FALL 2026

THE THANAGRAM

Official Publication of the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association, Inc.



PRESIDENT'S *message*

Colleagues,

As the leaves begin to change and the season of fall settles in, it is a wonderful time to pause, reflect, and reconnect with one another.

Funeral service is a profession built on connection — connection with the families we serve, with our communities, and with one another. Every day, our members have the privilege and responsibility of helping families navigate some of life's most difficult moments. The compassion, professionalism, and care you provide make a lasting difference.

As we move into the fall season, I hope all of you enjoyed the Fall District Meetings. The programs were informative and the attendance was great at all three. These gatherings are an important opportunity to step away from the day-to-day demands of our businesses, share ideas and experiences, learn from one another, and strengthen the relationships that make our association and our profession stronger.

Our industry continues to evolve, and staying connected is more important than ever. By coming together, we can discuss the challenges we face, celebrate the successes of our profession, and continue looking for ways to better serve the families who place their trust in us.

Be on the lookout for the 2027 Dues Statement that will be coming out soon. We need your support to continue moving TFDA forward. Your membership matters!

Thank you for all that you do for the families and communities you serve.

Wishing you and your families a safe, peaceful, and beautiful fall season.

I look forward to continuing to serve our great profession!

President Matt Sowell

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2026-2027



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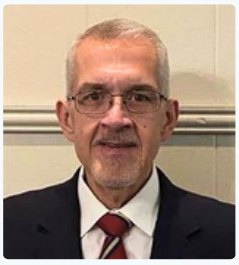

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Our Mission:
To be the Tennessee Funeral Professional leadership advocate, through communication, education, and legislation, thereby empowering the licensed funeral professional the ability to serve at the highest level.

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Be on the lookout for 2027 TFDA Statement of Dues

This year, the Statement of Dues will be sent out the first week of November.
We DID NOT increase the dues this year. We are aware of the increase that was put in place by the TN Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. We certainly did not want to add extra burden to our members and member firms. Be sure to get your dues paid by January 31, 2027, in order to get the best price. Dues will increase beginning February 1st, 2027.

Your dues matter. We are working hard to bring more value to TFDA members. Below are some of the items that we have completed and others that we are working on for 2027.

- New Website
- Weekly Wednesday Emails
- Timely Obit Notices
- Updated Thanagram
- Expanding Continuing Education Offerings
- Expanding Endorsed Providers
- Much more to come...

We hope that you are finding these resources helpful and that you will continue to support TFDA as we help move the funeral profession forward in Tennessee.

Please call the TFDA office if you have any questions at
615-321-8792 or email us at office@tnfda.org



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2026 FALL DISTRICT MEETINGS

The TFDA Fall District Meetings were held the last week in September. Kathy Seele from the TN Office of Vital Records and Executive Director, Jay Slatton provided the Continuing Education program. The TFDA Business meeting was held with Legislative Updates given at each of three districts. As you can see by the photos below, we had great attendance at all 3 meetings. We appreciate those who attended and your continued support of TFDA.













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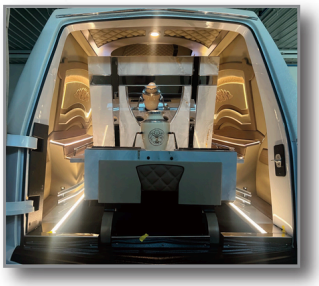







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NFDA and Selected Independent Funeral Homes Announce Intent to Combine Organizations

Brookfield, Wis. / Lincolnshire, Ill. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) and Selected Independent Funeral Homes (Selected) announced today that their Boards of Directors have signed a Letter of Intent to pursue the merger of the two organizations, creating a unified association designed to offer leadership development, professional education and peer engagement while preserving the unique strengths that have defined each organization.

The proposed merger reflects a shared commitment to the future of funeral service. For generations, NFDA has advanced the profession through advocacy, education, research and professional development, while Selected has fostered excellence among independently owned funeral homes through trusted peer relationships, leadership development and collaboration. Together, the associations seek to build on those legacies to better support funeral professionals, strengthen their members, and serve families and communities for generations to come.

The merger is intended to create new opportunities for learning, leadership and professional engagement while preserving trusted peer connections, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the programs and services members value most.
The associations also believe they will be better positioned to respond to the challenges facing funeral service such as economic turbulence, increasing regulatory complexity, workforce shortages and changing consumer expectations.

“Selected has been built on the belief that independent funeral homes are stronger when they learn from one another, challenge one another and hold themselves to the highest standards,” said Barbara Risher Welch, Selected President. “As we looked to the future, our Board asked a simple question: How do we preserve everything our members value while ensuring it continues to thrive for generations to come? We believe this proposed merger with NFDA gives us the opportunity to do exactly that, protecting the Selected community while expanding the resources and support available to our members.”

“Funeral service has always been strongest when leaders come together to prepare for the future rather than simply react to change,” said NFDA President Dan Ford. “This proposed merger reflects a shared belief that we can accomplish more together than either association can alone. We have an opportunity to build an association that is even better equipped to serve funeral professionals, the families who depend on us and the future of our profession.”

If approved by the memberships of both associations, Selected would eventually become a distinct designation and community within a unified NFDA association. The Selected Designation is intended to recognize funeral homes that meet the association’s longstanding standards of excellence while preserving the trusted peer community that has defined Selected for more than a century.

Throughout 2027, both associations would continue operating under their existing membership structures and program offerings while leaders and staff work together to design the integrated organization. A unified membership structure that maintains what members value while building for the future is anticipated to launch in 2028.

Eligible members of both associations will be asked to vote on the proposed merger later this year, in accordance with their governing documents, prior to an official agreement being signed. Additional information, including frequently asked questions, is available at nfda.org/better-together.

About NFDA

NFDA is the world’s leading and largest funeral service association, serving 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit NFDA.org.

