

# The Southerner Newsletter

Newsletter Of The Southern Cemetery Cremation & Funeral Association | Fall 2022



Michael Phares  
SCCFA President

High Lawn Memorial Park  
Oak Hill, WV

## Calendar

- June 25-27 Park Vista  
Hotel Gatlinburg, TN  
2023 SCCFA Convention  
in partnership with  
Cemetery Association of  
TN, Kentucky Cemetery  
Association, North Carolina  
Cemetery Association and  
South Carolina Cemetery  
Association.

## President's Message

A message from Michael.....

As we celebrate the 90th year of the SCCFA, I am humbled and honored to be leading such an amazing Association into the future.

I feel The Southern is small enough to know YOU yet big enough to fulfill all expectations and educational needs moving forward in our industry.

In the past couple of years, we all have navigated uncertainty and adversity in our profession. Thankfully, we seem to be on the upside of a World Pandemic. We are all well on our way back to normalcy, better prepared for the future.

This is one of the most adaptive professions in our great nation, and I thank all of you for sticking together and pushing through these last couple of years. I know it hasn't been easy.

I also look forward to seeing many of you at your State Association meetings, and can't wait to see all of you in Gatlinburg TN next year when we join with the states of Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee to celebrate our 90th Annual Convention!!

Southern Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association  
PO Box 508 | Kingston Springs, TN 37082  
Cindy Foree, Executive Director  
Phone: 615-714-9605  
Email: [TheSouthern.office@gmail.com](mailto:TheSouthern.office@gmail.com)  
Web site: [www.SCCFA.info](http://www.SCCFA.info)

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## Single Grave Grass Package

One of the vendors from our recent cemetery association event is Pearl's Premium Ultra Low Maintenance Lawn Seed. They just announced a new revolutionary and very useful cemetery product a complete grass package for up to 50 square feet, to cover a single new grave after a burial. The package is a deep root grass mixture with far less weeds, and also includes fertilizer and mulch, to hold water and dramatically improve the soil. This single grave package helps quickly establish the new grass, and is a beautiful dark green needing far less watering.

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**Contact:**

**Jackson Madnick**

**Office - 508-653-0800**

**Cell - 508-309-8123**

**[Jackson@PearlsPremium.com](mailto:Jackson@PearlsPremium.com)**

**[www.PearlsPremium.org](http://www.PearlsPremium.org)**



# Cash is King!

By: Jodie Dupree - SCCFA Board Member  
(Raleigh Memorial Park, Raleigh, NC)

A career in death care is without doubt a calling. No matter whether we find ourselves working at a funeral home, cemetery or both we can't deny that in most ways it is unlike any other profession. Some came into the business as a result of generational expectation...our family was in the business or we came into it by accident because we answered a help wanted ad. There is no question that to remain in this business takes a special person. Often because the business is so different from other professions some people do not like to think of it as a business. But make no mistake, it may be unlike many other businesses it is in fact still a business and must be operated under basic business principles. Whether you are the owner, manager or employee of the funeral home or cemetery you owe it to yourself and your coworkers as well as the families you have served or will serve in the future to be an active, profitable healthy business.

According to Keven Cope, the founder of Acumen Learning, all businesses regardless of size or type have five key drivers that determine how successful the business will be and whether it can survive. Those drivers are Cash, Profit, Assets, Growth and People. That may seem elementary but most business fail because they focus too much on one or two of the drivers and ignore the others. They think if their customers (people) are happy and they are doing more business this year than they did last year (growth) and they sell their goods or services for more than they paid for them (profit) then all is well. Ignoring the assets of the business or the cash flow of the business can be deadly.

The purpose of this article is to focus on cash flow in the business. Cash is in fact the only one of the five drivers that your business absolutely must have to stay afloat.

You can be lacking in other areas and survive till those areas improve but cash flow is the one area that most determines if you will survive as a business. According to a recent survey done by Entrepreneur.com, 90% of business failures come as a result of poor cash flow.

Fred Smith, the founder of Fedex had an MBA from Yale and a solid business plan but in 1973 while having \$80,000,000 in company assets including 14 airplanes he found himself in a bit of a pickle. He had no one willing to lend him anymore money and he had a \$17,000 jet fuel bill due in 3 days.

His accountant informed him on that Friday that the business had \$5,000 in the bank. Fedex had good people, lots of assets, had been growing but they were 3 days from closing their doors because they did not have enough cash flow to get passed Monday. Fred Smith stopped off in Las Vegas and played blackjack all weekend and won \$27,000 and kept his business afloat. That is not the preferred method of financing your business and Fedex might not exist today had the blackjack hands gone differently. Businesses that aren't yet profitable can survive for a while as long as they have cash or access to cash. People know that from their own personal lives.

