THE LFDA NEWSLETTER

Official Newsletter of the Louisiana Funeral Directors Association

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LFDA Mission Statement
To promote integrity in the funeral service industry through education, legislation, networking and communications.
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Gary F. Tranchina, LFDA President

Good Day LFDA!

Hoping this message finds our membership well. We’re gaining traction and moving forward. Your executive board and management team has completed the LFDA Orientation and Strategic Planning Retreat. Past LFDA President Roy Geesey and his associate Stephen Nickel reassured your board that LFDA is in a strong position on many facets, especially in our financial growth. LFDA Executive Director David Tatman expressed to our board how important you all are to LFDA on all levels.

It is obvious due to our current situation and location that unforeseen events can and almost certainly will occur in Louisiana. I believe it is time to offer relevant continuing education programs for the Fall Meeting & Seminar. Soon we will put the peak of hurricane season and the extreme heat behind us; however, with the tropics picking up steam for one last push for the coastlines, it is time to be prepared. Louisiana has been spared this season from the devastating winds of Hurricane Dorian, yet suffered disruption from Tropical Storm Barry. Does your district have a plan of action?

The LFDA Education Committee will present the Executive Director of Emergency Preparedness & Response at Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Rosanne Prats Sc.D., and Jimmy Guidry M.D. State Health Officer of Louisiana and LDH’s Medical Director in Lafayette to expand on these untimely events. These are important topics we will discuss regarding LFDA and our relationship with the State of Louisiana. We are pleased to also welcome Doug Gober to provide pertinent information on the topic of cremation that can enhance our ability in serving families choosing cremation as the option of final disposition. Doug always has a dynamic touch to enlighten your options as a funeral director and provider.

I’m pleased to introduce Leigh Anne Nugent from the Tatman Group to the team as their new Communications Specialist. Leigh Anne will be assisting R.T Delhomme (LFDA Comminutions Chair), in updating LFDA’s website and how we communicate within our association.

I would like your feedback on a potential LFDA Mobile Application and request that each district consider a Communications Chair to report what is unique about their district. This presentation could be used to highlight different areas of the state for the upcoming NFDA International Expo and Convention to be held in New Orleans in October 2020.

Most important as LFDA members is your fellowship with your colleagues and fellow members as you participate in district events, state events, and national events. Place an LFDA logo and link on your websites. Advertisements promote the positive goals we will achieve together as professionals making our association recognized in communities statewide, while expanding relationships with other associations related to professionals. Creative thinking from our districts are paramount to success in the growth of our membership and our response to the everchanging challenges we may face ahead legislatively.

Let’s Keep in Touch LFDA!

Respectfully Your President,

Gary F. Tranchina
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

LFDA Members,

The funeral profession made it through the 2019 legislative fiscal session without any major bills or updates to legislation. As always, your Laws and Legislative Committee worked hard at the Capitol to ensure a smooth and easy session. Next year’s session will be a general session, so we will remain vigilant about any bills passing through the system that could negatively impact you.

Elections season is finally upon us, and some big changes are ahead. All statewide elected officials and most local positions are up for election. This means that all 144 legislators are up for election or re-election this year, along with Governor, Commissioner of Insurance, and others.

Upon the close of qualifying in early August, 49 legislators were elected simply because they had no opponent. Since then, 3 more seats have been decided due to disqualifications or withdrawals. That means that 52 of the 144 legislators already know they’re returning in the spring.

The general election will take place on October 12th, and at least 40 of the remaining 92 races will be decided on that day. However, there will be a number of run-offs on November 16th. One potential run-off is the governor’s race. Right now, there are three main candidates: our current governor, John Bel Edwards; Eddie Rispone, a Republican businessman from Baton Rouge; and Ralph Abraham, a Republican Congressman from North Louisiana.

With these elections, the legislative class of 2020 will look very different! It will be the largest incoming class in Louisiana history. Most of the dynamics of this class will be dictated by who wins the Governor’s race. If John Bel remains in office, you’ll see another independent House. If a Republican wins, you’ll see more unity among the Governor, the House, and the Senate.