About Selected Independent Funeral Homes

Celebrating more than a century of service excellence, Selected Independent Funeral Homes supports and strengthens the top independent firms around the globe, empowering them to achieve their goals by creating business tools, developing education and connecting members to better one another. Its Annual Meeting serves as the premier gathering to shape the future of independent funeral service. For more information, visit the website and follow the association on Facebook, “X” and LinkedIn.

Media Contacts:

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OBITUARIES



Deloy and his wife Diane are the owners and operators of Love Cantrell Funeral Home in Smithville, TN. **Dallas Deloy Kirby**, age 79, of Smithville, entered his eternal home on Thursday, July 16, 2026. Born on January 18, 1947 in Smithville, TN, he was the beloved son of Virgil Lee "Bud" and Audrey Martella Kirby. He married the love of his life, Diane Hooper Kirby, on June 26, 1967, and together they shared 59 wonderful years and built a legacy together that will last for generations to come.

Deloy worked as an inspector at Carrier before pursuing a career at Love-Cantrell Funeral Home in 1978 to pursue his calling to support grieving families. In his early years at the funeral home, he worked the ambulance service for DeKalb County before the county had an ambulance center established.

He and Diane owned and operated Love-Cantrell Funeral Home serving as a pillar of compassion and strength in the community after the passing of his in-laws, Allen and Wilma Hooper. Deloy was a founding board member of DeKalb Community Bank, a member of the TN Cattleman's Association for many years, and a member of Mt. Hope The Baptist Church.

He was a passionate lifetime farmer raising registered Charolais cattle for many years before changing his herd to angus cattle. Deloy enjoyed his weekly appointments to the Warren County Livestock cattle sale. He knew every one of his cows by heart, recognizing each one by its unique markings. With just a glance, he could tell which calf belonged to which mama. To him, they weren't just cattle, they were part of his life. Beyond his career and farm life, he had a deep passion for his family. Whether he was cheering from the sidelines at sporting events, offering solid advice, or sitting under the shed sharing stories, his greatest joy was simply being with his family.

Deloy is survived by his devoted wife, Diane Kirby; his children, whom he adored, Renee (Brad) Hennessee and Chad (Shelia) Kirby; his grandchildren, who were his world, James Caplinger (Linda), Zackary (Tiffany) Caplinger, Dallas Kirby, Brylee Kirby, Katya Hennessee, Valya Hennessee, and Pasha Hennessee; his great-grandchildren, Brookelynn and Brayden Caplinger; 2 step-grandchildren, Michael Roberts and Rylee Roberts; his sister, Doris Fuson; his brother, Darrell (Jewel) Kirby; and his special friend, David Keith.

He is also survived by several nieces, nephews, cousins, and his fur babies, Lacey, Sophie, and Patches. He was preceded in death by his parents, Virgil (Bud) and Martella Kirby, and his brother-in-law, Willie Lee Fuson. Funeral services were held in the chapel of Love-Cantrell Funeral Home. Bro. Dwight Knowles, Bro. Garry McBride, and Bro. Frank Randolph officiated, and interment followed in DeKalb Memorial Gardens.



Mr. Crox is well known in the funeral profession from being a professor to helping his sons at Covenant Funeral & Crematory in Chattanooga, TN.

Walter Lee Crox, 82, of Cleveland, TN, passed away, Tuesday, July 14, 2026. He was predeceased by his wife, Barbara Helen Roberts Crox, parents, Ben M. Crox, Jr. and Virginia Fike Crox. Surviving him are his daughter and son-in-law, Bambi Crox (Steve) Johns; son and daughter-in-law, Walter L. (Cathy) Crox, Jr.; daughter and son-in-law, Jennifer Crox (Barry) Evans; son, Ben M. "Mac" Crox, III & (Earline Fairris); daughter, Monica Crox & (Stacy Smith); grandchildren and spouses are Hunter and Kelsey Johns, Trevor and Hillary Johns, Tyler Lee, Ben M. Crox IV, Macy Crox & (Wyatt Stinnett) and Brenley Evans and a great-grandson, Bode Johns; great-granddaughter, Westlyn Stinnett.

Walter was a fourth-generation funeral professional. He was a graduate of Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He taught funeral service for many years, having served as Program Chairman at Milwaukee Area Technical College, Associate Dean at Gupton-Jones College of Mortuary Science, and Department Chairman at Fayetteville Technical Community College. He was a fifty-plus-year member and past master of Charleston Lodge No. 484, F. & A. M. He was a fifty-plus-year member of the York Rite, a member of the Scottish Rite, and a fifty-plus-year member of Alhambra Shrine Temple. He was a fifty-plus-year member of the Order of Eastern Star and a member of Harmony Chapter 143, Knights of York Rite Cross of Honor, Royal Order of Scotland, and Royal Order of Jesters. He was Past Noble Grand of Ocoee Lodge No. 97, I.O.O.F., and a Life Member of Chattanooga Lodge No. 91, B. P. O. Elks. He was a member of the Board of the Funeral Ethics Organization and Col. Benjamin Cleveland Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution. He was a member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Walter was a licensed embalmer and funeral director in Tennessee and Georgia and a funeral service licensee in North Carolina.

Funeral services were held on July 21, 2026, in St. Luke's Episcopal Church, conducted by Father Joel Huffstetler. Interment followed at Fort Hill Cemetery.

Mr. Birdwell is the father of Mike Birdwell, Funeral Director and Embalmer at TFDA member firm, Hooper Huddleston Horner Funeral Home in Cookeville, TN.



COOKEVILLE CHAPEL - With deep sadness, we announce the passing of **Bobby "Bob" Birdwell** at NHC on Monday, July 20, 2026, surrounded by his family. Bobby "Bob" Lloyd Birdwell was born on November 14, 1941, in Detroit, MI. His parents were Robert and Maggie Birdwell.

On August 26, 1969, he married Phyllis Birdwell and they shared 56 years of marriage. They enjoyed spending time with their family and friends. Bob also enjoyed farming, gardening, and sharing his vegetables with others.