Most of us have lived at one time or another in our life "paycheck to paycheck". Owing far more than we had money to pay all at once but we were able to get by till things got better because we had enough cash to get us through the next few days till that next paycheck arrived.

# Cash is King! (Continued)

The funeral and cemetery business is no different. We must have cash flow to operate, pay the bills, pay the employees, order supplies, etc. However because of the nature of our business and the sensitivities involved we are often reluctant to discuss with families we are serving how they intend to pay us. We think we will appear cold or uncaring to discuss payment when they are going through the worst time of their lives. (That's a primary reason for preplanning and prepaying funeral and cemetery expenses but I will save that subject for another time.)

The fact is most people don't come to us intending not to pay our charges or shocked that we charge for what we do but we often approach them as if we think they will be offended to be asked to pay. Families often say that the estate will pay us or "my lawyer will send you a check" or "I have a life insurance policy and as soon as I get that money I will drop a check in the mailbox for you." Those answers affect your cash flow. You have vault bills, casket bills, payroll bills and more to pay now and waiting till later to collect your accounts payable can lead to the downfall of the business.

If you are the owner of the business you may have the luxury of choosing how or when you ask for money but if you are the employee of that business you owe it to the owner or owners who are paying all the bills to ask for payment when services are rendered. According to a recent article on the Ordermentum blog there are 9 causes for poor cash flow in a business.

1. Low profits. You have high or uncontrolled spending or poor sales.
2. Over investment. You are buying things you don't need.
3. Expanding too fast.
4. High overhead expenses. Rent, internet, utility bills.
5. Unexpected expenses. This can be crippling with adequate cash on hand.
6. Borrowing too often.
7. Incorrect product or service pricing.
8. Overstocking. Buying too many office supplies or inventory.
9. Weak accounts payable process. Giving customers more than 30 days to pay when most of the businesses bills are due in under 30 days. Running a business or helping the business be successful that employees you is certainly not easy. The next time you hear someone say "Cash is king" what they are really saying is "cash flow is king". 🌳

*Jodie Dupree oversees day to day operations and sales for 50 SCI locations in North Carolina.*



# Inspection Time

By: Susan Barney - SCCFA Board Member  
(Greenleaf Memorial Park, New Bern, NC )

It's Monday morning and you run by the post office to retrieve the mail before heading to the office. And there it is, a notice that indicates you have a certified letter from none other than the Cemetery Commission. You dread signing for this letter, but you have no choice. When you get to the office, you hastily open the envelope to realize it's a notice that an inspector will be coming to inspect your cemetery records for the past two years.

Okay, you have thirty days to gather all the information the inspector will need. And you may even wonder why an inspector must audit your records, after all, you file your monthly reports on time every month, you make timely deposits to the perpetual care fund and merchandise and services trust and pay fees as required.

Inspections are not for the purpose of rummaging through your records with a fine-tooth comb, but rather to perform a spot check of the records and reports to make certain that perpetual care fees and required trusting are being correctly reported and paid and that records are being properly maintained. The inspection is meant to find any errors in reporting or trusting sooner rather than later so that any issues found can be rectified at an early stage instead of things getting out of control.

As both a general manager and an inspector, I have a firsthand perspective of both sides of the inspection process. North Carolina inspectors are required to:

- 1) Review all at need contracts for interment rights sold during the inspection period to determine that deeds have been issued and perpetual care has been paid.
- 2) Review a percentage of pre-need contracts written during the inspection period to determine that all merchandise and services have been trusted and assessment fees are paid.
- 3) Review one file per alphabet for pre-need merchandise and/or services written in prior years to determine that the proper amount has been trusted or that the merchandise and/or services have been delivered.
- 4) Review all deeds issued during the inspection period to determine that perpetual care fees have been deposited and assessment fees paid.
- 5) Inventory all merchandise stored onsite.
- 6) Review trustee reports and confirm that all perpetual care fees and merchandise and services trust requirements are deposited in a timely manner.

There are a few steps that you can take to make the inspection process less stressful. The inspector will need:

1) Copies of all contracts entered during the inspection period readily available that are clearly marked as at-need, preneed or a combination contract. These copies can be in either paper or electronic form.

In lieu of actual copies of the contracts, you may provide a list of all contracts including the date of contract, name of purchaser, whether the contract is at-need, preneed or a combination contract, and the items purchased.

