

**OKLAHOMA**

# DIRECTOR

June 2022 • Issue 6

## **JOURNEY TO SERVE**

*Historic campaign launches to recruit military veterans to funeral service*

**Marijuana Policy  
for Safety Sensitive Jobs**

**Understanding  
Cemetery Symbolism**



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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**Dustin B. Pierce**  
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**SALES CLUB PRESIDENT**  
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### OKFDA MANAGEMENT

**Dustin Pierce**  
OKFDA Executive Director  
6801 N. Broadway #212  
Oklahoma City, OK 73116  
info@okfda.com  
405-843-0730

### PUBLISHER

**Kimberly Scheberle**  
Sail House Publishing  
3510 Crowncrest Dr.,  
Austin, TX 78759  
512-346-0892  
kscheberle@austin.rr.com

### ADVERTISING

**Patty Huber**  
512-310-9795  
phuber2@austin.rr.com



Phillip Hart  
OKFDA President

# Recharge Your Batteries This Summer

Well summer is here and half gone already! Enjoy it while you can. There is a big chance that you have never heard of the 300 Rule. Simply stated, "It is by the grace of God that 300 people don't die on the same day." In reference to the fact that on any given day in Cotton County there are at least 300 people either ill or of the age to die. Well, I suppose we could also say that by the grace of God summer is here and hopefully the slowdown that usually accompanies it. During the past two years we missed that slowdown for sure.

Summer is normally a great time to play catch up on all kinds of projects at the office, chores at home and, of course, family fun. It

could be the right time to take on a remodeling project while your case load is down or to simply get ready for the fall run by decluttering and organizing for efficiency's sake. It's a great time for owners and managers to recognize the opportunity to give employees extra time off, and for that thankful employee to remember the good deed when they are so needed during the rush of winter.

Unfortunately, summers are much like bank accounts and fishing trips, if you don't plan for it, and budget your time and resources, the opportunities of summer will be gone with nothing to show for it. Put out some effort and get a little sunshine, complete

a project you have wanted to do for the past five years. It might be a good time take a trip to see a family member or friend you haven't seen in a while, after all, funeral directors and support staff lose loved ones as well, so don't regret putting off that visit.

I could be guilty of being Captain Obvious here, but just wanted to remind you that what we do, though noble, shouldn't be the whole of who we are. Get a life undertakers! Use the summer to recharge, get out and get some Vitamin D. Along with the grace of God, it might just get you through the coming mayhem of winter. As always, if you need something don't hesitate to reach out!

## FUNERAL INDUSTRY BY THE NUMBERS

The latest statistics for the annual revenue of the funeral industry is \$15 billion. According to the NFDA (National Funeral Directors Association), funeral industry statistics from 2019 include:

- Number of U.S. funeral homes: **19,136**
- Percentage of privately owned funeral homes (individuals or families): **89.2%**
- Percentage owned by publicly traded funeral home corporations: **10.8%**
- Average annual calls per funeral home: **113**
- Average number of employees per funeral home: **3 full time and 4 part-time**

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## Workforce Solutions for Our Industry

Dustin Pierce  
OKFDA Executive Director

Welcome to summer! It's hard to believe that spring has wrapped up and all of our kids are out of school and summer is here. I hope that you can get some time away from work this summer and spend it with your families.

We are all aware of the challenges facing the future of our industry. Firms are struggling with hiring and retaining employees. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says there are over 4,000 job openings in the United States for funeral service workers. This number includes funeral directors, embalmers, preneed counselors and support staff. The numbers look daunting, but OKFDA has partnered with the Funeral Service Foundation and ICCFA Educational Foundation to promote their new program, Journey to Serve.

Journey to Serve was launched in 2021 by the Funeral Service Foundation and the ICCFA Educational Foundation. It is also co-sponsored by the Funeral Service Association of Canada.

The purpose of this new program is to engage, recruit and hire more military veterans into various careers within the funeral service profession – including funeral homes, crematories, cemeteries, pre-arrangement counselors and all levels of supplier and support roles. The program is important because when asked, funeral home owners and operators say their biggest challenge is finding strong employees. This is especially urgent during times of crisis, such as a pandemic, when the “service” part of the funeral profession really shines, and caring, competent employees are needed. When recruiting veterans, it's important to understand the unique skills they offer to the workforce, as well how to help them transition to funeral service so they can become a valuable member of your team.

Journey to Serve will accomplish these goals by leveraging a comprehensive toolkit provided at [www.journeytoserve.com](http://www.journeytoserve.com), which offers resources to help funeral businesses better communicate with and recruit veterans. Please go to the website and download all the program goodies.

Remember that all the Journey to Serve

items can be branded to your funeral home.