He was a graduate of Jackson County High School and Tennessee Technological University. He was an Office Manager with Production Credit Association and worked in banking throughout his career. He served in the Army National Guard and was in the Gainesboro Rotary Club for many years and he earned the Paul Harris Fellow Award. He was a member of Collegeside Church of Christ.

He is survived by his wife, Phyllis Birdwell of Cookeville, TN. Son, Mike (Amanda) Birdwell of Gainesboro, and daughter, Amy (Ron) Baker of Cookeville; grandchildren, Emma and Anna Baker of Cookeville and Avery and Hayden Birdwell of Gainesboro. He is also survived by brother, Jimmy (Ann) Birdwell of Gainesboro, sisters, Stella Anthony of Mt. Home, AR, Peggy (Bruce) Nesmith of Cookeville and Dorothy Jones of Gainesboro. Additional survivors include sister-in-law Connie Arms of Celina, several nieces and nephews and many friends. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by brothers Ernest D. and Willie Herman and brothers-in-law Kelley Jones, Lindel Anthony and Randall Arms.

Funeral Services were held on July 24th, 2026 in the chapel of Hooper Huddleston and Horner Funeral Home. Interment followed in the Cookeville City Cemetery. Memorial donations may be made to Rash Cemetery, In care of: Jimmy Anderson, 204 James Stafford Road, Gainesboro, TN 38562.

Mr. Manes was a Funeral Director at TFDA Member firm Christian-Sells Funeral Home in Rogersville, TN and the brother of TFDA Past President Charlie Manes.

William C. "Bill" Manes, age 89, of Rogersville, passed away peacefully to his heavenly home on Wednesday, July 22, 2026 with his wife by his side at Laughlin Healthcare Center of Greeneville, TN. He was born on July 30, 1936 just short eight days of being 90 years old.



He was the son of Bruce and Flo Manes and grew up in Bulls Gap, TN. Bill graduated from Bulls Gap High School in 1954. After graduating high school, he worked for Stewart's Funeral Home and obtained his funeral director's license which he kept a lifetime. Also, later in years he attended Walters State for criminal justice but illness prevented him from getting his degree finished. He married Elizabeth Rose Kite on July 22, 1959 which lasted 67 years on July 22, 2026. To this union one son was born, William Joe "Joey" Manes.

Bill changed jobs and went to work at Holston Army Defense Plant in Kingsport, TN. He retired in 1993, after 26 years of service. He then helped his son in the farm store, Circle J for a few years. When Christian-Sells Funeral Home opened up in 2001, he worked for them until his declining health.

Bill was a member and Deacon of Marion Robinette Memorial Primitive Baptist Church. He was a 65-year member of Bulls Gap Masonic Lodge No. 764 F&AM and Eastern Star. He was a member of the Shrine Clubs and Jericho Shrine Temple of Kingsport. Bill was on the board of directors of Lexington Shrine Hospital for several years. Also, he was a board member of the Hawkins County Rescue and EMS for several years. He was a member of the Police Auxiliary and a former Hawkins County Deputy Coroner.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Bruce and Flo Manes; son, William Joe "Joey" Manes; sisters, Barbara Burkhart (John), Sarah Haskins (Chester); father-in-law and mother-in-law, Joe and Mildred Kite. He is survived by his loving wife of 67 years, Elizabeth Rose Kite Manes; brother, Charles Manes (Marilyn); daughter-in-law, Frankie Manes; like a son, Lester Wallace; special friends, Chris Christian and James Sells; six nephews which he loved dearly; several great-nephews, great-nieces, cousins, and many friends that he cherished very much.

The family of William wishes to extend their sincere thanks to Laughlin Healthcare Center for their kind and gentle care for him, the Lawson Family and Wallace Family for loving kindness they shown us, and our Church Family for all they have done for us.
Funeral and Masonic services were held on July 25th, 2026 at Christian-Sells Funeral Home with Elder Curtis Hale officiating. Graveside services were held the following day at Kite Cemetery.

Mrs. Rita was a funeral director and pre-need agent for over 33 years serving the past 3 and a half years at Humphreys County Funeral Home in Waverly, TN.

It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of **Mrs. Rita Gale Kennerly Oliphant**, age 71, of McEwen, TN who passed away Friday, July 24, 2026, at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, TN. She was born on February 16, 1955, in Waverly, TN to Charlie and Elese Kennerly.



Rita was a lifelong resident of McEwen, Tennessee, and a proud 1973 graduate of McEwen High School. She was a faithful member of Liberty Baptist Church in McEwen and was known for her warm heart and love of spending time with family and friends. Rita especially enjoyed cruising, playing cards, dining out, and making lasting memories with her beloved "Yah" Girls.

A licensed funeral director and insurance agent, Rita dedicated her life to serving others during their times of greatest need. She faithfully served families through her work at Luff-Bowen Funeral Home for 30 years before continuing her ministry of compassion at Humphreys County Funeral Home for an additional three and a half years. She considered it a privilege to care for the families she served, and her kindness, professionalism, and genuine compassion left a lasting impression on countless lives. Funeral Services for Mrs. Rita were conducted on July 27, 2026, from the Chapel of Humphreys County Funeral Home with her cousin, Russell Gill officiating. Interment followed in Richlawn Cemetery.

Survivors: Loving Husband of 52 years: James Walter “Man” Oliphant of McEwen, TN. Son: Joshua James Oliphant (Marlaina) of Orange, TX. Daughter: Lesli Ann Oliphant (James Gibson) of McEwen, TN. Brothers: Larry “Easy” Kennerly of McEwen, TN and Randy Kennerly of Henning, TN. Sister: Janis K. Mayse (Glenn) of Martin, TN. Granddaughters: Giavanna Oliphant and Katie Ann Oliphant. Step Grandson: Cameron Gibson. Preceded in death by: Parents: Robert “Charlie” Kennerly and Elese Holland Kennerly. Brothers: Rickey Kennerly and Jeffery Kennerly.