2) All monthly reports filed during the inspection period.

3) All trustee reports for the inspection period; reports should include the dates funds were deposited and the amounts of each deposit.

4) Deed book indicating deed number, date of deed, contract number, name of purchaser, number of interment rights and the cost of each right deeded.

5) A complete list of the merchandise and trust liability as of the last date of the period to be inspected.

6) Accounts receivable list as of the last date of the period to be inspected.

7) List of all stored merchandise and the storage location; list should include the contract number, name of purchaser and items stored.

As a cemeterian, I have found that maintaining a yearly notebook with copies of all contracts and monthly reports is an easy and simple way to provide the inspector with much of the required information. For our cemetery, this process requires less time for our staff to prepare for an inspection and requires less files to be pulled for the inspector and then refiled by our staff.

While my knowledge is relative to North Carolina inspections, I am sure there are guidelines specific to each state. Review the general statutes and commission rules to be sure you are filing all required reports and paying all trust requirements. And remember that your commission staff and commissioners are available to assist you and answer questions you might have.

Remember, the inspector is not your enemy, but rather a security measure for your cemetery. 🌳

# SCCFA Commemorates Lifetime Achievement

## Susan Mena - Executive Director of The Georgia Cemetery Association

Daytona Beach, Florida – Susan Mena, The Executive Director of The Georgia Cemetery Association, The former Executive Director of the SCCFA, was awarded The Southern's (Southern Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association) highest honor as a designee of the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Susan began her career with the Lohman family in 1993 at Cheatham Hill Memorial Park in Marietta, GA. She credits "The Lohman Way" as the foundation of her dedication and love for our profession. Susan spent a brief period in family service, before quickly exceling into management. Here she excelled in helping families create lasting memorialization and educating her community on the value of pre-planning. She found purpose in helping those in need solve problems and ventured out into the community doing service and outreach events. That enthusiasm for service and empathy are qualities that are embedded into her life's work. She would move from the Lohman and Stewart Enterprises to develop the next chapter with American Funeral Financial with her friend and mentor, Chuck Gallagher. The pair still often collaborate with the same success and spark that helped them be efficacious with AFF. Susan's faux retirement came from a persistent Kyle Nikola, who persuaded Susan into her Executive Director role for the Southern (SCCFA) after working together successfully at the GCA (Georgia Cemetery Association). Susan remained the Executive Director for the Southern for 5 years.

Lauren Blevins, a Past President, said about Susan, "Susan Mena has left a stamp on our profession in every way. Behind her is a wake of families grateful to have made better decisions due to Susan's advice and education. Her devotion to our associations is evident to all who know her. Susan leaves lasting marks on the business functions and efficiency of the work we accomplish together. But, mostly, she has left imprints on us personally for the honest and heartfelt way she embraced us all and walked us through the last few years. Susan, the Southern and our profession will always owe you a debt of gratitude."

The Southern bestows this honor on someone who has profoundly impacted our profession, specifically the southern regions. Past recipients include Bill Gregory, Nancy Lohman, Bill Gaffney, Harry Sharp, Buddy, and Carol Sue Reeves. 🌳



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# 2022 SCCFA/GCA Convention Daytona Beach, Florida





# 2022 SCCFA/GCA Convention Daytona Beach, Florida






## Presidents Reception

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***Thank You!***



# Team Building and Leadership

By David Sharp - SCCFA Board Member  
(Greenlawn Gardens Cemetery, Vicksburg, MS)

What makes a team? This can be a million-dollar question. I often refer back to the days when I was involved in sports. I will always remember the cliché message of “there is no “I” in TEAM”. It should be known that success in any organization is determined by the bond of its members. Every organization should view its staff as a team. Furthermore, every member of the team should be a team player. Like a well-oiled machine, the team should function no matter how many hiccups there are on the road.

How can one achieve this? Leaders should strive to ensure their TEAM represents the morals and values of the organization. Weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly quick meetings are good to recap the message. As an organization grows and more people are brought in, the leader needs to make sure each member feels appreciated for the services they bring to the table. This can be a very hard concept for large companies. However, letting an employee know they are doing a great job and are appreciated, can go a long way, if it is genuine. On the other hand, one of the biggest “no-no’s” a leader can do is point out a flaw to an individual around others. This should always be done in private. One should always remember this statement, “the weather can be predicted”. Good or bad attitudes can rub off on everyone. Furthermore, if owners, managers, department heads, etc. are not making the attempt to know the ones around them, how can they say they are part of a team? It starts from the top.