OKFDA is excited about this new program, and we hope that it will help you in hiring and retaining strong employees. Once again, we are all in this together, and it will take all of us to make this industry stronger than it has ever been. Follow OKFDA on Facebook at [facebook.com/okfda](https://facebook.com/okfda), Twitter @okfda and Instagram @okfdassoc to get more informa-

tion about Journey to Serve.

If there is anything I can do for you, please call, text or email me and I'll do my best to help in any way I can.

Take Care

### Scholarship

Cadyn Brice receives a scholarship from the Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association and Dr. Larry A. Morgan for having the highest grade in Mortuary Jurisprudence during the 2021-2022 School Year.

Cadyn is an apprentice at Memorial Park Funeral Home in Oklahoma City and will obtain his funeral directors/embalmers license in August 2022.

Congratulations to Cadyn!



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# Journey to Serve

## Historic campaign launches to recruit military veterans to funeral service

By Edward J. Defort, Christel Henke and Lee Wiensch



Members of the U.S. military are trained to embody loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and courage. Each soldier is part of a team working to achieve a goal. These qualities are forever ingrained in the soldier, even long after their term of service ends.

For many veterans, the transition to re-entering civilian life is challenging. Every year, some 200,000 military members leave the service and start the search for a new career. As a majority

of those who enlist are assigned their tasks and areas of focus, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, about 55% of veterans in transition want to do something totally different than what they did in the military.

Underemployment is a major issue for returning veterans. According to a recent study by LinkedIn, vets are 37% more likely to be underemployed than non-veterans. When veterans do find work, the positions are argu-

ably not perfect fits and rarely take advantage of their advanced training or their military ethos of “service before self.”

Hmm... Service before self. Where have we heard that before?

Recognizing that the very values revered by the military complement the cornerstones of funeral service, the Funeral Service Foundation and the ICCFA Educational Foundation have teamed up in a historic collaboration of the profession’s leading philanthropic organizations to launch “Journey to Serve,” a comprehensive campaign to recruit military veterans for careers in funeral service.

“I am so pleased to see that the Funeral Service Foundation and the ICCFA Educational Foundation have joined together to create Journey to Serve,” said Christine Pepper, NFDA CEO. “Employers from all areas of funeral service will benefit from this partnership, as will our nation’s veterans looking to continue their service to their country as they start the next chapter in their lives.”

“The Funeral Service Foundation invests in people and programs to strengthen funeral service and lift up grieving communities. This joint project with ICCFA Educational Foundation is a solid mission fit,” said Lee Wiensch, Funeral Service Foundation executive director. “Recruiting capable, focused, caring veterans into the important work of funeral service strengthens our profession and our communities.”

This joint project provides customizable veteran recruitment resources that will help owners in the funeral profession (funeral homes, cemeteries, cremation facilities, suppliers and mortuary science programs, along with national, state and regional funeral associations) attract veterans looking for a new career.

### Stars Aligning

Now, this untapped resource may hold the key to solving one of funeral service’s most pressing issues. According to the recent

NFDA Funeral Directors' Expectations Survey, 74% of funeral home owners rank finding good employees as one of their top challenges. The survey also identified the most important job skills/qualities for prospective candidates, with the top five being:

- Ethical, honest, trustworthy
- Strong work ethic
- Professional appearance/demeanor
- Work collaboratively as team member
- Communication skills.

Veterans check all of those boxes and share a complementary skill set: resilience, discipline, organizational skills, desire for achievement, team building and the ability to thrive in extreme/stressful situations.

In the same way in which veterans take pride in their service to country, funeral service professionals take great pride in caring for the loved ones entrusted into their care with the utmost respect. Drawing another parallel between the career paths, it is during times of crisis, such as pandemics and other mass fatality disasters, that the "service" aspect of the funeral profession shines. They, too, are accustomed to managing situations like the current pandemic and are prepared to help families memorialize and remember their loved ones given any circumstances. The most important mission in funeral service is to help families at a time when they are shocked, grieving and vulnerable.

"The characteristics embodied by veterans – trust, resilience, a sense of duty, the ability to work under difficult circumstances – are highly valued by employers in the funeral service profession," said Pepper. "We hope that Journey to Serve will help connect funeral businesses with veterans who will embrace this profession's mission of caring for the dead and comforting grieving families.

"One of the challenges reported by our members is finding employees who will care for families with respect and compassion," she continued. "We hope Journey to Serve helps not just NFDA and ICCFA members but all of funeral service find veterans who will be great employees and help them in their businesses, with the families they serve and in their communities."