Former longtime President of Memphis Funeral Home and Market Director, E.C. Daves passed away on Monday, July 27, 2026.

Everett Claude (E. C.) Daves Jr., 79, of Germantown, Tennessee, passed peacefully into the presence of his Lord and Savior on July 27th, 2026, surrounded by the love of his family. Born October 26th, 1946, in Bruce, Mississippi, E. C. lived a life defined by unwavering faith, quiet strength, and a servant’s heart. He never met a stranger and had a gift for mentoring and making people feel welcome. In 1969, he began his career in funeral service at McDonald Funeral Home in Picayune, Mississippi, answering a calling that became his lifelong ministry. Above all else, E. C. was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, and friend.

He is survived by his loving wife of 57 years, Virginia (Ginny) Daves; his daughter Christina Daves Erickson and her husband Pete; daughter-in-law Mary Daves; his grandchildren Jessica Daves Warden and her husband Nicholas, Christian Leininger, Huston Akins, Kayla Daves, Zachary Akins, and Christopher Daves: step-grandchildren Blake Erickson and his wife Asha, Chase Erickson and Logan Erickson; and his newest great-grandson Renly Jasper Warden. He was preceded in death by his parents Everette and Lorene Daves, his sister Ann Daves Finnie, and his beloved son Stephen Christopher Daves.

E.C. will be remembered for his unwavering love of family, his faithful service to others, and the lasting impact he made on everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.
Funeral services were held at Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens located at 3700 N. Germantown Parkway, Bartlett, Tennessee 38133 with Rev. Jimmy Latimer and Jonathan Matthews officiating. Burial followed in Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens Cemetery.



Mrs. Evans is the mother of Thomas "Butch" Evans and Grandmother of Aylor Evans, owners of Evans Mortuary in Rockwood, TN. Both Aylor and Butch are longtime members and supporters of TFDA. **Virginia T. Evans,** age 99 of Rockwood, went to her Heavenly home on Sunday, August 9th, 2026. She was born on June 29th, 1927. She retired after 34 years of service with the state of Tennessee as the office manager for the Tennessee Dept. of Employment Security. She was a member of Asbury Methodist Church in the Eureka community of Rockwood, TN. She served the church in a number of roles, and taught adult Sunday school for 40+ years. After she retired from the state, she was involved in the operations of Evans Mortuary with her son and late husband since 1976.

She is preceded in death by her parents: Charlie Teague & Alma Keith Teague; husband: Thomas R."Bob" Evans Sr; brother: Jimmie "Bud" Teague; daughter-in-law: Hyda Evans. She is survived by: Son: Thomas R. "Butch" Evans Jr. Granddaughters: Misty Reagan (Michael), Lindsey Lewallen (Brad). Grandson: Aylor Evans (Jessica). Great-Grandchildren: Rhett Nelson (Olivia), Aidan Lewallen, Lydia Lewallen. Great-Great-Grandchildren: Walker Nelson & Millie Nelson. Special Family Friends: Phyllis Thompson, Mary & John Rinke, Rev. Paul Johnston & Betty Johnston, and the rest of her Asbury family and a host of other extended family members and friends.

Funeral services were held on August 14th, 2026, in the chapel of Evans Mortuary with Bruce Foster & Pastor Steve Parker officiating. Interment will follow in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Rockwood. Interment followed in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Rockwood.

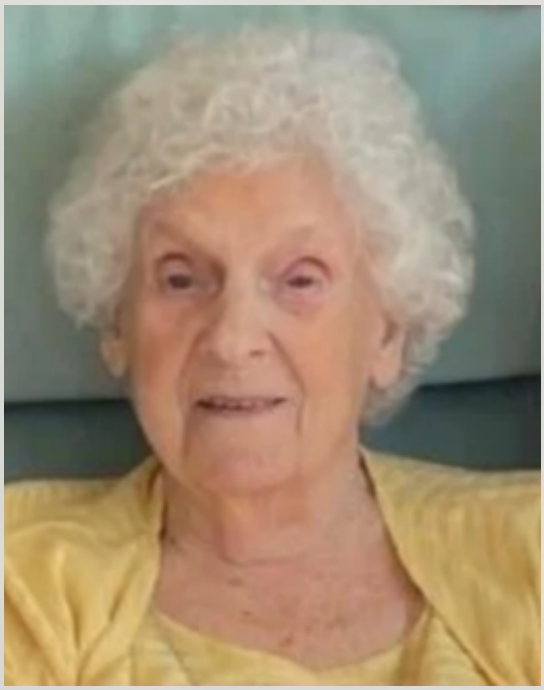
Mrs. Berry is the mother of Donna Collard, Director of Funeral Service Education at John A. Gupton College and the grandmother of Nathanael Collard, Manager of Shackelford Funeral Directors in Savannah, TN.



Flora Fay Berry, 92, of Clarkton, Missouri, passed away on Saturday, August 22, 2026, at her residence in Clarkton, Missouri. Flora was born on Sunday, November 12, 1933, in Fagus, Missouri to the late Wesley and Cecil Winder Williams. Flora dedicated many years to the Clarkton School District, where she worked as a custodian and bus driver. She was also a long-time member of Malden First Assembly of God. On November 8, 1986 in Clarkton, Missouri, she was united in marriage to Leonard Berry. He preceded her in death on June 18, 1995.

Her survivors include two daughters, Donna Collard of Dickson, Tennessee and Lenora Tripp of Clarkton; two sons, Vernon Scott and wife, Debbie of Gideon and Donald Wayne Scott of Camden, Tennessee; nine grandchildren, Rachel Rueff (Jeffrey), Nathanael Collard (Falin), Staci Barnes (Chris), Stephanie Worrall (Zach), Sheri White (Devon), Wesley Scott (Tiffany), John Hill, Mikey Hill and MiKayla Tripp and 19 great-grandchildren. In addition to her parents and husband, she was preceded in death by her first husband, V.A. Scott and sister, Mary Lou Stoker.

