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Join Us March 6th, 2019! Our 26th annual spring conference focuses on "How to Thrive Where Death and Innovation Meet". This conference is designed to provide practical and timely education and information for members of the death care profession. Click here for the Agenda.

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February 26, 2019

RE: Legislative Update on SB5001

Dear WCCFA & WSFDA members,

We received notification on February 20, 2019 that the bill had passed the House Policy Committee with our language adopted!

Though our memberships may not all agree with this bill, as professional Funeral, Cemetery and Cremation associations we knew that by OPPOSING it we would be fighting a losing battle based on the strength of both house and senate support as well as consumer reactions. As professional associations, it is our responsibility to ensure the consumer and our industry is protected. This is why we chose to actively participate in how the bill was written.

Realistically, the percentage of consumers that will utilize these options may be relatively small. That is why we found it SO critical to make sure our industry as a whole wouldn’t have to make substantial changes to our current processes and procedures.

On behalf of both associations, we would like to thank Scott Sheehan for doing such a great job representing both associations! Scott traveled several times to Olympia to testify on our behalf. He worked close with all parties involved to ensure our voices were heard. Scott spent countless hours working on the language within the bill to make sure it was a win-win for both the consumer and our industry. Without Scott’s dedication to this piece of legislature, we likely would not have reached the outcome we did on February 20, 2019!

Holley Sowards, WCCFA President

Lisa Devereau, WSFDA President
The Curse of 'Just-a'

by Glenda Stansbury, CC, CFSP

The Curse of 'Just-a'


CELEBRANTS

As cremation has increased, so have “just-a” services.

Just a cremation. Just a memorial service. Just a graveside service. Just a family gathering. In other words, not something the funeral director should spend time on.

This kind of thinking is a serious mistake that is seriously hurting both grieving families and your bottom line.

The curse of ‘just-a’

Doing these services right will serve your families and bring repeat business

One of the classes I teach in the University of Central Oklahoma funeral service program is “The History of Funeral Directing.” Ugh. History? How boring. Now, of course, when you look at history through the lens of caring for the dead, there are some high points: Egyptians. The U.S. Civil War. OK, that’s about it.

So, my challenge in teaching this online class is to find ways to make the dry facts a little more interesting and engaging. After all, these students don’t get the benefit of my sparkling personality or quick-witted repartee. (Of course, if you ask the students who are in my live classes, I’m not sure they’d admit to being dazzled by said personality and repartee.)

At any rate, when I was given this teaching assignment, I decided that I would try to bring in some other elements to enhance and expand the concept of “history.” Therefore, each semester the students are given videos to watch and a book to read explaining death rituals of diverse cultures and in other countries.

There are the typical presentations on subjects such as Egyptian burial, Victorian grave robbers and Civil War embalming. But I want to stretch them a bit. I make sure they see the sky burials in Tibet where monks are laid out on a mountaintop for vultures to devour (it’s on YouTube — go watch it); the Philippine practices of living with their departed loved ones in the home for years; Natitas in Bolivia where the families keep the skulls of their family members; grave rentals in Spain; Day of the Dead practices in Mexico and Central and South America; the Asian practice of using chopsticks to pick up the bones of the loved one after cremation. You get the idea.

The students post their thoughts in the discussion boxes and it is fascinating to read their reactions. Most of them can be summed up in two words: “How weird.” Some of them get pretty high and mighty and judgmental. “Ewwwww—who could do THAT?”

My hope is that they can learn to come out of their little bubble, expand their awareness and realize that death practices common in North America are not the only way to honor the dearly departed. That there is a big, wide, wonderful world out there, and the tapestry of the living and dead can be woven together in a myriad of ways, all of which fit that particular group of people at that particular time in their history. Your box of experience does not necessarily contain the only right way to do things. In fact, I can assure you that it does not.

But, honestly, if you step back and look at how things are here in your neck of the woods, people in other countries, from other cultures, might look at what we are doing and say, “How weird. Who could do THAT?”

A change of focus

Because the evolution of funeral practices in the past 30 years has become less and less about focusing on the reality of death and the grief journey and the importance of gathering and more and more about...
CELEBRANTS

Touch their hearts, and they will come back.
When we show them how powerful ceremony and a custom-designed experience can be, they will come back. They will come back.