Most professional organizations I have been affiliated with have team-building routines that help strengthen the bond of the organization. Team building exercises or retreats are great ways to build the bonds of your members. The real and most important part of team building is to make sure they are meaningful and relevant. Some of the best team-building exercises were those that made me vulnerable. For example, these were the ones that made me break out of my comfort zone and realize that I cannot achieve it all by myself. The lessons learned from these activities helped me grow. The best thing about it, the people around me grew too. We began to understand our strengths and weaknesses. Where one would fall, someone else was there to assist. We became a much stronger unit. This

made the daily operations more successful and the stress began to fade from everyone.

On the flip side of team building, we have leadership. The leaders need to ensure that they are willing to be part of the team and not above it. Leadership is not, “Do as I say, Not what I do”. True leadership is willing to be just as involved in daily operations as the low man on the totem pole and treat everyone equally. As humans, we can fall into tendencies to which we favor one person over the other, and therefore one or a group of individuals may be able to get away with a few more. This could destroy a team from the inside out and place the whole organization at risk of failing. As a leader, one needs to discover what works for their team and what can help their team grow. The key to success is for everyone to be together as a unit and not fight against one another. The leader should ensure they are a team player as well.

The biggest takeaway is: always remember your organization, company, and industry work best when the team is unified in their goals. Next, activities that are meaningful will always build better bonds for success. Ensure that the intended outcome helps build and grow the unit. There will be a time to support individuals that need it and are loyal and willing to bring success. If they are loyal and willing make time for them.

Lastly, the leaders need to understand they are part of the team and not above the team. They can determine success or failure based on their attitude towards the ones they are leading. As Terry Bradshaw says, “bad attitudes will ruin your team”. Leaders should always be fair and just at the time for them to take action. To quote Abraham Lincoln, “A house divided against itself cannot stand”. I say, “Be the leader; unite your house”. 🌳

*David is a 4th generation cemeterian and a managing partner for Greenlawn Gardens Cemetery, LLC. He has been an educator, counselor, minister, and is active with community and civic organizations in his home city.*



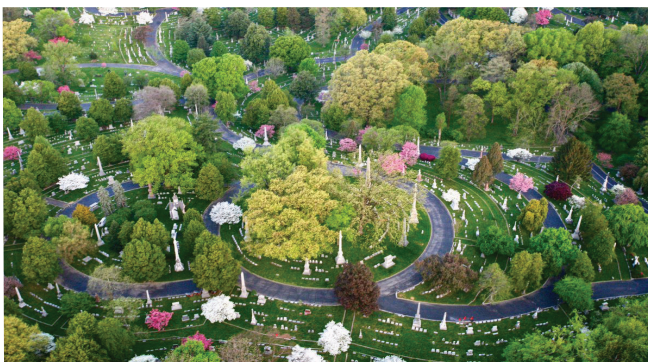
# Cemeteries as Community Assets

By Michael Higgs, SCCFA Board Member  
(Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville, KY)

A determining factor of the success of our business is not the deceased, but actually the living.

Without a life-centric business focus and a plan to connect in meaningful ways to the communities we serve, our relevance begins to diminish quickly over time. When coupled with the changing dynamic of the family unit, i.e. less church families, disconnected families, higher incidences of family disruption, generational disruption, and more, the 1950's era blocks that many of our businesses have been built upon simply will not sustain a long-lasting enterprise in the 21st century.

In *Hallowed Ground, Place, and Culture*, DeMond Miller and Jason Rivera recognized the role of cemeteries in community as more than just a burial ground, "... before the advent of literacy, places served societies as symbols of the distant past and, thus are indispensable for the remembrance of social events; moreover, people are unconsciously linked to places with which they continually come in contact with simply because each person creates his or her own relationship with a certain geographic location." In essence, without a connection to the place, and perhaps one that goes beyond that of simply acknowledging it as a location for the burial of a loved one, you run a great risk of only serving deceased individuals, not the living family and the generations that will follow.



This necessity of people and the centrality of place, which just so happens to be the cemetery, may not be as daunting as it first seems. Perhaps, your own property design (hardscape and landscape) is the first invitation to this sense of place that we should seek to create. Miller and Rivera also reflected on this as they discussed the evolving nature of cemetery design in the late 19th and early 20th century, "With a new emphasis on memory, cemetery design soon began to incorporate nature in the beautification of the final resting place to strengthen the 'interaction' between the dead and living. To make the cemetery a place where the living would feel comfortable, arrangement was created by emulating the plans for a city... This system of placement allows the living to 'roam' throughout a cemetery without the need to constantly walk over and among the actual graves." If you are fortunate to capitalize on the hardscape and landscape design features of your cemetery, this opens up a wave of opportunity.