Funeral Services were held on August 29, 2026 at the Landess Funeral Home in Malden, Missouri, with Reverend Deric Calvert officiating. Burial followed at Qulin Cemetery in Qulin, Missouri.



Mrs. Crowe is the grandmother of Emily Grace Crowe Tate, a funeral director and embalmer at Kyker Funeral Homes, a TFDA member firm. **Mary Ellen Crowe,** age 92 of Coalfield, Tennessee, peacefully passed from this earthly life into the arms of her Savior and was joyfully reunited with her beloved husband Boyd Crowe on Friday, August 28, 2026. She was surrounded by the love of family and friends, leaving behind a legacy of kindness, faith, and service that touched countless lives. Mary Ellen was a devoted Christian whose strong faith guided her throughout her life. She was a member of Corbin Hill Baptist Church. She lived her beliefs daily through acts of compassion, generosity, and unwavering love for others. Her church, her community, and her family were at the center of everything she did.

She was known for her love of cooking and baking, especially fried apple pies and stack cakes. She and her fried pies were featured in a WBIR news story (Morgan County woman makes fried apple pies to fundraise). Whether gathering family around the table, sharing food with neighbors, or helping others in times of need, Mary Ellen's kitchen was a place of warmth, fellowship, and care. Serving her community was one of her greatest joys, and she never hesitated to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed it.

Above all, Mary Ellen cherished her family. She was a devoted mother to 4 children, Tony (Midge), Becky (Steve), Judy (Ryan) and Scott (Gwen). She was also a beloved grandmother, treasured great-grandmother, and proud great-great-grandmother. In addition, she was a loving aunt to many nieces and nephews and a faithful friend to countless others. Her wisdom, encouragement, and unconditional love touched generations and will be remembered always. Family was her greatest joy and most precious blessing, and she took immense pride in each of their accomplishments, milestones, and moments shared together. Her legacy of love will continue to live on in the hearts of all who knew and loved her.
Mary Ellen also treasured time spent with family and friends around the Rook and Canasta card tables. Despite her poor eyesight, she was known for her remarkable skill at both games, a sharp memory, and perhaps just a little bit of card counting. Her friendly competitive spirit and knack for winning made every game memorable. Family and friends fondly recall the laughter, playful banter, and good-natured teasing that accompanied her many victories. Whether gathered around the table for a serious game or simply enjoying one another's company, time spent with Mary Ellen was filled with joy, fellowship, and unforgettable memories.

Mary Ellen Crowe's memory will forever remain in the hearts of her family, friends, and community. Her life was a beautiful example of faith in action, and the love she shared will never be forgotten.
She is survived by her children (listed above), grandchildren: Ray Adcock, Malinda (Bill) Smith, Elisha (Rick) Laymance, Regina (Isaac) Maceo, Steven (Paige) Patton, Richie (Monica) Patton, Wayne Phillips (Chrissy Burton), Amanda (Chris) Hill, Joey Hargis, Ben Hargis, Jacob Lively, Emily Grace (Brad) Tate, Zach Crowe (Kailey Kreis), great-grandchildren, Devin (Casey) Smith, Vanessa (Derek) Heidel, Don (Amber) Laymance, Abby Laymance, Sara Patton, Caleb Patton, Kali Mayes, James Patton, Riley Patton, Madilyn Patton, Brooklyn Patton, Corbin Burton, Sonny Phillips , Harper Hill, Asher Crowe, great-great grandchildren Aiden, Bryson, Axle, Sophia, Ian, Marley, Shiloh, Abby.
Funeral Services were held at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church. Graveside service held in Batley Baptist Church Cemetery.

Though she will be deeply missed, those who knew and loved Mary Ellen find comfort in knowing that her faith has carried her home. Her legacy of love, service, perseverance, and devotion to family will continue to inspire all who were blessed to know her. "Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:23



Cayley served her community through TFDA member firm, Woodlawn-Roesch-Patton Funeral Home & Memorial Park in Nashville, TN. She began her career there in 2018 and had served as the Care Center Manager since 2023.

Cayley Kristin Freeman, 55, of Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, passed away on Friday, August 28, 2026 after ending her battle with cancer in a draw. Her strength and persistence continue even beyond her and are an inspiration to all who loved her.

She was born in Glendale, California on March 13, 1971. Cayley graduated from John A. Gupton College and received an associate's degree in Mortuary Science. Cayley's academic accomplishments remain a pinnacle of inspiration for her family, friends, and colleagues. Cayley took all challenges head-on—this was no exception. Receiving honors with her degree, she will always be immortalized as the smart cookie that she is.

Cayley was married to Will Freeman on Saturday, October 16, 1999, in Orlando, Florida in the middle of Hurricane Irene. This storm could only challenge the smallest percentage of the great force that Cayley was. The pair's love is impossible to put into words; spanning across decades, Cayley and Will faced everything together in stride. The family takes great comfort in knowing that Cayley will stand by Will every step of the way, though she may have to hear him get pop culture references wrong.

Cayley had a career in funeral service for Woodlawn-Roesch-Patton Funeral Home & Memorial Park. She was an avid supporter of animal welfare and rehabilitation. She spent her life loving flowers, the very highest heels, Keith Urban, and living life to the fullest. Her family and friends know that the flowers will grow a little brighter now that she is watering them.

She is survived by her husband, Will; her daughter, Aspyn (L.J); her mother, Jill; her sisters, Jennifer (Geoff) and Rachelle (Kathleen); her aunt, Gail (Ron); her cousins, Terry, Kristin (Thomas), and Kori (Alex); her father-in-law, Bill; her sister-in law Stephanie (David); her nieces, Kendall and Sydney; and countless other family members, friends, and maybe a few enemies. She is preceded in death by her father, Richard and her mother-in-law, Bette.

A celebration of Cayley's life took place September 5th, 2026 at the Hilton Nashville Downtown.