### The Kickoff

In late April (2021), a virtual kickoff for Journey to Serve was co-hosted by Bob Arrington, founder and president of Arrington Funeral Directors, immediate past president of the Funeral Service Foundation and NFDA past president (2015-16); and Jay Dodds,

## MAKING THE TRANSITION:

### Douglas "Dutch" Nie

In high school, Doug Nie wanted to be a police officer, so after he graduated, he joined the U.S. Air Force and served for eight years as a staff sergeant, during which he traveled to Japan and South Korea. Toward the end of his tour, he spoke with his parents, funeral home owners, about succession planning and decided to come home.

Nie earned a bachelor's degree in mortuary science from Wayne State University and worked with his parents after graduating. He didn't always know he would follow in their footsteps, but he remembered the many times he had helped them over the years and that he had attained a good grasp on the business.

He and his wife eventually bought the business after his parents retired. Nie's current office is his childhood bedroom, so he's never far from where he came. The business then expanded with a new location, at which the Nies' two sons work.

Nie gained a few key skills in the military he uses to this day in funeral service, including critical thinking and the ability to work on a team and to accept and appreciate others' differences.

He is now funeral director and owner of Nie Funeral Homes in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and serves as secretary of NFDA, of which he has been a member since 1990. He also serves as financial officer for his local American Legion Post.

"As a veteran working in funeral service, you realize that you are serving as an ambassador for the military and that everything you do reflects on that 'duty to serve,'" Nie said. "It's important to reflect that commitment back to those you are helping.

"My travels in the military opened my mind to other experiences and exposed me to different dialects, religions and cultures," he added. "This helps me in my career, as I have learned that I can't impose my own values on others. I must listen, understand their unique situation and respect their wishes."

Nie said veterans bring such a diversity of skills – from leadership and problem-solving to a strong understanding of tradition and culture that's needed to succeed in this profession.

"My favorite part of working in the funeral profession is meeting families at the most difficult times of their lives – walking with them through the first days of their grief and creating a meaningful end-of-life service for their loved one," he said. "It's an honor that they trust us, and we take that commitment very seriously."

president of the International Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association, trustee emeritus for the Funeral Service Foundation and trustee of the ICCFA Educational Foundation. The event featured keynote speaker Lisa Rosser, CEO and founder of The Value of a Veteran.

Beginning in Fall 2021, the Funeral Service Foundation and the ICCFA Educational Foundation began offering two \$5,000 academic scholarships each year to military veterans pursuing education in funeral service. Additionally, the Hunter M. Harbeson Memorial Scholarship will offer two \$2,500 academic scholarships each year to military veterans pursuing education in funeral service.

The scholarships are available to any United

States or Canadian military veteran who has honorably served on active duty, National Guard or reserve status and is seeking enrollment in a degree program or additional training necessary to secure employment in the funeral service profession. Awards are paid directly to the accredited program or institution on behalf of the scholarship winner. Applicants will complete a few brief essay questions and submit a two-minute video as part of the application process.

The Journey to Serve campaign provides a deep toolkit to assist funeral professionals in recruiting veterans. It includes, for example, a postcard that doubles as a single-panel brochure and can be customized by funeral professionals looking to hire veterans. It is

## MAKING THE TRANSITION:

### Gabriel Schauf

Gabe Schauf made a pact with a friend in high school: If one of them entered the military, the other would join him. That pact between two teenagers came to fruition when his friend made the decision to join. Schauf, keeping his promise, did the same and never looked back.

Schauf has always been a leader. In high school, he was president of his 4H Club, participated in Student Council, coached hockey and taught Sunday School. He found that the military offered similar leadership opportunities. He was a fire team leader, squad leader and training NCO, all of which taught him the importance of integrity, teamwork and simply doing the right thing. He also served as a sergeant in the Wisconsin Army National Guard and was deployed to Iraq during his service.

Upon leaving the military, Schauf finished college at the University of Minnesota, graduating from the mortuary science program, and worked at several funeral homes in Wisconsin and Minnesota. When he was young, he said, he was told that he was a “people person” and that he should highly consider entering the funeral service profession. He took this advice to heart.

Schauf agrees that there are many parallels between the military and funeral service – the mental toughness developed in dealing with difficult situations, for one. Veterans are skilled at compartmentalizing situations and focusing solely on the task at hand.

Today, Schauf is a funeral service instructor at Milwaukee Area Technical College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His goal as an educator is to show those who are interested what it’s truly all about and how incredible the profession can be. He is also host of NFDA’s “A Brush With Death” podcast, on which he has the opportunity to speak with many interesting guests and listen to their stories.

“I look at my military career as a ministry, a way to serve and be there for others. It’s the same with the funeral profession,” said Schauf. “In both, I have had to put my own life aside, forget about my own problems and put the needs of others first.