Day of the Dead observances (above left, Los Parques, Guatemala City, and above right, a cemetery in Santiago, outside Guatemala City, Guatemala) are now common in some places in North America, but other death rituals and customs from countries around the world seem truly foreign to people in the United States—and vice versa.

convenience or cost, we are in the middle of some interesting patterns. We have abdicated our responsibility to the public we serve to be guides and guardians and have just shrugged our way to allowing less service to become the norm.

When cremation became a defining factor in funeral decisions, we gave up (“It’s just a cremation,” “It’s just a graveside,” “It’s just a memorial,” “It’s just a family gathering”) rather than working even harder to be sure that each of those opportunities was packed with meaning and healing. I call it the curse of just-a.

I got to watch this in person. When I was given the incredible honor and opportunity to speak to the staff of Grupos Primaveras in Guarulhos, Brazil, last year, some of the reactions were pretty close to those of my students. In Brazil, the emphasis is on speed. Most visitations and burials or cremations happen within 24 hours of the death.

Within mere hours, the family arrives for the visitation and the body is embalmed, casketed and present for the four to six hours of the family gathering. Then, they either process to the gravesite or to the cremation ceremony space. They do not know the term “immediate disposition” or “memorial service.” Every body is embalmed. Every body is in a casket. Every body is present for the entire experience.

Part of my role was to offer ideas for ceremony to enhance or slow down that gathering experience, to get people to focus more on the grief journey rather than just getting it over with today and expecting to feel better tomorrow.

Part of my role was to serve up a cautionary tale: Do not do what North America is doing. Do not lessen the importance of viewing, of remembering, of being present.

I told the group that I had performed a celebrant service the weekend of Mother’s Day for a woman who had died before Christmas because the family had decided that’s when they could all get together. A young woman gasped and asked, “Where was the body that whole time?” I jokingly said, “in her daughter’s closet,” which was not really a joke. The urn had been in her daughter’s closet.

The Brazilian staff just shook their heads in amazement. You could hear them thinking “How weird!” in Portuguese. Why would you wait that long? Why would you not have a viewing and a ceremony with the body present? These strange Americans and their messed up funeral practices. When did convenience become more important than honoring and grieving?

Indeed, why would you wait that long? When I met with that family for the service, I said, “I bet the idea of waiting until May to do this sounded a lot better when you decided to do it than it was in reality. That’s a long time to hold your breath until saying goodbye and starting your grieving journey.”

All three of this woman’s children agreed completely.

Learn to create ceremonies

There is something within us that needs that moment marked in time. that carving out of a sacred space of goodbye, before we can exhale and begin to lean in to what this new reality is going to look like.

For those who opt to have nothing—no funeral, no service—that starting point never happens and, too often, their grief is held in limbo. We, as funeral professionals, should be explaining that to each and every family.

I’ve long been an advocate for creating ceremony at every step of the way with families, especially with cremation families who are often unwilling or unfamiliar or untrusting of the options we have to offer.

• Ceremony for the arrangement conference. Begin the arrangement conference by lighting a candle and explaining that the time together will be focused on a life lived and the special ways we can create a tribute that honors and commemorates every part of this unique individual.

• Ceremony for the ID viewing. Clean and dress the deceased and bring the family in for a time of final goodbye rather than leaving their loved one on a cold dressing
CELEBRANTS

Above, some funeral homes, use beds and home-like settings for viewings. (McDougald Funeral Home and Crematorium, Laurinburg, North Carolina)
Left, an urn ark is a must-have to bring more ceremony into cremation services. (Sonorales/Los Parques, Guatemala City, Guatemala)

table with a sheet thrown over the body.

- **Ceremony for processing and recessing the urn into the chapel/church/gathering space.** If you don’t have an urn ark, get one. If you have one and never use it, why not?

- **Ceremony for the family receiving the urn after the cremation.** As anyone who has heard me speak can confirm, this is one of my soap-box issues that I preach about loudly and at length. Quit treating the urn like a piece of furniture. Anything that you would do with a casket, do with an urn—especially the final moments of receiving.