Mr. Murphy was a longtime member and supporter of TFDA having owned Murphy Funeral Home in Martin, TN. He was honored as the 2014 inductee into the TFDA Wall of Fame. He was an instrumental part of TFDA having served many years as the Government Affairs Committee Chairman. He also served two terms on the TN State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers.



Mr. David W. Murphy, Sr., and a lifelong resident of Martin, Tennessee, passed away on Monday, September 7, 2026, surrounded by his loved ones at Van Ayer Nursing Home in Martin. David leaves behind a remarkable legacy of service, devotion, and love for his family, his community, and the funeral profession to which he dedicated his life.

He was born on February 7, 1939, to the late Douglas Ruel Murphy and Montez Winstead Murphy in Martin, Tennessee. Martin was not simply the place where David was born; it was his home, his community, and a place to which he gave so much of himself. Throughout his life, he invested his time, his talents, and his heart in the people, businesses, organizations, and institutions that make Martin special.

David was a proud United States Army veteran, serving from 1963-1965 during the era of the Korean conflict. His time and service included 13 months in South Korea working in the U.S. Army Mortuary. His military service reflected the same sense of duty, responsibility, and commitment that would define so much of his life.

He graduated from Martin High School in 1957 and continued his education at The University of Tennessee at Knoxville before transferring back home to The University of Tennessee at Martin where he received his degree in Physical Science and Liberal Arts in 1961 and was a member of Phi Sigma Kappa Fraternity. He later attended John A. Gupton Mortuary School in Nashville, Tennessee, pursuing his education in funeral science and embalming. He served as President of his class and graduated in 1962.

David went on to build a distinguished career as a funeral director, mortician, and 3rd generation owner of Murphy Funeral Home, Murphy Florist, and St. Charles Flowers and Gifts in Martin. For David, funeral service was never simply a profession – it was a calling. He believed in being there for families during some of the most difficult moments of their lives, offering compassion, dignity, comfort, guidance, and respect when they needed it most.

Over the years, David became a respected leader in the funeral profession. He was a longtime member and supporter of the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association. He was honored as the 2014 inductee into the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association Wall of Fame. He was an instrumental part of TFDA having served many years as the Government Affairs Committee Chairman. A dedicated public servant, he honorably served two terms as President on the Tennessee State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers, having received gubernatorial appointments from both Governor Ned Ray McWherter and Governor Phil Bredesen. His knowledge, leadership, and dedication earned him the respect of those who worked alongside him and the trust of the countless families he served.

David's commitment to service extended far beyond his profession. He believed strongly in giving back to the community that had given him his home. Beginning in 1973, he served as a Martin alderman and remained actively involved in numerous city boards and civic organizations. He served approximately 15 years as a director on the board for Volunteer General Hospital as well as Chairman. He worked to help strengthen the community and improve the lives of the people in Martin.

His civic involvement included the American Legion Post 55, Martin Rotary Club for over 60 years where he served as President, and the Elks Lodge. He was a longtime supporter of The University of Tennessee at Martin, he was a member of the Captains Club, and the UTM Board of Governors. David never sought recognition for his service. For him, serving his community was simply part of who he was. He believed that when you belong to a community, you have a responsibility to make it better than you found it.

At the heart of David's life, however, was his family. His family was among his greatest sources of pride and joy. The love he gave them and the lessons he passed down will remain a part of his family's story for generations to come.

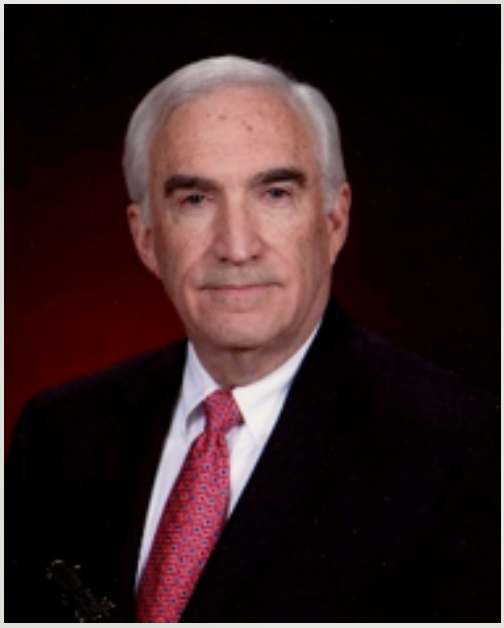
David was more than a funeral director, a veteran, a businessman, or a civic leader. He was a pillar of the Martin and Weakley County community. His life was woven into the fabric of the town and county he loved. Through the funeral home he operated, the businesses he built, the boards on which he served, the organizations he supported, and the countless lives he touched, David helped shape the community he called home. His influence reached generations of families throughout Martin and Weakley County. He was someone many people turned to in times of sorrow, a neighbor who believed in giving back, a leader who believed in his community, and a father and grandfather whose greatest legacy will always be the family he loved.

David's passing leaves an immeasurable absence. He will be deeply missed by his family, friends, colleagues, fellow veterans, and the many families whose lives he touched throughout his years of service. Yet while his presence is gone, the legacy he built remains. David gave a lifetime to Martin, Tennessee. He served it, he believed in it, and helped make it better. His earthly work is finished, but his legacy of love, service, and devotion lives on.

David is survived by his children Jennifer Murphy Gaw of Nashville, TN, David Winstead Murphy, Jr. of Martin, TN, and Ginger Ellen Murphy of Martin, TN; his grandchildren, Jeannette Arnold Gaw of Chicago, IL and 1st Lieutenant Douglas Murphy Gaw of San Diego, CA; Nathan Tyler Perry of Lebanon, TN; and Mary Elizabeth Higgs and Murphy Michael Higgs of Martin, TN.

In addition to his parents, Doug and Montez Murphy, David is preceded in death by his aunt Pearl Annette Winstead Wiles, his uncle Sam Atkins Winstead, and his beloved wife Patty Futrell Murphy of 49 years.

