

THE THANAGRAM

Official Publication of the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association, Inc.



PRESIDENT'S *message*

Colleagues,

It is an honor to begin serving as President of the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association. I appreciate the trust placed in me and look forward to working alongside each of you this year. I would also like to express my gratitude for the job our new executive director, Jay Slatton, has done his first few months in that role.

Funeral service in Tennessee remains strong because of the professionals who serve families with consistency and integrity every day. While the profession continues to shift — particularly with the continued growth of cremation and evolving service preferences — our responsibility remains steady. Whether a family chooses a traditional service, a personalized gathering, or a simple direct disposition, they deserve thoughtful, professional care.

The 2027 convention will be back in Franklin, at the Embassy Suites. Our theme for this year, “Rooted in Tradition, Riding Toward Growth,” reflects a practical focus. Tradition gives us our foundation. Growth ensures we remain effective, engaged, and relevant as an Association.

One of my priorities this year is participation. A strong TFDA depends on active members — not only through dues, but through attendance, mentorship, and engagement at the district level. I encourage you to attend your district meetings, take advantage of continuing education opportunities, and reach out to colleagues who may not yet be involved.

Our collective voice is strongest when we are unified and informed.

Thank you for the work you do in your communities and for your continued support of TFDA. I look forward to seeing many of you in the months ahead.

President Matt Sowell

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TFDA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2026-2027



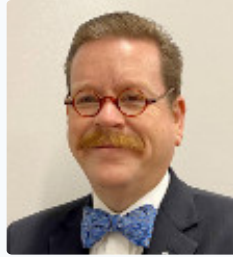
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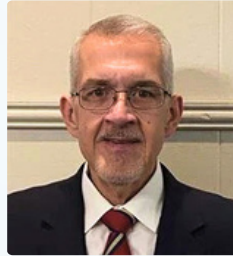
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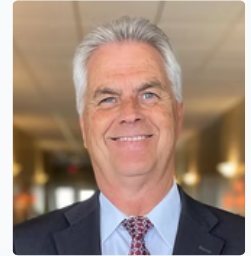
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Our Mission:

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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TFDA Honors Bob Batson

35 Years of Dedicated Service

The Tennessee Funeral Directors Association proudly recognizes Robert W. “Bob” Batson for his extraordinary 35 years of service as Executive Director and his lasting contributions to the funeral profession throughout Tennessee.

For more than three decades, Bob has been the steady leadership force behind TFDA, guiding the association through significant growth, legislative initiatives, educational advancements, and countless opportunities that have strengthened funeral service across the state.

His dedication to supporting funeral professionals, advocating for the profession, and promoting the highest standards of service has left an enduring impact on generations of funeral directors and embalmers. Bob has served as Executive Director of TFDA for decades and continues to be a respected leader and educator within the profession.



In recognition of his unwavering commitment, visionary leadership, and distinguished career, TFDA was honored to induct Bob Batson into the TFDA Wall of Fame during the 123rd annual convention held in Chattanooga. This prestigious recognition celebrates individuals whose service and accomplishments have significantly advanced the association and the funeral profession.

Throughout his tenure, Bob has been a mentor, advocate, and friend to funeral service professionals across Tennessee. His passion for the profession, dedication to education, and commitment to serving TFDA members have helped shape the association into the respected organization it is today.

As he joins the TFDA Wall of Fame, we extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to Bob Batson for 35 remarkable years of leadership, service, and devotion to Tennessee funeral service. His legacy will continue to inspire future generations of funeral professionals for years to come.





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NFDA ELECTION RESULTS ARE IN AND TN LEADS THE WAY FOR A 3rd CONSECUTIVE YEAR IN TOTAL VOTES.

With only two states having over 100 total votes, TN led the way with 151 votes. Thank you for making Tennessee's voice heard on a national level. The following is the press release from NFDA:

Eligible voting members of the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) have elected new officers to serve on the association's Board of Directors, selecting leaders who will help guide NFDA's efforts to support funeral professionals, advocate for the profession and strengthen service to families and communities. Elected to serve as officers on the 2026-27 Board of Directors were President-elect Steve Spann, CFSP, CCO, of Spann Funeral Home in Dickson, Tennessee; Treasurer Ellen Wynn McBrayer, CFSP, CPC, CCO, of Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory in Villa Rica, Georgia; and Secretary Carlton Maye Jr., MBA, CFSP, CCO, of Serenity Funeral Home in Dublin, Georgia.