   Why, oh why, do we think it is acceptable for a family to walk in, sign some papers and be handed an urn like it’s just a plastic box or a vase we bought from the hobby store? This is someone’s mother!

   I honestly believe that we can change so much about funeral service if we just stop and reexamine all of these touch-points and stop treating cremation customers like second-class citizens.

   I have an example. At one of the staff trainings this year, I did my usual plea, which is more like a stomping on the floor, that we change the paradigm for receiving the urn. I gave them sample words they could use for a short ceremony.

   The next day, one of the people in the training went home and did it! Amazing. Here was the email I received about it:
   
   "We just had our first hand-off ceremony this morning for DL. The daughter was a bit confused when we discussed this over the phone, and she did not want anything done. We did it anyway, though. She came in and we brought her to the chapel where everything was set up for her.

   It was very touching; she was definitely impacted by the presentation and space dedicated to receive her loved one. What a different reaction than what we have had in the past, and what a great practice to continue using!"

   Did you get the most important part of that message? “We did it anyway.” Either we believe in our profession and the wisdom and guidance we provide, or it all becomes just-a.

   Too many of us feel that if the service doesn’t fit our template of traditional offerings, it’s not important. It’s “just a.”

   But if we don’t understand that regardless of what the family chooses to do, this is still the only time in their lives they must stop and face the reality of that particular death and begin their grief journey, we are doing a great disservice to our families and to our businesses.

   Why do we think that any gathering calls for less than our best efforts and our best offerings?

   If the family wishes to gather for a private family service, we should be offering an officiant who can help lead that time for them to tell stories, provide music, candles—whatever it takes to create a special moment.

   Leaving families on their own to navigate these unknown waters does not create a safe space for their own grieving and they usually leave feeling hollow, untouched and ignored.

   I’ve done countless graveside services where that was the only gathering that was going to happen. As a celebrant, I meet with the family, create a life story, and treat it just like a funeral for 400 in a chapel. This is it. This is the only shot we have. We should be providing our very best. It is not just-a graveside.

   ‘Just-a’ can lead to more

   Doing things this way also can pay dividends. I did a sweet graveside service for a 94-year-old lady 10 years ago. We told her story. She had been married several times and, before Alzheimer’s took her memories, had a very interesting life.

   We left rocks next to her urn, because she was being buried in a Jewish cemetery next to her first husband. The whole thing took 10 minutes, but it captured what the family was looking for.

   Five years later, a woman called me and said, “You did the service for my husband’s grandmother. You told her life story. You gave us rocks.” Five years later she remembered everything about that simple graveside service."
CELEBRANTS

Why, oh why, do we think it is acceptable for a family to walk in, sign some papers and be handed an urn like it’s just a plastic box or a vase we bought from the hobby store? This is someone’s mother!

Her husband had just been killed by a tree falling on him. “You must do his service. You must give away rocks like you did for his grandmother.”

The chapel service drew more than 300 people—a standing-room-only crowd. Since that time, we have done six more services for her; every time anyone in her extended family dies, she calls us.

Touch their hearts, and they will come back.

Another time, I conducted a service for a lady who had been ill for many years. She and her husband had been married only a short time, and he really didn’t have much to offer in the way of stories. She and a son from a previous marriage had been semi-estranged. She had no other family or friends; 12 people attended the service. But we told her story, lit candles, played music, displayed pictures. This is it. This is the only shot we have.

The next day a young man died of an overdose in that community. His best friend’s mother happened to be one of the 12 people in attendance at that small service the previous day. She immediately told this family, “I know where you need to go, and I know who needs to do the service.” It was another standing-room-only service, with 400 people attending, followed by burial.

When we show them how powerful a ceremony and a custom-designed experience can be, they will come back. They will come back.

In my world there is no such thing as a just-a. Each and every time we have an opportunity to do something that is healing and life-changing, we should be doing it.

Celebrants are uniquely trained to be ceremony specialists, so if you do not currently have one on staff or available to you in the community, that should be a priority for this year. There are plenty of trainings offered around the country to choose from.

But it doesn’t have to be just about celebrants. There should be weekly conversations and training for all of your staff around the idea of creating ceremony and being laser-focused on opportunities to gather and heal people.