The races for Speaker of the House and President of the Senate, both of whom are elected by their peers, are also getting more crowded each day. There are many unknowns right now, but we do know that the incoming class will be busy next year. Now is the time to make those connections with your potential legislators!

I encourage each of you to get out and vote on October 12th! You can visit geauxvote.com or use the Geaux Vote app to learn more about the races in your area, find a sample ballot, and search for your polling location. It’s a great tool to have.

See you at the polls!

David Tatman
**NORTH DISTRICT**

Monday, June 24th the North District presented a donation of $300 to the Veteran’s Home in Bossier City. Funds will be used to purchase personal items for veterans who have no family.

The Louisiana Funeral Directors Association honored the North District governor, Troy Denard with the 2019 Outstanding District Award. Troy worked hard during his term as governor raising money for various charities.

Golden Funeral Home in Bastrop will be hosting the North District’s fall meeting in September. This meeting will provide 2 CEU’s. Details will be available at a later date.

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**SOUTH DISTRICT**

The South District Meeting had David Adams from Johnson Consulting conduct 2 CEU hours on the topic of Serving and Converting Cremation Families. This was a most informative seminar giving antidotes and solutions to give funeral professionals the confidence to engage and educate our consumers on the value of a Body Present and Memorial Gatherings.

The South District has its Bowling Event Scheduled in October 23rd at Rock and Bowl. Call Muhlisen Funeral Home For Details.

Our Fishing for a cure rodeo will be held Oct 18 and 19th at the Myrtle Grove Marina in Plaquemine Parish. Call Boyd Mothe Jr. For Details.

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Need some help building your preneed program?

Let SNL show you a better way. Security National Life has years of experience building preneed programs that work. We’ve got the tools you need to make your business succeed. www.PreenedSuccess.com
SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

The Southwest District is excited about kicking off 2019-2020 with the new theme of “Working Together for Excellence!” This new focus will allow each funeral home in our district to have a monthly opportunity to honor a variety of local organizations affiliated with funeral services. The Fall-Winter quarter is off to a great start and is focused on First Responders, Military, Lion’s Club eyeglass donations, Maddie’s Footprints, Toys for Tots and Faith House. With tons of support, numerous 1st Responders were recently honored throughout our district. Over 800 meals were served to honor those who protect and serve our communities and assist us during funeral services. A very special thank you for those who participated as well as those who sponsored the last district meeting and local area function. The 2nd quarterly meeting is on Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2019, at the Evangeline Downs Racetrack and Casino. Our recent meeting at Oakbourne Country Club was a super success! Our goal for the new year is for the Certificate of Excellence to be standard practice across our district and for continuing education to be made available at all meetings. Please join us in making funeral home services a productive field in Louisiana!

Anita Ardoin, Governor, SWLFDA
Fountain Memorial Funeral Home
Lafayette, LA
Abilene, TX - Funeral Directors Life Insurance Company is proud to announce the establishment of a new subsidiary domiciled in Louisiana to serve the funeral professionals of Louisiana.

“As we have spoken to funeral directors and owners across Louisiana, it was evident that there was a huge need for a locally domiciled company to be established in the state,” said Kris Seale, President and CEO of Funeral Directors Life. “Many funeral professionals hold a limited Class D license or a temporary license to sell preneed, and because of that, they are limited by law to working with only locally domiciled preneed providers. That is why we are proud to offer a better choice: Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana!” With a locally domiciled subsidiary, clients of Funeral Directors Life will be able to continue to use their limited licenses to sell preneed insurance through Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana.

“We felt very strongly that funeral professionals in the state of Louisiana deserved to have a choice about the company they worked with,” said Mark Owen, Regional Sales Vice President with Funeral Directors Life. “We are proud to be able to offer funeral professionals the same great service and financial stability that they are used to with Funeral Directors Life.”

Funeral Directors Life, rated A- “Excellent” by A.M. Best, is a full-service preneed company that offers a wide range of value-added services to help funeral directors grow and succeed in a rapidly changing marketplace.