Funeral services for Mr. Murphy were held on September 12, 2026, at Murphy Funeral Home in the funeral chapel. Burial followed at Eastside Cemetery.



Mr. Looney was the owner of TFDA member firm, McEvoy Funeral Home in Paris, TN.

William Thompson Looney, age 82, passed away at Ascension St. Thomas Hospital on Sunday afternoon, September 6, 2026. Funeral services were held on September 11, at McEvoy Funeral Home, with John Dale and Rob Touchstone officiating. Burial followed at Hillcrest Cemetery.

He was born at home on November 21, 1943, in Henry County, TN, to the late William Curtis and Mary Sue Thompson Looney. On August 27, 1966, he married Ann Carol Roberts, who was his beloved wife for 60 years until his passing.

He is survived by his wife and his sister Suzanne Looney Richter, Springville, TN; three children: Tara Looney Swafford, Franklin, TN, Mark Roberts (Stephanie) Looney, San Francisco, CA, and Aimee Looney (Rob) Touchstone, Nolensville, TN; grandchildren: William Tyler, Thomas (Radley), and Travis Swafford, Taylor and Bennett Looney, Anna, John Mark, Mary Ann, and Andrew Touchstone; great-grandchildren: Mary Maclaine, Shepherd, and Vivian Swafford; cousins: Jane Gibson, Tommy Thompson, David Rickleton, John Rickleton, Karen Dargan, Jane Overton, and Baker Kendall; sisters-in-law: Helen (Pat) Deese and Marilyn (Rick) Drake. In addition to his parents, he was preceded by a special aunt, Annie Warren Looney Mills.

Mr. Looney was committed to his family, his church, his work, and his community. Nothing pleased him more than a long day's work and entertaining friends and family over a meal with stories of his many endeavors. He was an exceptionally hard worker. He practiced law and owned a funeral home and cattle farm in Paris. He began his law practice in Paris in 1970 after graduating from David Lipscomb College in 1966 and Memphis State University Law School in 1969. He helped innumerable individuals and businesses from his office at the corner of North Poplar and West Washington streets. He was a solo practitioner with exceptional expertise in many areas of the law. He was honored to be Paris's top-voted attorney in the Paris Post-Intelligencer Readers' Choice Awards. He held numerous leadership positions on local boards and organizations.

Mr. Looney was also the proud owner, President, and Funeral Director of McEvoy Funeral Home, a family business serving the Paris and Henry County community since 1901.
Outside of work, he enjoyed following the musical and sporting endeavors of his grandchildren. He was an avid sports fan, serving as the Voice of the Patriots and loyally following the Kentucky Wildcats and St. Louis Cardinals in good seasons and bad. He enjoyed traveling, the outdoors, his many family dogs (especially Sally), mowing his lawn, and working on the family farm in Elkhorn. He was a lifetime servant of the Lord, preaching at small churches in Henry County, leading singing, and teaching classes. He was a member of Glendale Road Church of Christ in Murray, KY, where he served as an elder. He will be dearly missed by his family, employees, and clients.



Summer 2026 - Top 10%

Samantha Blake - Maryville, TN
Jerry Carpenter - Chapmansboro, TN
Trina Donica - Madison, TN
Gage Evans - Abbeville, SC
Olivia Giordano - Nashville, TN
Madison McCullah - Goodlettsville, TN
Breanne Rainey - Dale, IN
Brian Robertson - Lebanon, TN
McKenzie Savage - Gruetli-Laager, TN
Jamie Simms - Lebanon, TN
William White - Rome, GA
Erika Wilder - Cadillac, MI
Jessica Williams - Greenville, MS

2026 Graduation Information

John A. Gupton College's graduation ceremony will begin at 1:30 PM CST on Thursday, December 10th at the Maxwell House Hotel, 2025 Rosa L. Parks Blvd, Nashville, TN 37228.

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Remembering

Mike Nicodemus

1952 - 2026



Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is mourning the death of longtime colleague Mike Nicodemus, a nationally recognized cremation expert and educator whose more than 50-year career in funeral service had a profound impact on the profession. Nicodemus, who served as NFDA's vice president of cremation services, died peacefully September 19 in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He was 73.

"It is difficult to put into words what Mike meant to all of us at NFDA," said NFDA CEO Christine Pepper, CAE. "For 13 years, he gave so much of himself to this organization, our members and a profession he truly loved. Mike had an incredible depth of knowledge, but he never kept it to himself. He was always willing to take the call, answer the question, tell the story or spend a little more time helping someone understand. That generosity was simply who Mike was. We will miss his expertise, certainly, but even more, we will miss Mike – our colleague, our friend and a very special part of the NFDA family."

A Career Devoted to Funeral Service

Born September 22, 1952, in Altoona, Pennsylvania, Nicodemus graduated from Altoona Area High School, where he excelled in basketball, baseball and track. He attended Nathaniel Hawthorne College in Antrim, New Hampshire, before enrolling at the Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science (PIMS). After graduating from PIMS in 1974, he began a career in funeral service that would span more than five decades.

Nicodemus joined Hollomon-Brown Funeral Home & Crematory in Virginia Beach in 1979, beginning a 35-year tenure with the firm. He eventually rose to vice president of cremation operations before retiring from Hollomon-Brown in 2013 and joining NFDA that same year.

A licensed funeral director and one of the profession's most respected authorities on cremation, Nicodemus also served as president of the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). Throughout his career, he was a strong advocate for due diligence and professional standards in cremation. His expertise was frequently sought in cremation-related litigation, where he served as an expert witness, and he became a trusted resource for funeral professionals navigating the operational and risk-management issues surrounding cremation.

Transforming Cremation Education

When Nicodemus joined NFDA, he took on the task of developing what became one of the association's most successful educational programs. He launched the Certified Crematory Operator Program in 2013, which later evolved into the NFDA Cremation Certification Program to better reflect the diverse roles funeral professionals play throughout the cremation process.