And then, maybe, people in other countries won’t look at what we do when death occurs and think, “How weird.”
Sponsorship Opportunities

WCCFA 2019 Sponsorship Opportunities Now Available!
Are you looking for a great advertising opportunity? Click here to become a sponsor of the Washington Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (WCCFA). The WCCFA is a non-profit professional association dedicated to educating members of the death care profession in sound, compassionate and ethical service to our communities.

Your support of our association would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the association office at toll free 1-877-460-5880 or by email: WCCFA@AMInc.org. You are also welcome to speak to any WCCFA Board Members about sponsorship.

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**Caring:** We demonstrate our concern for people by working diligently and in a timely manner to ensure no detail is overlooked.

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**Commitment:** We take our responsibilities seriously, seeing every project through to the end standing behind our work.

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Quiring Monuments, Inc.  Seattle Washington
Meet Our Board Members

Kimberly Lofgren

Kimberly Lofgren grew up in a small town in Washington State and never imagined herself working in the death care profession. However, in 2007 she took a leap in faith on a position at a funeral home/cemetery combo in the big city of Renton, Washington, uprooting herself from the comfort of a small town. She was there until 2013 when she decided she wanted to try something different in her career and took on an accounting position at a school district. She loved the change at first, but after a while realized that something was missing and that she missed working around the people she had gained relationships with in the death care profession. But most of all, she missed helping families.

After 8 months at the school district, Kimberly was tricked into meeting with Jon Reece at Quiring Monuments for a position that was open. Yes, she was tricked. Jon had reached out several times over the 8 months asking if she was happy with her current position and told her that if she wasn’t happy, she should contact him. He finally sent her a message asking if she knew anyone interested in a customer service position. When she asked more about it, trying to think of someone, he responded back, “if you’re serious, let’s schedule a time you can come up and we can talk.” She of course thought there was nothing to lose and made that happen. Before leaving the meeting with Jon, she knew she wanted to work for Quiring Monuments. Five years later and now the Wholesale Customer Service Manager, Kimberly has worked hard on building a great CSR TEAM, where customer service is the main priority. Being back in the death care profession is where Kimberly’s heart is because she loves being able to serve the industry partners by giving them sup-
port to serve their families.

When she’s not in the office or traveling to all the locations between Washington and Oregon, you can find Kimberly spending time with her two old dogs, Jaxson, who is 10.5 years old and Annabelle, who is 11.5, or with her family, especially her parents. If there’s one thing she’s learned while being in the profession, it’s to keep your family close to your heart because life is far too short, and you never know when your last day will be.

Kimberly knew she was on the right career path when a family thanked her for helping them through the toughest time in their lives, making it easier for them by being there and taking care of them every step of the way. She says, “Never in a million years would I have thought that someone who is having the most difficult time in their life would want to thank me for being there for them. In the end, we all die. We all are either buried in the earth or cremated to ashes and we all should learn to be kinder to one another because we all will end up gone one day.”
Serving Cremation Families

by Amy Cunningham, CC

Serving Cremation Families

“Witness cremations,” where the family watches their loved one’s casket enter the retort, are becoming more common. Providing the facilities to make them possible is just the first step. Funeral professionals also need to help families craft a ceremony that will make a witness cremation a meaningful experience.

A ceremony for witnessing the casket’s entry into the retort

“There is love in holding, and there is love in letting go.”
—Elizabeth Berg

To some Western eyes, the cremation ceremonies at Varanasi, on the gray shores of the Ganges River in India seem brutally stark. Families gather to wrap their dead in a linen shroud and adorn them with strings of marigold blossoms. The oldest sibling might light the pyre, and later, gently prod bones deeper into the embers.

But this jarring jolt of reality—stark as a witnessed cremation might initially seem—can actually launch healing in some people. To the astonishment of many professionals in the funeral and cremation business (who wish to spare families anything perceived as “traumatic”), more Americans are asking their local crematories if they can watch, or witness, the closed casket’s entry into the cremation chamber, or retort, where pressurized heat rising to 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit turns a human body to bone fragment in three hours.

An American crematory “witness” is a much softened version of what occurs in India. No one in the United States, save a crematory operator, is allowed to see the body of a deceased person burn. American crematories keep the casket closed, with the sights and sounds much more contained.