However, one must understand community dynamic, which requires a look back at the past. Where best to learn this information but your cemetery by examining the life and contributions of those that paved the way to our current state of existence. From this context, you can begin to frame a method of approach to connect people in a relevant way to visit your cemetery and see its value through storytelling. Building and launching a series of relevant cultural programming creates an avenue for individuals to "own space" and build an affinity for continued connectivity.

# Cemeteries as Community Assets (Continued)



A historical tour or development of a program to meet a family where they are can go a long way. The barrier of grief can sometimes deter a family to connect that has sustained a recent loss. However, if you offer a guided meditational walk or forest bathing workshop, for example, you may find a way to maintain a critical connection. Partnering with a local historical organization to highlight symbols and other elements of iconography is a wonderful way to create a multi-dimensional educational approach between students and adults.

The simple act of labeling select plants and trees with common and scientific names is an invitation for the community to 'roam' and create their own value of space.



Miller and Rivera summarize their article in one of the most compelling cases for our cause to redefine the cemetery space, "Humans have created the special nature and culture that influences the cemeteries and the traditions that take place within their confines. Burial sites are centrally significant to a community's sense of well-being and indirectly, to the preservation of history by teaching the living about the past. A cemetery is a living place that reflects the conditions and social realities of the surrounding community both past and present."

The future of our business is reliant on an orientation to serving the needs of a living generation. In what ways can you create a directed connection through storytelling and self-discovery?

A critical assertion is the task of developing a space that is open, inviting and relevant to the community. These gestures are assured to create open opportunities to better serve your current families and the generations that will follow. 🌳



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# A Southern Solution to Staffing

By Jessica Farren (ASD, Media, PA)

Back in 2017, a group of ASD – Answering Service for Director’s longest-tenured employees sat down for a lunch meeting. The topic of the day: how can ASD better support funeral homes located in the southern United States who are looking for an answering service that sounds local to their area? For several hours, the group discussed a number of different options the company had, from seeking out job candidates who had moved to ASD to prefer to have someone answering their phones who sounded more local, ASD began to develop specialized training. This included an extensive review of southern speaking mannerisms and the importance of using pleasantries like ‘Sir’ and ‘Ma’am’ when speaking to these callers. ASD’s technical team also created a “southern group” setting within its answering service system that would automatically route calls for southern belt funeral homes to ASD’s southern-trained staff.

Fast forward to 2021 when the pandemic, coupled with a staffing shortage, prompted ASD to expand the company’s remote capabilities to better support its new work-from-home model. By investing in technology solutions that would allow the company to begin hiring and training employees remotely, ASD was able to cast a wider net and employ staff outside of their local area. This crucial shift gave the company the ability to fill two needs with one deed, growing its workforce by hiring employees in the south.

Today, ASD’s goal of establishing a southern workforce has now been accomplished. The company has a dedicated remote team in South Carolina with more than 70 Call Specialists residing in that state. ASD’s proactive approach to the unprecedented staffing challenges of last year has opened the door for the company to provide an even higher level of service to its clients, especially to thousands of funeral homes located in the southern United States. As an added bonus, ASD is proud to be a source of employment for those living in areas where jobs are increasingly hard to come by.

“I really believe in ASD and what we do. This job gives so many opportunities to people,” says ASD Call Specialist, Nykia Oggs, who works remotely from

Columbia, SC. “This is my first remote position I’ve ever had, and I love avoiding the hustle and bustle of the commute and the fear of not being on-time because of traffic. It’s a lot easier to establish reliability. It’s important for me to know that my company knows they can depend on me. It helps me take pride in my work.”

Nykia is one of four SC-based ASD Call Specialists who was recently promoted to the position of Training Specialist. Creating pathways for remote employees to grow and excel has been vital to the company’s mission of retaining skillful employees who are invested in ASD’s success. This is also foundational to ASD’s new advanced training program which involves of a mix of classroom style and one-on-one training to help new hires gain confidence on the phones.

“I like ASD’s approach in training. They first go through all the terminology but then walk you through hands-on learning the system. Only then do you start listening and participating in calls. It really helps put everything together instead of just giving you all the information at once and throwing you in rotation,” explains Call Specialist, Audrey Fogle, who works remotely from her home in Salley, SC. Like Nykia, Audrey will soon begin her new role as a Training Specialist for ASD.