Current President-elect, Chris E. Christian, CFSP, CCO, of Rogersville, Tennessee, will assume the role of 2026-27 NFDA President. Current NFDA President Daniel J. Ford, CFSP, CCSP, of Cheshire, Connecticut, will continue his service on the Board of Directors as 2026-27 Immediate Past President. These leaders will begin their one-year terms of office immediately following the 2026 NFDA International Convention & Expo, which will take place October 25-28 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Also continuing their service on the Board of Directors are 2025-2027 At-Large Representatives Carlos D. Black of Small's Mortuary in Mobile, Alabama, and Christopher Costello, CFSP, of Mothe Funeral Homes in New Orleans, Louisiana.

From June 11 through June 24, 2026, eligible voting members cast a total of 1,361 votes through a secure electronic voting system administered by Survey & Ballot Systems. Winners of the officer elections are determined by a plurality vote. The election results were:

President-elect

- Steve Spann, CFSP, CCO – 95.5% (1,300 votes)

Treasurer

- Ellen Wynn McBrayer, CFSP, CPC, CCO – 95.1 % (1,294 votes)

Secretary

- Carlton Maye Jr., MBA, CFSP, CCO – 64.0% (871 votes)
- Ladd Pulliam, CFSP – 33.4% (454 votes)

NFDA's at-large representatives serve staggered two-year terms to provide continuity in leadership. During the 2026 NFDA Leadership Conference, taking place August 2-5 in Louisville, Kentucky, state association representatives will elect two additional at-large representatives to serve 2026-2028 terms on the Board of Directors. Their terms will begin immediately following the [2026 NFDA International Convention & Expo](#).

State association representatives are the designated voting delegates from each state who cast votes on behalf of their associations in the election of at-large representatives serving on the NFDA Board of Directors.

The candidates for the 2026-2028 at-large representative positions are:

- Christopher Holt, Anderson Stevenson Wilke Funeral Home & Crematory, Helena, Montana
- Steven L. Johnson, CFSP, CCSP, H.E. Turner & Co. Inc., Batavia, New York
- Maureen E. Krienen, Krienen-Griffith Funeral Home, Wilmington, Delaware
- Shelby Ogozaly, Perman Funeral Home, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



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OBITUARIES

Connie Ray Epperson Bland is the mother of Barry Bland, TFDA Member and Funeral Director at Replogle Lawrence Funeral Home in Medina, TN. Funeral services for Connie Bland were held in the chapel of Replogle-Lawrence Funeral Home on Saturday, July 11, 2026, at 1 P.M. with Pastor Steve Osborne officiating. Burial followed at Centerville Cemetery near Medina.

Connie Ray (Epperson) Bland, age 80, of Medina, Tennessee, passed away peacefully at her home on July 7, 2026, surrounded by the love of her family.



Born on March 6, 1946, in Medina, Connie was the daughter of the late Raymond Epperson and Mary Lorene (Morgan) Epperson.

A proud graduate of Medina High School's Class of 1964, Connie was an active member of the Beta Club and enjoyed playing basketball. Throughout her life, she built an impressive and diverse career. She worked at Lockheed Martin in Jackson, became the first female cotton ginner in West Tennessee, earned her Certified Administrative Professional designation, served as president of the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), graduated from Bethel University, and retired from Porter-Cable as a credit representative.

Above all, Connie was devoted to her faith, her family, and her community. She was a faithful member of Friendship Baptist Church in Medina, where she lived out her Christian faith through kindness, dedication, service and Sunday School teacher.

In addition to her parents, Connie was preceded in death by brothers, Jimmy, Lynn, Jerry, Randal, Victor, and Tim Epperson, and sister, Annie Bell Toone Epperson.

She leaves behind her loving husband of 62 years, William Bland; her sons, Barry Bland (Pam), and Mark Bland (Linda); her cherished grandchildren, Daniel Bland (Madison), Becca Bland Brinks (Tyler), Brittany Leek (Brandon), Mark Hunter Bland (Shelby), and Hunter Hays; her beloved great-grandchildren, Waylon, Hallie, Lila Jane, Ella, and Maisie; her sisters, Johnnie Higdon, Virginia Gilley (Bruce), and Rhonda Stewart (Chuck); and her sisters-in-law, Billie, Sherry, Donna, and Rita Epperson.



James Newton Miles “Jim” is a brother to Paul Miles, Funeral Director and Manager of Kyker Funeral Home in Kingston, and Nancy Russell Office Manager of Kyker Funeral Homes, and James is the uncle of Danny Morgan Funeral Director and Manager of Kyker Funeral Home in Harriman.