To learn more about Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana, visit http://la.funeraldirectorslife.com. Funeral Directors Life, based in Abilene, TX, is a leading provider of insurance-funded preneed funeral products and services. To learn more, visit us online at www.funeraldirectorslife.com.

https://www.funeraldirectorslife.com/introducing-funeral-directors-life-of-louisiana/

Save the Date
Kramer Embalming Seminar

Thursday, March 19, 2020
4 Hours Continuing Education

Guest Speaker: Tom Buist, MBIE

For seminar information, please call 318-445-6311

Alexandria, Louisiana
As a funeral professional, you are probably feeling the pressure of rising cremation rates, changing consumers, and low budget competitors that offer direct disposition with no added value.

In my work every day, I talk with funeral directors who are feeling discouraged and even thinking about getting out of the business. Funeral directors are unhappy. Families are unhappy. In the consumer’s mind, the funeral home is a commodity differentiated only by price; in the funeral director’s mind, the funeral home is a valuable asset to the community. Sometimes it seems like we are speaking a different language than our customers and coming from totally different points of view about what is important in a funeral service. In fact, a recent study commissioned by 18 of the largest funeral organizations in our nation found that 63% were dissatisfied with the way funeral homes were communicating with them. 48% of Americans were dissatisfied with funeral service as a whole. This means that the communication challenges are real! It’s no wonder that so many funeral professionals are feeling stressed out, overworked, and underappreciated.

We understand. As a preneed provider that is “in the trenches” with our clients, we have seen these trends coming years before they were evident in the at-need conference room. That is why we have been working tirelessly for years to help our clients get ready to serve what we are calling “the new funeral consumer.” Luckily, our clients are seeing great success in connecting with the new funeral consumer, and I’d like to share three strategies that will help you as you try to connect with today’s families in a more meaningful way.

1. Make it as easy as possible to communicate with you.
Today’s families are used to instant responses and connectivity. They want to be able to connect with you quickly and easily, and face-to-face meetings don’t always work for them. Sometimes they want to communicate through email, text, and even social media. Rather than doing things the way they’ve always been done, we need to go above and beyond to communicate with families the way they prefer. Today, we have many software and technology options available to us to enhance our external communication with families and internal communication with our staff. And a big bonus: better technology and automation of certain tasks means that we can free up our time to spend more of it helping families create a healing and meaningful funeral service. **Bottom line: Invest in technology that helps you communicate with families the way they prefer.**

2. Educate families about why funerals are important.
Most families don’t know or understand WHY a funeral is so important, so they naturally turn to price as the main decision-maker in their planning process. However, when they understand the value of a meaningful funeral experience, the conversation changes from price to options for creating a healing tribute for a life lived. This can be accomplished through social media messages, video, web content, brochures, staff training sessions, and so much more. Educate your community about the value of a healing funeral long before they come into the arrangement conference. To get started, you can go to www.funeralbasics.org – this is a free resource available to anyone! You can always find great articles on this website to share with the families you serve. **Bottom line: Make sure that everything you do to educate families reaffirms the value of a healing and meaningful funeral.**

3. Give yourself more time to serve families like no one else.
Most funeral homes don’t consider how much time they are spending on “low return on investment” or low ROI activities like back-end processes, forms, insurance claim paperwork, and duplicate data entry, and reporting. These are time killers that are much better suited to an automated technology solution or an outsourced provider. Think of it this way: no one else can sit down with your families and offer them creative ideas, suggestions, and guidance. But you can. There is no substitute for your role as a guide to the families you serve. So, look for technology partners and vendors who can take the pressure off you so that you can save time on back-end processes and invest more of your time in the families you serve. You will reap the rewards with happier employees, more satisfied families, and more quality time with your own family at home! **Bottom line: Bring your best self to the arrangement conference and outsource or automate everything that is keeping you from being present with the families you serve.**

We are so proud to have recently made a change in how we were serving our clients in Louisiana by establishing a new subsidiary: Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana. This locally domiciled company now allows our clients with limited Class D licenses to continue working with us to enhance their service to families, connect with more families through digital marketing, and ultimately grow their businesses.