“I really enjoyed my training experience,” Audrey says. “Everyone seemed so willing to help and provide feedback. The trainers I had during my classes were great especially with all the material you have to get through. And the trainers I had during calls really helped put everything together for me when I went out on my own. They were so patient and informative. I want to give others the same positive experience.”

Nykia is also looking forward to her new role on ASD’s Training Team: “When we were in training, we had a different trainer every day and they all had different styles,” she shares. “It was so helpful to be able to cherry-pick different techniques to create your own. I am always wanting to build up others and make sure everyone feels confident in themselves, so it feels good to have an opportunity to be able to give people that encouragement. I hope to help others come to love the job as much as I do.”

# A Southern Solution to Staffing (Continued)

For funeral homes located in the southern United States, having an answering service that sounds local to the area is an important concern. Many people who call a funeral home are older individuals that may be confused if a voice picks up that sounds too unfamiliar. Having the ability to offer these funeral homes peace of mind of knowing their calls will be answered by someone sounding like they could be down the street is a gamechanger. No longer will southern funeral home owners have to choose between quality and proximity when deciding who to trust with their sensitive calls.

“Over the years, we have spoken to so many funeral home owners in the southern United States who have shared with us how they want to use our answering service, but were nervous our Call Specialists’ accents might cause unnecessary confusion for their callers,” said ASD Vice President and Family-Member Owner, Kevin Czachor. “With our dedicated southern team, these funeral homes no longer have to feel obligated to work with a local company that cannot offer the same level of service as ASD.”

While the company is eager to grow its remote team, ASD does not have any plans to outsource to other countries and is fully committed to keeping all calls answered within the United States. In addition to its South Carolina staff, the company also has employees working remotely from GA, AL, TN and FL. ASD plans to continue expanding its southern team while exploring other possible advantages their new remote model can offer.

To give an example, ASD has worked for more than a decade to build up the company’s Spanish-bilingual team which now includes more than 40 employees. The reason it took so long to establish this team was because ASD was limited to only hiring from the scarce number of bilingual job candidates applying from the company’s local area. Now, with remote technology and the ability to hire people from all over the country, ASD can specifically target states and cities with a high Spanish-speaking population to quickly grow its bilingual workforce.

Whether employees are near or far, one thing everyone working for ASD has in common is a drive to help others. Emotional intelligence is not something you typically see on a resume bullet point. It’s not a quality that can be measured or defined—there is no empathy IQ Test. However, if such a test were to exist, it would undoubtedly have a great deal in common with what is required to work at ASD. It takes a special kind of person to willingly step into the darkness of a stranger’s sadness and pain in hopes of bringing in a little light. Having the ability to cast a wider net to attract those rare personality types to come work for ASD will support the company’s mission to offer funeral homes the most sensitive and compassionate answering service in operation.

“A few months prior to seeing the ad for ASD, I lost my father and my grandfather back to back, three days apart. When I saw the ad, I thought about what it was like to be on the other end of that phone call,” shared NyKia. “I wanted to be that person to show compassion or to assist in any way I can with someone who is experiencing those losses. I have a servant’s heart and I don’t know what I would be doing if I wasn’t helping people.” 🌳

*Jessica Farren (Fowler) is the Public Relations Specialist and Staff Writer at ASD – Answering Service for Directors where she has answered the calls of funeral homes nationwide for more than 18 years. Jessica manages ASD’s blog and social media presence and has also contributed articles on a variety of subjects to funeral trade publications.*

# 2022-2023 SCCFA BOARD OF DIRECTORS





# SCCFA 2022-2023 OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## President

### **Michael J. Phares (22)**

High Lawn Memorial Park  
1435 Main Street East  
Oak Hill, WV 25901  
304-469-3251 (W) 304-663-4646 (C)  
mjphares99@gmail.com

## President Elect

### **Rita Augenstein (20)**

Louisville Memorial Gardens West (Parklawn)  
4400 Dixie Hwy  
Louisville, KY 40216  
765-454-7355#8 (W) 502-640-0664 (C)  
raugenstein@plcorp.com

## 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President

### **Tim Smith (21)**

Gwinnett Cemeteries, LLC  
925 Lawrenceville Hwy  
Lawrenceville, GA 30046  
770-962-7630 (W) 678-860-1374 (C)  
tcsmith13@aol.com

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President

### **Jeremy Weaver (22)**

Carriage Services – Garden of Memories  
6508 Falcon Ridge Lane  
McKinney TX 75071  
682-300-8314 (C)  
jeremy.weaver@carriageservices.com