James Newton Miles “Jim”, age 70, of Knoxville, formerly of Kingston, Tennessee passed away Sunday, June 28, 2026 at Parkwest Hospital.

Jim graduated from Roane County High School in 1975. He excelled as a linebacker and helped lead the Yellow Jackets football team to the 1973 Class AA State Championship. He honorably served in the United States Marine Corps before enjoying a long career with Ryder Dedicated Logistics, from which he retired.

Preceded in death by his parents, Crawford and Georgia Brackett Miles. Sisters; Judy Miles, Rose Branson, and Billie Jo Lunsford. Brother, Richard Miles. Father and mother-in-law, Cotton and Faye Bacon.

Survived by his wife, Pam Bacon Miles of Knoxville, TN. Sisters and brothers-in-law; Emma and Ross Monroe of Tampa, FL. Wanda and Charles Shannon of Rockwood, TN. Brothers and sisters-in-law; Ray and Judy Miles of Harriman, TN. Toby and Sheila Miles of Rockwood, TN. Paul Miles of Kingston, TN. Brother-in-law and sister-in-law; Bill and Connie Parton of Knoxville, TN. Several nieces, nephews and great nieces and great nephews.

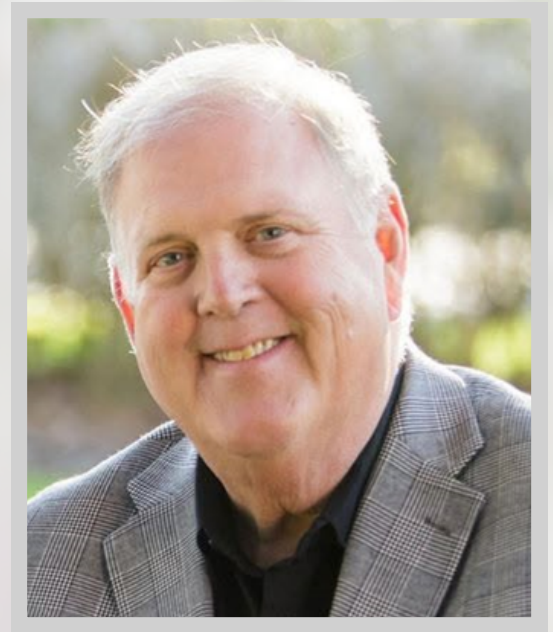
Funeral Services were held at 7PM on Thursday, July 2 at Kyker FH of Kingston. Burial was held 11:00 a.m. Friday, July 3, 2026, at Glen Alice Cemetery with Military Honors by the United States Marine Corps and the Roane County Military Memorial Honor Guard.

Thomas Christian "Tommy" Spears, age 74, passed away on June 2, 2026, in Cordova, Tennessee. Tommy was President of the TFSSC Sales Club in 2024 and a longtime supporter of TFDA. Born on April 3, 1952, in Tullahoma, Tennessee, Tommy was the son of Paul and Ophelia Spears. Growing up in Tullahoma, he developed a lifelong love of fishing and football, interests that remained with him throughout his life.

During his high school years, Tommy discovered his calling in life: serving families during their greatest times of need. In 1976, he graduated from Jefferson State Community College in Alabama with a degree in Funeral Service Education. Settling in Birmingham, he began a career that would span decades and touch countless lives.

Tommy devoted his entire professional life to the funeral profession. He served as a funeral director, funeral home manager, and funeral service consultant, dedicating himself to helping families navigate the difficult journey of losing a loved one. His compassion, professionalism, and servant's heart made him a trusted source of comfort for those experiencing grief.

Among his many professional accomplishments, Tommy served as Manager and Funeral Director of Daves-Culbertson Funeral Home in Tullahoma during the 1990s. In that role, he had the privilege of assisting many friends, neighbors, and family members from his hometown through some of life's most difficult moments.



Later in his career, Tommy joined Vantage Funeral Products, where his exceptional abilities as a salesman earned him numerous accolades, including the prestigious Eagle Award and recognition as a top sales consultant. In 2024, he was honored to serve as President of the Tennessee Funeral Supply Sales Club.

Tommy married the love of his life, Patricia "Patty" Spears, June 4, 1988. For 38 years, they shared a partnership built on friendship, faith, laughter, and unwavering devotion. Tommy became shepherd to three children—Bill, Travis, and Sandy—whom Tommy loved as his own and guided through life's many challenges and blessings. Tommy and Patty were truly best friends who approached life as a team.