The point is, change is inevitable. As market conditions shift, we have to adapt to the “new normal” and come up with new solutions to solve problems for the clients we serve. The same is true for funeral businesses and the families they serve. The idea of change may feel overwhelming. You may feel unequipped to deal with changes that you know are coming. But that is why it is so important to work with a competent, innovative partner who is looking ahead and has solutions ready to go. We know it’s not easy, but there are partners who are here to guide you through the changes that lie ahead. I encourage you to stay focused on the three areas mentioned above, and you will begin to see a change in your employees, your families, and your own life. If you’d like to consult with one of our team members about how to connect with the next generation of funeral consumer, please don’t hesitate to request a free consultation at http://la.funeraldirectorslife.com.
HOW SEM HELPS INCREASE AT-NEED CALLS ASAP

FUNERAL BUSINESS SUCCESS - WELTON HONG

You know what SEO is. For the last 20 years or so, no business owner—even a funeral home owner—has been able to escape that term. You've heard what everyone says: To be successful, you need great SEO. Make sure you're always improving your SEO. Not enough calls? You must need better SEO. On the other hand, if you've been paying attention to marketing gurus over the past several years, you've likely heard that SEO isn't very important anymore. Some so-called experts have even decreed that "SEO is dead."

That's ridiculous. Here's the truth: Search engine optimization remains incredibly important. Every successful, high-converting funeral home website has solid SEO. Most people still prefer to click on organic (free) search results, and the best way to rank highly in those results is to have great SEO. However...Before you start thinking that "SEM" in the headline was a typo, it's not. This column isn't about SEO. It's about SEM. These tools are related, but they're also very different. And if you want to generate many more at-need calls, you really must incorporate both into your marketing plan.

While SEO is focused on helping your funeral home obtain the pole position in the organic listings of search engine results pages (aka SERPs), SEM—which stands for search engine marketing—buys you excellent real estate on those pages through paid advertisements.

Or, to make it simpler:
Great SEO = you rank among the top free listings on SERPs.
Great SEM = you appear (as an ad) at the top of SERPs.

In other words, SEM lets you attract more at-need clientele (and preneed clientele, for that matter) by putting your funeral home front and center on SERPs regardless of whether your SEO is any good or not. Granted, it's better if you do have good SEO, because you attract a lot more business if you have both an ad for your business and the free organic listing for that business at or near the top of the SERP.

However, SEO can take a while to kick in. If you've never worked on improving your funeral home website's SEO before, it could be six, nine, or even 12 months until you move up substantially in the local rankings. (How quickly you rise typically depends on how many local competitors you have—and how good their SEO work has been.)

SEM, on the other hand, goes to work virtually immediately. If your funeral home really needs to increase calls right away, you can have pay-per-click ads at the top of Google SERPs in just a couple of days. In most areas, you really can see a major difference in less than a week. The key is to keep strengthening your SEO while your SEM is generating traffic. Once your SEO has improved to the point that you're dominating all (or at least most) of your competitors in local searches, you can choose to ease up on the SEM, saving you money. Or you can keep using both to really become the "go-to" deathcare service provider in your area. SEM tools such as Google Ads (formerly Google AdWords) can include text-based or image-based ads (or product listings) that appear somewhere on a search results page. Note that search engines still have relevancy and quality requirements for SEM. You aren't guaranteed a particular placement. You bid for it. The amount you're willing to pay per click, along with the quality and relevancy of your ad and on-site content, determine where your ad appears on the page. SEM gets you in front of families who are searching for your services even when organic SEO doesn't. And one of SEM's greatest benefits is the ability to target search ads to your audience or segments of your audience. To do that properly, you must understand who your audience is.

As you know, older adults commonly preplan to remove this burden from their families. Younger adults might be helping their parents preplan. Families in general might be searching because they have an immediate need. Also, remember that your ad isn't the final sales tool. Its purpose is to show up at the right time for the user and persuade them to click on your link. A comprehensive approach to SEM ensures that you have high-quality pages on your funeral home website and other on-site content. There's no benefit to traffic—even lots of it—if your website fails to convert visitors into clientele.

Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing® (funeralhomeprofits.com) and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes, 2019 Edition.
CONTINUING EDUCATION AUDITS

Have you been getting confusing emails from CE broker about disallowed hours? We’re here to explain! The Louisiana State Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors recently performed their annual audit, as required by Louisiana Statute.