## Secretary

### **Linda Mayle (17)**

Floral Hills Garden of Memories – (StoneMor)  
6839 Sissonville Drive  
Sissonville, WV 25320  
304-984-0003 (W) 304-203-1809 (C)  
lmayl@stonemor.com

## Treasurer

### **Nancy Massingille (22)**

Gwinnett Cemeteries LLC  
103 Crestview Church Road  
Warner Robins, GA 31088  
478-953-0210 (W) 478-335-6065 (C)  
njmassingille@gmail.com

## Immediate Past President

### **Spencer Hines (17)**

NorthStar Memorial Group  
10406 Greenhedges Dr  
Tampa, FL 33626  
850-530-1537  
spencer.hines@nsmg.com

## Executive Director

### **Cindy Foree**

PO Box 508  
Kingston Springs, TN 37082  
615-714-9605 (C)  
TheSouthern.Office@gmail.com

## Directors

### **Jodie Dupree (23)**

Service Corporation International  
300 Saint Mary's Street  
Raleigh, NC 27605  
919-828-4311 (W) 919-235-7379 (C)  
Jodie.dupree@sci-us.com

### **Michael Higgs (23)**

Cave Hill Cemetery  
701 Baxter Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40204  
502-813-7761 (W) 502-639-9393 (C)  
michael@cavehillcemetery.com

### **Susan Mini (23)**

Sherwood Memorial Park  
1250 East Main Street  
Salem, VA 24153  
540-389-2171(W) 540-537-4647 (C)  
susanm@sherwoodmemorialpark.com

### **Horace Hodges (23)**

Raleigh Memorial Park (SCI)  
7501 Glenwood Ave  
Raleigh, NC 27612  
919-787-2766 (W) 919-632-7134 (C)  
horace.hodges@dignitymemorial.com

### **Nick Startup (24)**

Leaf Cremation  
4355 Hwy 92  
Acworth, GA 30102  
678-653-8538 (W) 770-547-3111 (C)  
nick@leafcremation.com

### **David Sharp (24)**

Greenlawn Gardens Cemetery  
191 Highway 80  
Vicksburg, MS 39180  
601-636-6259 (W) 601-529-4024 (C)  
davidcsharp@att.net

### **Dwane Wills (24)**

Foundations Partners Group  
4901 Vineland Road, Suite 300  
Orlando, FL 32811  
407-583-4735 (W) 239-292-7801 (C)  
dwane.wills@foundationpartners.com

### **Tara Bessling (24)**

NorthStar Memorial Group  
5110 Gallatin Pike  
Nashville, TN 37216  
615-865-1101 (W) 615-210-1976 (C)  
besslingt@nsmg.com

## Directors

### **Susan Barney (25)**

Greenleaf Memorial Park  
900 River Road  
New Bern, NC  
252-633-1440 (W) 252-670-9844 (C)  
sbarney.greenleaf@gmail.com

### **Pierce Dempsey (25)**

Leaf Cremation  
4255 Wade Green Rd. NW Ste 920  
Kennesaw, GA 30144  
678-653-8538 (W) 404-626-3888 (C)  
pierce@leafcremation.com

### **Ellen Wynn McBrayer (25)**

Meadowbrook Memorial Gardens and  
Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes  
1100 Hickory Level Rd.  
Villa Rica, GA 30180  
770-459-3694 (W) 678-410-2548 (C)  
ellen@jones-wynn.net

### **Alberto Pagarizabal (25)**

Fidelity Memorial Group  
1336 Dean Forest Road  
Savannah, GA 31405  
912-233-3557 (W) 281-352-7321 (C)  
alberto@savannahheritage.com

## Past President Representatives

### **John Gouch (23)**

Gethsemane Cemetery & Memorial Gardens  
1504 W Sugar Creed Road  
Charlotte, NC 28262  
704-596-5417 (W) 980-721-1591 (C)  
john@ggethsemanememorial.com

### **Kyle Nikola (24)**

Fidelity Memorial Group  
2794 Hwy 80 W  
Garden City, GA 31408  
732-939-7666 (W) 732-939-7708 (C)  
knikola@fidelitymemorial.com

### **Lauren Blevins (25)**

Polk Memorial Gardens (PLC)  
PO Box 12574  
Columbia, TN 38401  
252-633-1440 (W) 252-636-7325 (C)  
greenleaf.lrc@gmail.com