A man of deep Christian faith, Tommy accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior at an early age and remained committed to following Him throughout his life. He was an active member of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee, where he faithfully served others. Among his many contributions, he initiated and led his Life Group greeter ministry at Bellevue, welcoming fellow believers with warmth and enthusiasm.

Tommy's faith was reflected in his actions. He possessed a servant's heart and consistently sought opportunities to help others. He generously supported Royal Family KIDS Camp, a faith-based organization serving children impacted by abuse, neglect, and foster care. He also volunteered with Mid-South Mission of Mercy (MOM), helping provide free dental care to underserved members of the Memphis community.

Before moving to Cordova, Tommy and Patty lived in Tuscaloosa. As an enthusiastic and devoted fan of the University of Alabama, Tommy was proud to call Tuscaloosa home and rarely missed an opportunity to cheer on the Crimson Tide football team.

Tommy never met a stranger. He had a remarkable ability to connect with people from all walks of life and could almost always find common ground with anyone he encountered. His genuine interest in others, quick smile, and engaging personality made him a friend to many.

An avid reader throughout his life, Tommy could often be found with multiple books underway at the same time, especially books focused on scripture, faith, and Christian living. Besides football, he was also passionate about NASCAR, fishing, golf, and lifelong learning.

Perhaps nothing brought Tommy greater joy than his grandchildren. He loved them deeply and delighted in sharing stories of their accomplishments with anyone willing to listen. Family was one of the greatest blessings of his life.

Tommy also cherished the deep bond he and Patty developed with several couples through their Life Group at Bellevue Baptist Church. Together, they enjoyed travel, fellowship, and a standing Friday evening dinner tradition with close friends who became like family.

He achieved the rank of Life Scout in the Boy Scouts of America, an accomplishment that reflected the values of service, leadership, and integrity that characterized his entire life.

Tommy will be remembered for his love of God, his devotion to Patty and his family, his unwavering commitment to serving others, and the kindness he extended to everyone he met. His example of faith, generosity, and compassion will continue to inspire all who knew and loved him. Even in death, Tommy's servant's heart continued through his decision to be an organ donor, providing hope and healing to others through the gift of life.

Tommy is survived by his beloved wife, Patricia "Patty" Spears; his children, Bill Cline (Amada), Travis Cline, and Sandy Cline; his two sisters, Paula Alexander (James Hickey) and Kristi Hart (Buddy); his five grandchildren and one great grandchild; and numerous extended family members and dear friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Paul and Ophelia Spears.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Mid-South Transplant Foundation, (<https://midsouthtransplant.org>), 8001 Centerview Parkway, Suite 302, Cordova, TN 38018, (877) 228-5433.

Tommy's life was a blessing, his memory a treasure, and his legacy one of faith, love, and service. "Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:23.

Celebration of Life was held on June 26, 2026, at Bellevue Baptist Church (Pollard Chapel), 2000 Appling Road, Cordova, Tennessee 38016.

Buddy Brown was an employee of TFDA member firm, Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home.

Hayter Crockett “Buddy” Brown, III, 73, of Kingsport, passed peacefully into the arms of his Lord and Saviour after a long, hard-fought battle through an extended illness. Born in Staunton, Virginia and came to Blountville in his youth. Buddy was a graduate of Sullivan Central High School, class of ’71, and John A. Gupton College in Nashville. He began his career at Blountville Funeral Home and was an employee of Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home at the time of his death. Buddy was a member of Orebank Missionary Baptist Church.

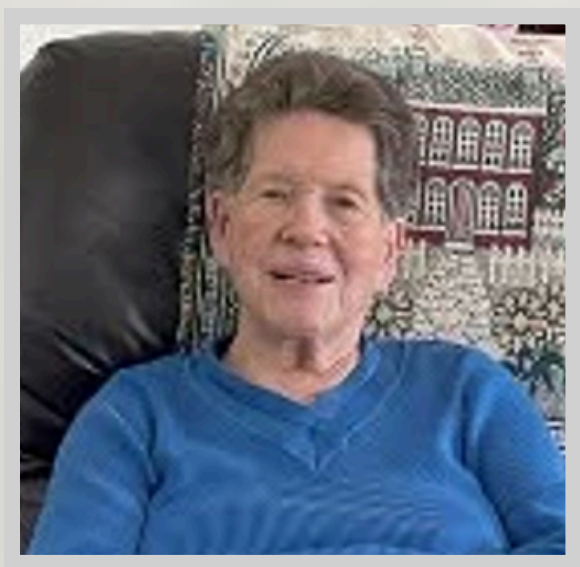


Buddy was preceded in death by his father, Hayter C. Brown, Jr.; mother, Reba Johnson Brown; sister, Mary Frances Dalton; and brother, Joseph G. Brown.