“In both the military and funeral service, attention to detail is highly important,” he continued. “In the military, being distracted could lead to failure of the mission or even cost a life. When working through the funeral process, whether it be embalming or making arrangements, you need that same level of attention to successfully come through for the deceased and those grieving their loss on the most difficult day of their lives.”

intended for use as a handout at job fairs or trade shows, a brochure for use at local VFW posts or as a mailed piece or tip-in for veteran recruiting publications. Other tools include:

- Landing page URL: [journeytoserve.com](http://journeytoserve.com)
- Journey to Serve video link via YouTube
- 30- and 60-second radio spot ads
- Sample social media posts/graphics and hyperlocal Facebook campaign tools
- Slide deck for funeral professionals demonstrating how to use the recruiting tools
- Blog featuring how-to topics for professionals, such as how to handle a job interview with a veteran
- Key messages: how to speak consistently about the campaign
- Answers to common questions professionals ask about recruiting veterans
- Hyperlocal Facebook recruitment program
- Communications plan: how recruiting tools are being marketed
- Print ads
- Digital ads
- Press release.

Veterans’ resources include:

- Slide deck for veterans: why consider the funeral profession
- Blog: Short piece on GI Bill apprenticeships in funeral service
- Quiz on how to know if the funeral profession is right for you
- Comparison sheet: What funeral service career is a good fit with your military training/rank?
- Links to national and state funeral service job boards
- Links to mortuary science and funeral service schools and training programs
- Announcement of and links to application for funeral service-specific academic scholarships for veterans.

“This Journey to Serve collaborative partnership strengthens the profession by bringing together two valued organizations committed to serving all of funeral service,” said Wiensch. “We’re thrilled to share this initiative with the entire profession and look forward to future collaborations with the ICCFA Educational Foundation.”

*Ed Defort is editor of NFDA Publications, Lee Wiensch is executive director of the Funeral Service Foundation, and Christel Henke is vice president of earned marketing at STIR Advertising in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

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# Journey to Serve Toolkit

## For Funeral Directors

- Landing page URL ([journeytoserve.com](http://journeytoserve.com))
- Journey to Serve video link via YouTube
- 30- and 60-second radio spot ads
- Sample social media posts/graphics and hyperlocal Facebook campaign tools
- Slide deck for funeral professionals: how to use the recruiting tools
- Blog: how-to topics for professionals, such as how to handle job interviews with veterans
- Key messages: how to speak consistently about the campaign
- FAQ: common questions professionals have about recruiting veterans
- Hyperlocal Facebook recruitment program
- Communication plan: how recruiting tools are being marketed
- Postcard
- Print and digital ads
- Press release

## For Veterans

- Slide deck for veterans: Why consider the funeral profession?
- Blog: short piece on GI Bill apprenticeships in funeral service
- Quiz on how to know if the funeral professional is right for you
- Comparison sheet: Which funeral service career is a good fit with your military training/rank?
- Links to national and state funeral service job boards
- Links to funeral service schools and training programs
- Announcement of and links to application for funeral service-specific academic scholarships for veterans

## Why Veterans Make Good Employees

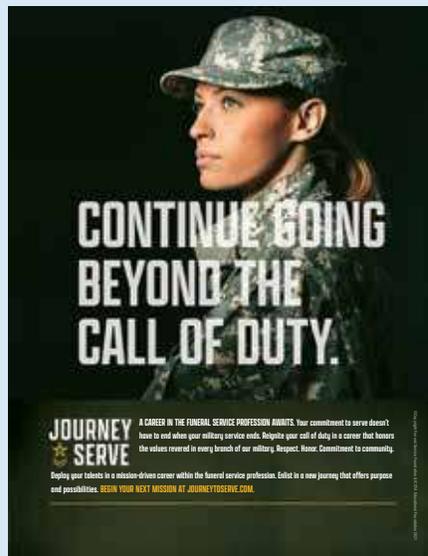
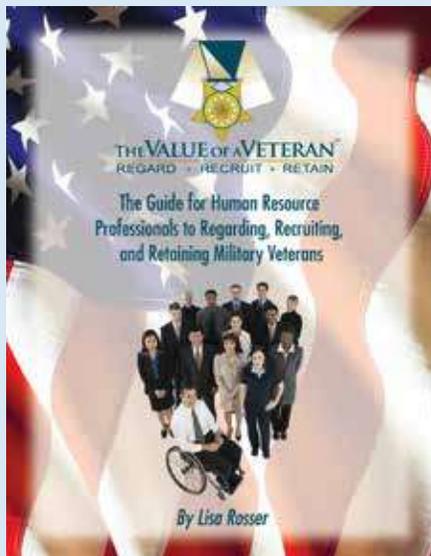
Employers can certainly benefit from hiring veterans. Military personnel are often cross-trained, have multiple skills and have experience in varied tasks and responsibilities. Many veterans have learned what it means to put in a hard day's work. They have also come to appreciate the challenges and satisfaction of a job well done. Much of this experience can translate to their participation in the workforce, making the veteran an asset on the job. Strengths the veteran can bring to the workplace:

- Working well in a team is considered an essential part of daily life and is the foundation on which safe military operations are built
- A sense of duty, responsibility and accountability for job performance and completing missions
- Self-confidence: holding a realistic estimation of self and ability based on experiences is expected of each service member
- Organization and discipline
- Strong work ethic: In the military, the mission always comes first
- Ability to follow through on assignments, even under difficult or stressful circumstances.
- A variety of cross-functional skills, including extensive training in computer programs and systems, interaction with people with different skills to accomplish a task, and troubleshooting problems in both novel and known conditions
- Able to problem-solve quickly and creatively
- Able to adapt to changing situations
- Able to follow rules and schedules.

Hiring a veteran can result in the hiring of a dedicated employee who has developed valuable teamwork, leadership and job skills.

## Some Examples from the Toolkit

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



# Marijuana Policy for Safety Sensitive Jobs

By Marty Ludlum



At the 2022 Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association Convention, I gave a presentation about developing a Medical Marijuana policy for your employees. I greatly enjoyed the event and I want to thank Executive Director Dustin Pierce, Immediate Past-President Kacey Ferguson, newly installed President Phillip Hart, and the entire Board of OKFDA for the warm welcome. One hour is not enough time to go through all the potential issues of a marijuana policy for your funeral home, so I wrote this as a supplement.

The bad news: the details are thin. The laws are new, just enacted in 2019, so we have not had any cases go through the courts. One issue is clear: Oklahoma's medical marijuana policy does not allow for a blanket rule, (example: I think all employees are safety sensitive). Each

job must be considered individually.

However, there are some valid conclusions from the text of the law. I thought it would be best to explicitly go through the few issues which are certain, so that you might currently develop a policy for your employees in line with Oklahoma law. The relevant part of the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana and Patient Protection Act, [63 O.S. § 427.8] states,

2. No employer may refuse to hire, discipline, discharge or otherwise penalize an applicant or employee solely on the basis of a positive test for marijuana components or metabolites, unless: ... c. the position is one involving safety-sensitive job duties, as such term is defined in subsection K of this section.

In other words, if the job is "safety sensitive" then the employer can prohibit an employee

from being under the influence of Medical Marijuana while on the job.

So, what is "safety sensitive"?

The Oklahoma Medical Marijuana and Patient Protection Act [63 O.S. § 427.8(K)] states "Safety-sensitive" means any job that includes tasks or duties that the employer reasonably believes could affect the safety and health of the employee performing the task or others including, but not limited to, any of the following...

The wording of the statute: "reasonably believes could affect the safety and health of the employee..." is very vague, so the Oklahoma Legislature tried to list some examples. However, these examples are considered on a case by case. The finding in one industry/profession may not be applicable to another.

However, several of the factors listed apply perfectly to funeral homes. (Note: Italics indicates wording from the statute).

"Safety-sensitive" means any job that includes a. the handling, packaging, processing, storage, disposal or transport of hazardous materials...

Embalmers and those conducting a first call would be considered "safety sensitive" because chemicals for embalming as well as body fluids would be hazardous materials.

Also, "safety-sensitive" means any job that includes b. the operation of a motor vehicle, other vehicle, equipment, machinery or power tools...

Any worker at a funeral home (FD licensee or not) could be considered "safety sensitive" if he/she operates cars (driving the hearse, driving the family car, driving the flower car, delivering death certificates, etc.) or while operating machinery, such as a backhoe or other equipment for the cemetery. In addition, the statute mentions power tools, so a funeral home employee could be considered "safety sensitive" while mowing the grass or doing building repairs.

"Safety-sensitive" means any job that includes c. repairing, maintaining or monitoring the performance or operation of any equipment, machinery or manufacturing process, the malfunction or disruption of which could result in injury or property damage...

Any worker at the funeral home would be considered "safety sensitive" who repairs the automobiles or machinery (crematory, etc.) at

the business. I am confident this section would apply to many fewer workers than operating a motor vehicle, but should also be considered.

“Safety-sensitive” also means any job that includes f. the extraction, compression, processing, manufacturing, handling, packaging, storage, disposal, treatment or transport of potentially volatile, flammable, combustible materials, elements, chemicals or any other highly regulated component...

Embalmers could be considered “safety sensitive” if any of the chemicals used in the preservation of human remains are flammable. (Even if the chemicals are not flammable, they would still be considered hazardous.)

A great many funeral home employees could be considered “safety sensitive.” In fact, at most firms every employee must help drive the cars for services, etc., and as a result every employee could be considered safety sensitive.