But still, a family can watch the casket being raised to the level of the retort and then guided in. There are sometimes accompanying noises of the crematory’s lift rising to the proper height, sounds of the casket going in and the small shrill sound of the door of the cremation chamber coming back down.

Why would anyone elect to see and hear all that, especially when grieving, you might ask? The reasons for requesting a witness cremation are poignant and interesting:

1. Families may not trust the funeral/crematory personnel to cremate the deceased in a timely manner or on schedule (due to a small number of well-publicized crematory scandals), and the family members may want to maintain the role of the deceased’s ultimate

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SERVING CREMATION FAMILIES

Witnessing a loved one’s casket enter the retort is an experience many people will find completely unfamiliar, so it becomes the funeral director or celebrant’s role to tenderly prepare and guide the family through the whole experience.

Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York, where funeral director Amy Cunningham has officiated at cremation ceremonies, has a beautiful retort area with room to observe caretaker or custodian.

If they witness grandma’s entry into the cremation chamber at 9:45 a.m. Thursday, they know she went in at 9:45 a.m. Thursday. There’s no mystery to it, no waiting for a funeral director’s call to say “She’s over there now.”

2. Families electing to witness may feel aligned with the notion that fire releases the soul from the body, and it may feel liberating to be in the proximity of the casket at its exact time of incineration.

3. Families may wish to simply accompany their loved one “the whole way” and stay as close as they can until they have to say goodbye.

Witnessing a loved one’s casket enter the retort may produce one of the most profound realizations you’ve had in your life. We must all physically separate.

It is also an experience many people will find completely unfamiliar, so it becomes the funeral director or celebrant’s role to tenderly prepare and guide any family though the whole experience, with detailed descriptions of what is about to come to pass and some poetry, scripture or words to impart the conviction that difficult experiences can become very meaningful ones.

Not every crematory allows witnessing, so those that do have a competitive advantage and should market it.

Families coming to witness the cremation may have just completed a crematory chapel committal service, or may have just come from a funeral home viewing with subsequent ceremonial casket closing.

While the crematory staff is getting things ready is a good time for the funeral director or celebrant to remind the family that not everyone in the group should feel obligated to participate in the witnessing, giving those who are now having doubts an opportunity to say to the others, “You know, I think I’ll just wait for you guys out here.”

At this moment, the funeral director or celebrant might say, “I have something to read that might be of comfort while we wait for the crematory staff to get ready for us back there and take (name of loved one’s) cremation casket to the proper area.”

Readings for a witnessed cremation service

The funeral director/celebrant should be prepared with readings for the occasion. Here are some things I suggest to families:

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

—2 Corinthians 5:1, King James version, published 1834 by C. Alexander & Co.

The poem “Epitaph,” by Merrit Malloy, which addresses love and loss (“love doesn’t die, people do”), can be read in whole or part. “Death is Not the End,” by human rights activist Peter Tatchell, is another great reading on everlasting life. (“Death is not the end, but the beginning of a metamorphosis …”)

Another possibility is the poem “To Those Whom I Love & Those Who Love Me,” by Mary Alice Ramish, which speaks of the need to let the beloved deceased person go and to temper grief with the knowledge that this parting is not forever.

“The one offered to you now proceed to his/her destiny, putting on new life, let him/her reunite with a new body …”

—Rig Veda, the traditional Hindu scripture for cremations, 1896 translation

Music

Tell families it is fine to bring music, drumming, singing and chanting into the space where the witness cremation is taking place. Bose speakers with an iPad mini work beautifully, as they are small yet resonant.

I’ve heard music of all sorts played for the witnessing itself, from The Beatles “All You Need is Love” to Mozart’s famous choral “Requiem.” People I’ve worked with have also made their own music. One time a female shaman drummed. Another time, Tibetan monks chanted.

Cremation and farewell

If you are offering witness cremations, I hope you have created a beautiful space where the family can see the retort, whether through a window in an adjacent room or in the crematory itself.

In the past, since families were not seeing them, crematories often had an industrial feel, but when crematory machines are upgraded, redesigning the space to make viewing possible should be considered.

