in funeral service today. Many directors still feel that sense of obligation to safeguard the remains until the family is ready to take possession of them. But I have to ask: How is keeping them on the top shelf of a back closet or in the damp, cold basement considered safeguarding? Simply leaving them unprotected and out in the open can hardly be considered safeguarding.

There are certain means that allow us to handle the issue of unclaimed cremated remains, such as the Customer Designation of Intention form, which dictates that after a prescribed number of days the manner in which the funeral home will dispose of said remains (typically, it is by scattering, some-

times by burial). This form certainly takes liability off the funeral home and would keep firms safe in case of litigation. But how might the family take it if they came back one day in search of their loved one only to find that their cremated remains had been scattered without the family present. I’m sure this would only cause undue distress.

Steve LeBlanc, an Associated Press reporter, wrote in a 2008 article, “Funeral directors worry the regulations don’t carry the protections of law, so they have been holding on to the ashes – just in case.” LeBlanc implied that some funeral directors may hold onto them because they worry that the Customer Designation of Intention form may not be legally binding in the case of a family suffering emotional distress due to the scattering of remains after the allotted time.

I have taken several classes with Dr. Penepent at SUNY Canton in which the issue of what to do with unclaimed cremated remains has come up. His suggestion was that following the allotted amount of days, they could be interred in a mausoleum crypt or vault, which could be purchased by a group of funeral practitioners in the area and used as a type of receiving vault. While I believe this is a fine idea, and it certainly keeps the urns safe and away from harm, it doesn’t allow for easy retrieval should a family member come by unannounced. There is also the fact that the family would have to be charged a disinterment fee.

Many directors still feel a sense of obligation to safeguard unclaimed remains until the family is ready to take possession. But how is keeping them on a shelf or in a closet or in a cold, damp basement considered safeguarding?

In my opinion, a fire-proof safe is the best solution to this issue. It allows the urns to remain on the premises for easy and ready retrieval, while also protecting us from liability in case of fire, theft or other catastrophic scenarios. This solution is practical for both the funeral director and the family and still upholds the duty of care owed to these precious remains.

Despite the fact that they were abandoned, they were loved by someone at some point, and that, in and of itself, is demanding of our respect and utmost care for them. I believe it is our duty to hold these remains until a family member comes to take them into their possession and to care for them in an honorable, dignified and safe fashion.

*John W. Dimpleby is a mortuary science student at SUNY Canton.*

# Earn Scholarship Dollars for the Work You Love

By Kelly Manion

In her winning Steve Lang Academic Scholarship essay, Kati McCarron wrote, “The way I see it, how lucky am I that I get to sit with families that talk about how much they love someone? What other job gets to do that? I get to hear amazing adventures, lifetimes of joyful moments, characters, trips, hobbies I didn’t know existed. This is the human condition. It’s what connects us. This is why I do this.”

Stories like Katie’s are what inspire the Funeral Service Foundation’s work and drive its mission to support funeral service in building meaningful relationships with the families and communities it serves.

Education has served as a Foundation cornerstone since 1945, and late this spring, its Scholarship Committee, comprising educators and funeral service professionals, awarded a total of \$24,000 in academic scholarships to McCarron and eight other candidates whose essays and video submissions best highlighted their passion, drive and promise.

“Our most recent slate of scholarship winners notably listed compassion as a trait that will help them build a successful career as a funeral director,” said Stephanie Kann, Scholarship Committee chair and Foundation chair-elect. “We are honored to help these candidates offset the costs associated with earning a degree and look forward to keeping in touch with them as they grow in their careers.”

“My education is a crucial tool in becoming the great funeral director I plan to be,” said McCarron. “As for my future career goals, I look forward to using my position to become a role model in my community and contribute positively to the public health and well-being of those I serve.”

Spring 2018 Academic Scholarship winners include:

## DENNIS SCHOEPP MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

*Brooke Hassig*, Warren, Michigan (Wayne State University)

## FOUNDATION '45 ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

*Bethany Popieski*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science); *Kelsey Yantz*, Bellevue, Ohio (Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science); and *Rebecca Steckley*, Milverton, Ontario, Canada (Humber College)

## JOSEPH E. HAGAN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

*Grace Mabiala*, Bellevue, Kentucky (Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science)



## MEMORIAL CLASSIC SCHOLARSHIPS

*Levi Elliott*, Plymouth, Indiana (Worsham College of Mortuary Science); and *Chanda Jeffers*, Owings Mills, Maryland (Community College of Baltimore County)

## SHIPLEY ROSE BUCKNER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

*Vanessa Leon-Verde*, Vermilion, Ohio (Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science)

## STEVE LANG SCHOLARSHIP

*Kati McCarron*, Georgetown, Massachusetts (FINE Mortuary College)

The Foundation will award an additional nine scholarships this fall, ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 each. They include Foundation '45, Steve Lang and Memorial Classic Scholarships and Shipley Rose Buckner, Joseph E. Hagan and Dennis Schoepp Memorial Scholarships. The Foundation also promotes the Brenda Renee Horn and Steve Mack Memorial Scholarships in partnership with the SCI National Scholarship Program.

Students enrolled in ABFSE-accredited institutions or accredited Canadian schools can apply online September 1–November 30. Comprehensive submission instructions, award amounts, eligibility requirements and scholarship terms and guidelines are available at [FuneralServiceFoundation.org](http://FuneralServiceFoundation.org).

*Kelly Manion is Funeral Service Foundation director of communication.*

*From the Editor's Desk...*

## Framing a Picture



One thing you probably learned well before you enrolled in a mortuary science program is that statistics hold varying degrees of interest. For example, the day before I wrote this editorial, I watched Major League Baseball's home run derby. For such a basic event, there were certainly enough analytics and data to, well, warrant turning down the volume. For example, the broadcasters seemed fixated with a batter's exit velocity – the speed in which the batted ball travels when hit. Now, I like a good statistic as much as the next person, but there seemed to be no point to it since the winners of each round had different exit velocities and the conversation didn't seem to lead anywhere.

In statistics more relevant to this profession, each year, the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) issues its statistical report offering a detailed look at enrollment and graduation numbers for the 59 accredited mortuary science programs. As for trends, there doesn't seem to be much dramatic shifting going on, save for the 2,411 new enrollments in 2017, the lowest number since 2008.

Of note, total current-year enrollment (new, pre-graduate and graduate) in the 59 programs in 2017 was 5,394, 10.56% lower than the 2016 total of 6,031 and 7.6% below the 2015 total enrollment of 5,837.

What does this mean for you? While we keep an eye on the number of mortuary science graduates, we must still be mindful that a number of states are seeing shortages in funeral director applicants. And let's not lose sight of that nebulous baby boomer spike predicted to occur anytime between 10 years ago and 2025 (really, it looks like it's going to be less of a spike and more of a gradual increase). About 10 or 15 years ago, prognosticators were suggesting that the baby boomer-fueled spike in the number of deaths would be hitting about now. Even though that projection turned out to be at least a half-decade premature, it still forced the profession to think about the developing labor pool.

The challenge for mortuary science programs has been and remains producing quality students/graduates who stay in the profession.

It's not an overstatement to say that staffing decisions at a funeral home are the most important decisions a manager has to make. And if these statistics are indeed framing a picture, that importance will only increase.

*Ed.* Edward J. Defort  
Editor

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