There are employees who would not be considered safety sensitive. A worker who only works the evenings for phone/door duty and who does not drive any vehicles would

not likely fit the definition of safety sensitive. Additionally, a typist/secretary who never participates in the funeral services would not be safety sensitive. Most funeral homes do not have the luxury of narrow job descriptions, and every employee becomes a driver during a multiple service day.

The statute, the Oklahoma Medical Marijuana and Patient Protection Act, was not written for just funeral home workers. It applies to all employees in Oklahoma. As a result, several factors are clearly not applicable to funeral homes, such as: performing firefighting duties, maintenance of critical infrastructure, dispensing pharmaceuticals, carrying a firearm, or direct patient care or direct child care.

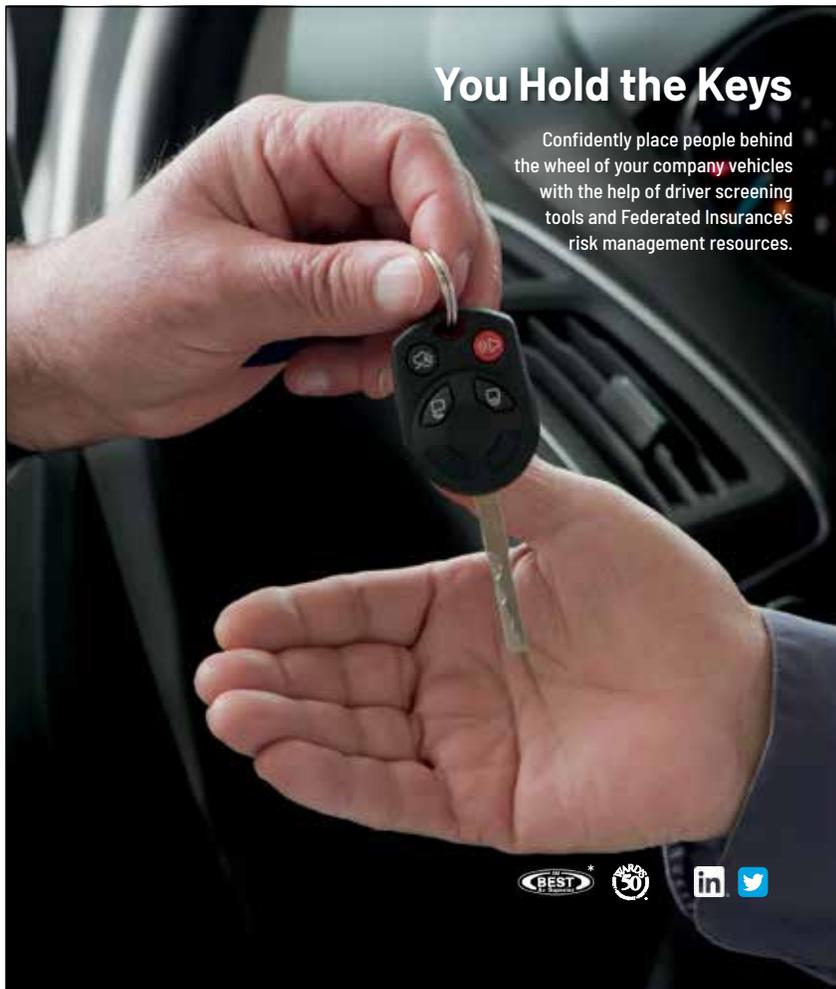
I have been coming to OFDA conventions since 1985, but perhaps there are things I still need to learn. If a funeral home offered child care in-house either for employees’ children or for funeral home customers’ kids, those workers could be considered “safety sensitive” but I cannot recall anyone offering this service.

Also, if the funeral home has an employee

whose job includes carrying a firearm, that employee would be considered “safety sensitive.” I cannot imagine this being a situation so common that the funeral home hires armed guards (instead of calling the police), but if so, those guards would be safety sensitive employees.

Are there other examples? yes, that’s the whole point of “including, but not limited to” language. The list can and will grow over time. I expect the law’s details to be more fully developed over time by both court decisions and legislative amendments.