In any case, when the cremation process
SERVING CREMATION FAMILIES

Regardless of the constraints of the room, this is sacred space. Every group creates their own kind of experience. Some families may stand in respectful silence. Some may pray, or cry or wave goodbye. Many just stand in total silence.

As the casket is lifted to the proper height, and the door of the retort is opened, prepare the family to hear a soft roar unless they are in a soundproofed room.

You may have prepared the family to push the button on the wall that lowers the crematory door to seal the retort and commence the cremation. Some families are interested in doing this, others aren’t.

This is something like holding the torch at the shores of the Ganges. There is no looking back, only forward. The relationship will continue; the body will come back in a different form.

Stand there for another fifteen seconds, then indicate to the group that there’s nothing more to do.

Slowly, gently, lovingly, usher everyone out. They may be shaken but amazed by their own resolve and courage. Some may be wiping their eyes and blowing their noses. Hugs will be exchanged.

You’ll hear “Oh my God, I’ve never seen anything like that. That was so shocking in some ways but also so amazing. It’s so strange, but I’m glad we did that.”

You might remind them, “You accompanied your loved one the whole way. You took it as far as you could, and you took exquisitely care. You did it all and saw it all.”

They may say, “Boy, we sure did.” They may feel devastated, separated, but also incredibly proud of themselves.

You might guide everyone to find cups of water at this point. Perhaps you have little cookies to offer the family (a really good idea).

If you’ve read one of the suggested poems, you might try another if the group seems to need something else. Give it a moment. No one should feel rushed, but it is truly time to think about a meal to be shared, a home to go back to, a new phase of grieving.

Remind the family that the box or urn of remains will be ready for pick up or delivery in two or three days, but that they can wait until they’re ready for it.

You can close with this little conversational, optimistic benediction:

“I will be in touch, and I am still here for you, but go in peace for now, everybody go in peace, and may the source of peace grant you each peace, and grant peace to all who mourn. Please take care, and goodbye, everyone.”

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Aug 14, 4:50 PM – Aug 16, 8:50 PM
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For more details and registration please visit: https://www.wsfda.org/event-info/deathcon2019

Employment Opportunities

Funeral Director/Embalmer

Einan’s at Sunset
Location: Richland, WA

To oversee all activities within the funeral service profession. The funeral service experience includes but is not limited to funeral directing, funeral arrangements, counseling, visitations, management of funeral service forms and agreements, embalming activities and crematory operations.

Job Description

Click here to read more and apply online today!
Front Desk Coordinator

Busy Funeral Home

**Location:** Richland, WA

Einan’s at Sunset Funeral Home is looking for an open-minded, compassionate person that values family, integrity, first impressions, and has the desire to build lasting relationships through outstanding customer service.

Our hard work coupled with our unique ability to create healing moments and passion to serve our community defines Einan’s as a leader in the industry. We continually enhance our processes and practices to ensure exceptional experiences for our families!

The ideal candidate is proficient in self direction and within a team environment. He/she consistently practices active listening techniques. Experience with mainstream computer programs and MIS systems a must.

To ensure that the candidate is in alignment with the mission, vision and values of Einan’s at Sunset, he/she understands the value in celebrating life, and exemplifies strong verbal and written communication skills. The ideal candidate is detail oriented, able to work in a fast paced environment but able to keep busy when business is slow and is open to change. Bilingual in English and Spanish is preferred but not required. Two years office/receptionist experience preferred.

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Funeral Director/Embalmer Position

New Tacoma Funeral Home
**Location:** University Place WA

A unique opportunity for the progressive person to work for a private combination in business since 1875 assisting 450 families per year. Management duties are a possibility depending on experience. MUST be proficient in self-direction and a team environment and possess strong computer and communication skills, MIS knowledge a plus. Candidates will have a clean driving record, Washington State dual licensure or ability to reciprocate and a genuine desire to make a difference. Competitive salary, full benefits, 401k w/ match.

Send resume’ to: Ron Messenger, New Tacoma Funeral Home, 9212 Chambers Creek Rd W, University Place WA 98467 or email to: ron@newtacoma.com. No phone calls please. We are an equal opportunity employer. [www.newtacoma.com](http://www.newtacoma.com)
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Please call the WCCFA office at 1-877-460-5880 or email wccfa@aminc.org