## Supplier Representatives

### **Linda Jankowski (23)**

webCemeteries.com  
277 Fair Street  
Kutztown, PA 19530  
586-634-1373 (C)  
linda.jankowski@webcemeteries.com

### **Debbie Holmes (24)**

Argent Trust Company  
500 E Reynolds Drive  
Ruston, LA 71270  
318-251-5856 (W) 318-548-6648 (C)  
dholmes@argenttrust.com

# PRESS RELEASE

## **SLG GROUP, INC. TO INVEST \$1.2 MILLION IN SOUTHWEST MOBILE COUNTY**

Mobile, AL--June 30, 2022 -- SLG Group, Inc., owner of Serenity Funeral Home and Cemeteries, is pleased to announce plans to build an estate garden, Serenity Memorial Estates, in southwest Mobile County, AL as part of a \$1.2 million expansion.

The centerpiece of the expansion is Serenity Memorial Estates, a perpetually cared for estate garden featuring stately upright monuments, polished granite benches and paved winding walkways through a garden filled with manicured flowering plants and trees. The estate garden offers many interment and inurnment options allowing families to build their garden so their entire family can rest together forever.

SLG Group, Inc. has retained industry expert EDA Land Planning to design and oversee the construction of the estate garden. Contractor, JLEC, has been tapped to prepare the grounds and build the garden. Construction of Serenity Memorial Estates will begin in June of 2022 and is expected to be completed in the Fall of 2022.

SLG Group, Inc. owns and operates Serenity Funeral Home, Serenity Memorial Gardens, Lawn Haven Memorial Gardens, Serenity Rest, Chapel of the Chimes Mausoleum, and Serenity Event Center. The company has been serving families in Mobile County, AL since 1966.

**Submitted By:  
SLG Group, Inc.  
8691 Old Pascagoula Road  
Theodore, AL 36582  
Randy Granger  
251 653-4781  
randy@serenityfuneralhome.com**



# On The Outside Looking In

By Debbie Holmes - SCCFA Supplier Rep  
(Agent Trust, Ruston, LA)

## Thank You for Your Service

Every chance I get I tell a military veteran "Thank you for your service". This is important to me because my grandfather was a World War II veteran and my husband a Desert Storm veteran. I have heard their stories and I am thankful for all those who have served and sacrificed. Though I have never served in the military, I am very close to those who have.

What I don't always take the time to say to your profession is "Thank you for your service". Though I have never served my community in a cemetery or funeral home, I am very close to those who have. You see, having administered trust accounts for both funeral homes and cemeteries, I have a perspective that many people in our country don't have. I've heard your stories and I've seen your sacrifice.

Many people see you; most people will probably sit with you in the planning room at the nice table at least once if not twice and unfortunately maybe a couple of times after that. You are calm, sympathetic, caring and handle us with kid gloves. You remain professional, you hold it together and you are the only person in the room that is thinking clearly. You have a huge heart. You take phone calls during Thanksgiving dinner to help us know what to do with a tragic loss you don't tell your family about until later. You take our calls in the middle of the night when no one else knows it has happened, on your vacations and in the middle of your families most important occasions. You do that so you can serve us at what will be one of our saddest times in our lives. You serve us well.

While you are serving your communities you are running your business. Like any other manager, employee, or owner, you are dealing with supply chain issues, retaining employees, following codes, inspections and audits and taxes and the list goes on and on. I see you working hard on the "backside". The part that the public doesn't see. You are involved in your state organizations, national organizations, international organizations and state boards and agencies all for the betterment of your profession. You spend your own money and give up your free time to make things better for the consumers.

As fate would have it, I received a call while composing this article that my Aunt Trudy passed away last night. They told me where she was and that "Bob at the funeral home" was taking care of it. The same "Bob at the funeral home" that took care of my Daddy and my Mamaw and many other people in my community. That's what you do. You become our family when we've lost one, and we are comforted when we see you walk in because we know you care.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve you as you serve your communities. We don't forget what you do day in and day out. I will try to remember every chance I get to say "Thank you for your service" because what you do is important to me. 🌳

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*2023 Convention*

*The Park Vista Hotel - Gatlinburg TN*

*June 25 – 27, 2023*

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Cemetery Association of Tennessee  
Kentucky Cemetery Association  
North Carolina Cemetery Association  
South Carolina Cemetery Association

Watch for details on registration: [www.SCCFA.info](http://www.SCCFA.info)  
Contact: Cindy Foree | 615-714-9605 | [TheSouthern.office@gmail.com](mailto:TheSouthern.office@gmail.com)