During his 13 years with NFDA, Nicodemus continuously expanded and strengthened the program. He traveled extensively throughout the United States and internationally to teach cremation best practices, due diligence and risk management. He also staffed NFDA's Cremation Hotline and authored numerous resources that helped funeral professionals answer questions, solve problems and better serve families.

His influence extended well beyond the classroom. Known throughout funeral service for his deep expertise and willingness to share it, Nicodemus became a trusted resource and mentor to funeral directors at every stage of their careers.

Nicodemus was also a memorable presence. Tall and unmistakable, with a booming voice that could command a room, he brought warmth, humor and an obvious passion for funeral service to his teaching. In the classroom, where he was perhaps most at home, his decades of experience came alive through stories, practical advice and a genuine desire to help other funeral professionals succeed.

"Mike was one of those people you were always glad to see," said NFDA President Dan Ford. "He had a presence about him – you knew when Mike was in the room – but behind that booming voice was an incredibly warm and generous person. Nowhere was that more evident than when he was teaching. Mike loved sharing what he knew, and he wanted every funeral director in that room to leave better prepared to care for families. He taught so many of us, challenged us and made our profession better. That is a legacy that will live on for a very long time."

A Lasting Legacy

Nicodemus' influence on cremation education will continue through the program he spent more than a decade building. In 2026, as he prepared to retire from his work with NFDA, the association began transitioning leadership of the Cremation Certification Program while ensuring the standards, rigor and emphasis on due diligence that Nicodemus championed would remain at its core.

For Nicodemus, funeral service was more than a career. He often described being a funeral director as "a calling, not a job," and took particular pride in knowing that he had helped families through some of the most difficult moments of their lives. His commitment to families, to funeral professionals and to continually raising the standards of the profession defined his career.

Away from funeral service, Nicodemus was an avid sports fan who followed the Boston Celtics and Pittsburgh Steelers and especially enjoyed college basketball and March Madness. His work also gave him the opportunity to travel extensively with his wife, Elizabeth, eventually visiting all 50 states. Those who knew him also knew his enthusiasm for a great meal and his ability to recommend a favorite restaurant in seemingly any city.

Nicodemus is survived by his wife of 32 years, Elizabeth; daughter, Erin (Wendell) Van Houten of Virginia Beach; son, Ryan (Stacy) Nicodemus of Midlothian, Virginia; and four grandchildren, Garrett, Evan, Ella and Graham. He was preceded in death by his parents, Maxine (Nicodemus) Larson and Richard Nicodemus; stepfather, Donald Larson; sister, Ann Harshbarger; brother, Patrick Nicodemus; and daughter, Erica Nicodemus.

His obituary is available at hollomon-brown.com.

NFDA and the Funeral Service Foundation have established the Michael Nicodemus Memorial Scholarship to honor Nicodemus' memory and ensure that his commitment to education and the funeral service profession continues to benefit future generations of funeral professionals. Please visit funeralservicefoundation.org/donate-nicodemus to make a contribution.

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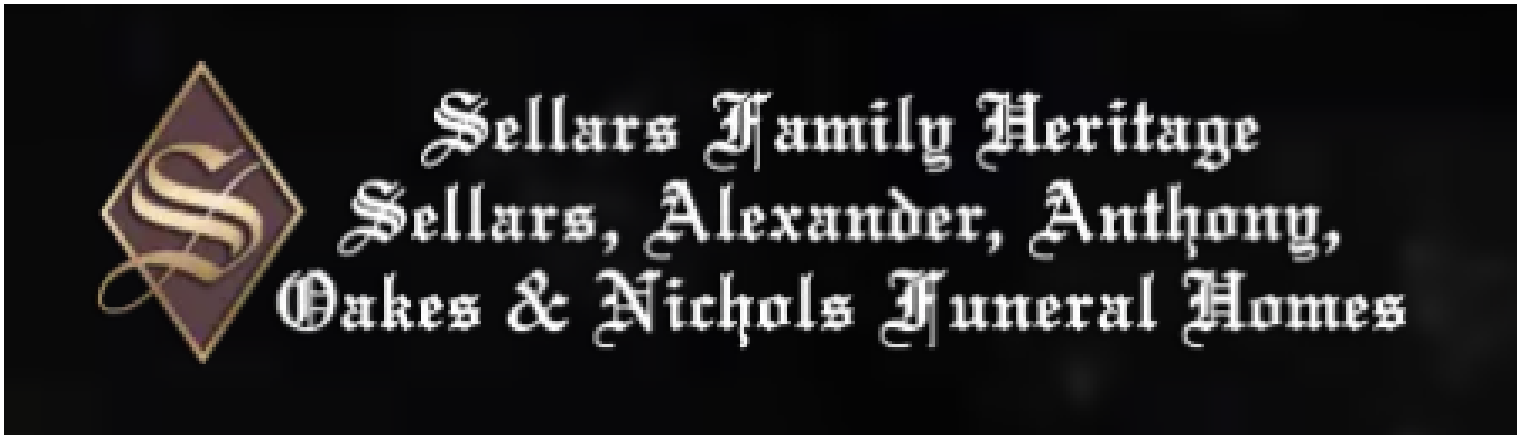

Earlier this year, a great time was had by all at the TFDA President's Retreat hosted by Matt Sowell. The day started with a round of golf at Pillow Springs Golf Course in Columbia, TN. Later that evening a delicious meal was provided by the clubhouse staff. TFDA would like to give a huge thank you to Judd Sellars for sponsoring the event.

We still have a few lapel pins left over from the district meetings. If you were unable to attend the meetings and would like to purchase one please contact the TFDA office. Lapel pins are $10 each and TFDA will cover the shipping cost. Your support matters!

EXCITING NEWS!

TFDA now has official clothing with the new updated logo. We have partnered with Coats Clothing in Florence, Alabama to offer you several apparel items to show your support of TFDA. Items can be purchased directly from the website @ tnfda.org