*Professor Marty Ludlum teaches business law at the University of Central Oklahoma and is a licensed attorney. He has made numerous presentations to the funeral profession at state and national conventions and has written articles in national and state funeral magazines. Professor Ludlum has a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in economics, a Master’s degree in communication and a Juris Doctor, all from the University of Oklahoma. Professor Ludlum is the Education Director for Osiris Funeral Home Software.*

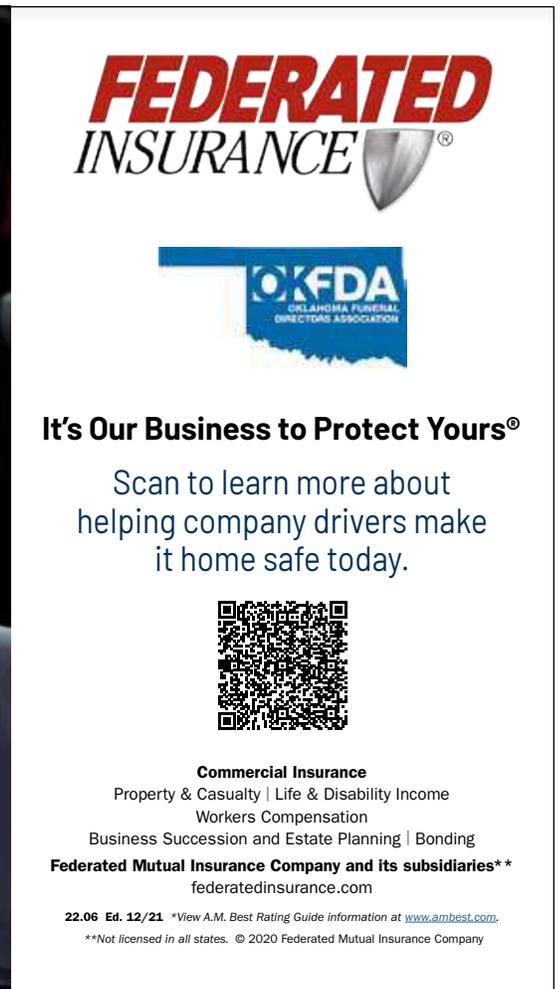


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# Understanding Cemetery Symbolism

By Marnie Vinge



Gravel crunches as the tires of an old hearse make the turn into the graveyard. The hearse leads the funeral procession down a small lane that allows access to the cemetery plots, many of which are already taken. Pallbearers gather when the motorcade comes to a stop. The funeral director opens the hearse and, together, the funeral director and the pallbearers escort the deceased to their final resting place. Another grave among many.

Those graves already occupied are marked by headstones and other stone structures.

Not only do they provide identification for wandering family members on Memorial Day, but they can also tell a total stranger a little bit about the person resting six feet below.

Nowhere else is there such a mingling of different styles of art and architecture. Egyptian, Classical, Byzantine, Islamic, Renaissance, Gothic, and Neoclassical styles can be seen along with many others. The gravestones themselves also bear the same amount of diversity, but what do all those symbols mean? And where did they come from?

Typically, monuments and gravestones bear iconography that tells the viewer about the deceased. The information to be gleaned is usually about the length of the person's life (an untimely demise if that may have occurred), interests (maybe they liked to ride motorcycles or garden), religion (they could have been Catholic), humanity (they may have been married), professional and fraternal associations (perhaps they were a Freemason), and ultimately life and death (good reminders for us all of life's brevity).

Seeing stalks of wheat gathered in a bundle on a gravestone is good news for the deceased. This means they led a long life, generally of at least seventy years. On the other hand, should you see a broken column, this could mean that the deceased's life was cut short all too soon. One of the most common symbols from the Victorian era was the lamb. Not only did this symbolize Christ, it also symbolized a child. Typically graves marked with a lamb are an indication that a child is buried there.

On more modern graves, it's common to see symbols such as gardening shears or a motorcycle. The limit for what icons can be put on a headstone today are limited only as far as what graphic designs are available. Someone with a love of the theater might have drama masks on their stone. Someone who was a dog trainer in life might depict their beloved German shepherd on their marker. Personalization like this is far more common today.

Religious symbols proliferate in the Victorian

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graveyard. Almost all floral symbols can be linked to some element of Christianity. The pinecone is a symbol of immortality and incorruptibility. Palm trees can indicate victory of life over death. Olive branches mean peace. A pomegranate symbolizes the hope of immortality and resurrection. Often times, famous religious sculptures are recreated in graveyards, such as the Pietà.

Other faiths are represented there as well. The star of David can adorn a Jewish headstone. Menorahs and ewers can also be seen as symbols of the Jewish faith. There is also a Jewish practice of leaving pebbles near or on the headstone.

Some symbols in the cemetery depict the humanity of the deceased. A crown can indicate victory, leadership or distinction. Ships can indicate that the deceased lead a seafaring life. A candelabra symbolizes light through dark times during life. The veil is also a common symbol, signifying the passage from one life into another. Coins can indicate charity. An anchor symbolizes hope. Lamps typically mean that the person was wise, faithful, and holy. Flames represent eternal life or vigilance. Feathers are associated with the ascent into heaven. Stars are symbols of divine guidance.