Per the law, “A maximum of eight hours of continuing education may be carried over and applied to the required hours for subsequent licensing periods, up to four hours each period for a maximum of two periods.” Since only eight hours can be carried over, any hours above that will be deducted “for compliance” and the remaining eight will be carried over.

It’s also important to note that “credit shall not be given for the same course more than once during any two consecutive licensing periods.” When these are discovered in the audit, they will also be deducted “for compliance,” which CE Broker has been calling “disallowance.”

If you have any further questions about your Continuing Education hours, you can contact Kim Michel with the LSBEFD at 504-838-5109.
DON'T BE BASHFUL WHEN ASKING FOR REVIEWS

FUNERAL BUSINESS SUCCESS - WELTON HONG

I want to tell you about one marketing initiative that independent funeral home owners really need to do if they want to ramp up both their at-need calls and their preneed business. It's also the one thing many owners (and funeral directors in general) don't especially want to do—which probably isn't a coincidence. If more of them felt comfortable doing it, it wouldn't be such a challenge. Which is too bad, because once they get the hang of it, it's really not hard at all.

So, I hope you're asking, what do you need to do? You need to get used to asking the families you serve for reviews. I know. For some of you, I might as well be encouraging you to spend a day at the Department of Motor Vehicles. I work with a lot of funeral home owners, and this is the one area where I find a lot of resistance. It's not like I don't understand: Funeral professionals never want to be viewed as being callous in any way. They don't want to look like they're as concerned with their own businesses as they are with the families they serve.

Regardless, in this digital age, the online reputation of local businesses has overtaken offline reputation—and by that, I mean community word of mouth—in importance. I recently searched for Google reviews of funeral homes in 10 American cities with metro area populations over 200,000. You would expect the larger funeral homes in these well-known cities to have close to 100 reviews by now. But that's not the case. In one, the most-reviewed firm had 26 reviews. The runner-up had only 13. No other funeral home in this relatively large metro area had Google reviews in the double digits. The same was true in many other similarly sized regions. There was the occasional outlier: One area had a funeral home with 44 reviews—a fraction of what it should have, but comparatively spectacular in the industry.

This is understandable to a certain degree. Many funeral homes still don't prioritize aggressive marketing in general. They're less inclined to promote themselves online. And many funeral directors remain uncomfortable with pursuing online reviews from families after providing services. Granted, people in general are less inclined to take it upon themselves to review a funeral home that helped their family than they would be to review a hotel or restaurant. It's just not something that quickly comes to mind. But that also goes to the very point I'm making: If you ran a hotel or restaurant, you wouldn't have to be aggressive about soliciting reviews. You would get them whether you want them or not.

At a funeral home, you must take the initiative. If you don't set goals for positive review generation and stick to them, you'll never hit the quality and quantity "tipping points" that will make your firm dominate local competitors in search results.

Even worse, if you're sitting back and being entirely passive about online reviews, about 80 percent of time you'll either be receiving no reviews or negative ones. Families don't necessarily think to submit a review of a funeral home, especially when the passing of their loved one is still fresh in their minds. You could provide the most amazing service in the history of the profession, but it won't necessarily occur to the family to review you. That's why you must get comfortable with the notion of reaching out. Do so thoughtfully, of course; it's also obviously a good idea to only inquire among families who clearly felt that you did an excellent job. (If you're not entirely sure, you should wait for the next one. A severely negative review can do more harm than 10 or 15 positive ones.)

This is also a good place to note that Yelp, despite being one of the biggest names in consumer reviews, prohibits business owners from directly soliciting reviews. You could try, of course, but if you got caught, Yelp can hit you with some serious penalties. So I suggest you focus on Google reviews and Facebook reviews, which are really just as powerful as Yelp for deathcare online reputation anyway. If you give it a shot, I think you will be very pleased with the results.

Welton Hong is the founder of Ring Ring Marketing® (funeralhomeprofits.com) and the author of Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes, 2019 Edition.
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You shouldn’t have to settle for less than the best when it comes to your preneed provider. Now, you can use your limited Class D license to sell preneed with Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana and still benefit from the same great service and financial stability you enjoy with Funeral Directors Life. And, best of all, you have access to all of our value-added services that will help you grow your business... the right way. Enjoy quality and convenience with Funeral Directors Life of Louisiana!