Some of the symbols seen commonly in older cemeteries are those of the Freemasons, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Eastern Star, and the Daughters of Rebekah to name only a few. The list is long for secret societies and special organizations that can be represented in the graveyard. The symbol most famously associated with the Freemasons is the square and compass with the letter G inside. Another famous symbol of the Freemasons is the all-seeing eye. A five-point star, upside down, indicates the grave of an Eastern Star, the female equivalent to the Freemasons. The points of the star signify heroines (Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha, and Electa) as well as the tenets of the Eastern Star, which are fidelity, constancy, loyalty, faith, and love. A chain made of three links typically represents a member of the Odd Fellows. Usually this symbol is accompanied by the letters I. O. O. F. or the letters F. L. T. to represent friendship, love, and truth. A half-moon symbol along with a dove and a white lily can be seen beside the letters D. R. on the tombstone of a member of the Daughters of Rebekah. Sometimes these graves feature a beehive indicating industriousness and teamwork.

The most widely and instinctually recognize symbols in the cemetery are those that represent life and death. These are the sym-

bols that can have the greatest impact and lend to the cemetery's somber air. A vacant chair is often used to symbolize death, to indicate that the person once occupying it is not coming back. The Green Man is often seen in Scotland as an indication that new life springs from death. Grim reapers can be seen in some cemeteries, a typically thin or skeletal figure carrying a scythe. The inverted torch is a common funerary symbol along with the draped urn. The drape on the urn could harken back to the symbolism of the veil.

Cemeteries are rife with memento mori, or symbols that call one to "remember thy death." A memento mori was, "an image (drawing sculpture, or photograph) or an item (hair locket, tear vial)," according to Douglas Kiesler. They are meant "to remind the viewer that death is an unavoidable part of life, something

to be prepared for at all times."

Cemeteries are full of symbolism and information that can be gathered beyond what text is found on the tombstone. They are places we go to remember and to honor the dead. Armed with a little extra information, it might be easier to discern what some of those strangers' tombstones are trying to tell us about them and about ourselves and our relationship with death.

*Marnie Vinge is a novelist that focuses on horror, paranormal suspense, romance, and thrillers. She also hosts the podcast Eerie Okie, chronicling all the dark and paranormal history of her home state, Oklahoma. She lives in the central part of the state with her family and their three dogs. Her latest books: Gunshy, Thicker Than Water, The Way It Ends, The Haunting of Solomon House, and The Reunion, all available on Amazon*

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The Oklahoma Funeral Directors Association is successful and impactful because funeral service professionals give their time and expertise to guide the association. Their efforts benefit ALL funeral service professionals in the state. Here we introduce you to the 2022-2023 Board of Governors.



**Monica Zyzak, District I**

Born and raised in Moore, Oklahoma, Monica is a funeral services graduate of the University of Central Oklahoma. She has worked in the industry since 2014 and received her funeral director's license in 2018. Monica is proud to serve Norman-area families, is a hospice volunteer and enjoys an active lifestyle. She currently works at Primrose Funeral Service in Norman.

**Carolyn Shaw, District II**

Carolyn is a lifelong resident of Northeast Oklahoma, calling Tulsa home (no matter where she resides). She graduated from Coweta High School, attended Tulsa Community College before choosing Funeral Service as her final career path. She earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Central Oklahoma and recently received an MBA from Western Governors University.

While funeral service was not Carolyn's first career choice, she says it has been the most fulfilling. Her first career was in the food service industry, and she still has a private catering business she runs in her spare time. While attending UCO, Carolyn apprenticed with



Dignity at their Care Center in Oklahoma City. After graduating in 2013, she joined the Moore Funeral Home family in Tulsa, serving predominantly at their Southlawn Chapel. She obtained her Celebrant Certification to give families more options in their celebrations.

She and her husband, Tim, have two ornery black cats, Veronica and Wednesday. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, crafting, cooking, having fun with family and friends, thrift shopping, reading and gardening.



**John Decker, District III**

John Decker works for Lanman Funeral Home, Inc. They have four locations in north-west Oklahoma and one in southern Kansas.

He and his wife, Christen, have two boys, Lane and Mason, with another baby on the way due in July! If he is not at the funeral home, you might find him hunting, golfing, vegetable gardening, or spending time with the family.



**John W. Williams, District V**

John W. Williams is the third-generation owner/operator of Winans Funeral Home in Maysville, Okla. John has been a licensed embalmer/funeral director since 2014 when he graduated from the University of Central Oklahoma. John's hobbies include spending time with his family, playing guitar, golf, and being outdoors.

John and his wife, Theresa, were teachers in Texas prior to returning to Maysville in 2012. They have two sons, Connor and John Ross, who are both Business Administration Majors at East Central University in Ada, Okla.

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