He is survived by his sons, Josh, Jason, and Jordan Brown; fiancé, Rhonda Smith Hawn; sister, Vicki Brown Martin; five grandchildren; niece, Brittany Martin; and nephews.

Funeral services were held Sunday, May 31, 2026, at 2 PM at Orebank Missionary Baptist Church. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Orebank Missionary Baptist Church’s Ignite Kids Group, 5930 Orebank Rd., Kingsport, TN 37664.

Buddy was a unique, funny, and kind man who loved serving the families of his community. He will be greatly missed by his family, friends, and many others.



Patsy is the mother of Hope DeJarnatt, the aftercare and grief counselor at TFDA member firm Higgins Funeral Home in Fayetteville.

Patsy Ann Gray, a beloved mother, grandmother, and dedicated educator, passed away on May 24, 2026, at the Lynchburg Nursing Center at the age of 88. Services to honor her life were held at 1 PM Friday, May 29, 2026, at Higgins Funeral Home with Bro. Greg Wiser officiating. Burial followed in Stewart Cemetery.

Patsy was born on August 10, 1937, in Lincoln County, TN, to the late William Earl Sisk and Nannie Sue Richardson Sisk.

She was a proud graduate of the Central High School Class of 1955. Passionate about learning, she went on to earn her degree in education from Berry College and later obtained her Master’s Degree from Middle Tennessee State University.

Patsy dedicated her professional life to shaping future generations. She began her teaching career at Vantown School, followed by Flintville School, and finally Eighth District School. She truly loved molding young minds and treasured the joy, energy, and laughter of the classroom.

After her retirement, Patsy remained deeply connected to her community. She enjoyed traveling, playing cards with friends, and regularly meeting her high school classmates for lunch. She and her husband, Billy, stayed active for many years, thoroughly enjoying their daily “breakfast club” at the Patrick Rehab and Wellness Center, where the socializing was just as important as the exercise.

A woman of deep faith, Patsy was a lifelong member of the Molino Church of Christ until its closure, after which she became a faithful member of the Liberty Church of Christ. Above all else, Patsy loved her community, her lifelong friends, and her family.

Survivors include her daughters, Hope (Dan) DeJarnatt and Allison (Cory) Holder; grandchildren, Laura (Johnny) Stevens, Drew (Kathryn) Ivey, Austin Bagby, and Malachi Holder; great-grandchildren, Cooper Stevens, Hayden Ivey, Charlie Ivey, Rhett Ivey, Drew (Lexi) Stevens; and great-great-grandchildren, Bonnie and Teddy Stevens; as well as many extended family members.

In addition to her parents, Patsy was preceded in death by her husband, Billy Gene Gray; sisters, Jean Brooks, Louise Pitts Casey; and brothers, Allen, Robbie, and Tommy Sisk.

Memorial donations may be made to the Washington Street Church of Christ, Youth Camp Fund, PO Box 324, Fayetteville, TN 37334.

Mrs. Berry is the mother of Fred Berry, a longtime member and supporter of TFDA.

Marilyn “Gee” Brooks Berry, age 90, of Knoxville, passed away on Thursday morning, May 21, 2026.

Born in Tazewell, Tennessee on a farm that had been in her family since the 1700's, Marilyn was a high achiever in school, graduating Claiborne County High School at the age of 16. After her graduation, she continued her education at Ft. Sanders School of Nursing. Education was extremely important to Marilyn and after she attained her Nursing degree from Ft. Sanders School of Nursing, she later obtained her Master's Degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Tennessee. She began her career at Ft. Sanders Hospital in 1955 as a staff nurse.



She met the love of her life, Fred Berry Jr, at Ft. Sanders Hospital and they married in 1955. Soon after they were married, she became a charge nurse in Labor and Delivery at St. Mary's. In 1958, Fred and Marilyn moved to LaFollette, TN, where she was the Director of Nurses at the LaFollette Community Hospital from 1958-1960. It was in LaFollette where their daughter Kim was born. After moving back to Knoxville, Marilyn began working at St. Mary's Hospital as an instructor in the School of Nursing and became the Assistant Director of the School of Nursing in 1969, where she taught cardiology to nursing students for years, all while being a mom and having their son, Fred. After the nursing school closed in 1988, Marilyn ended her career at the Ft. Sanders School of Nursing instructing Leadership Management. She loved her students, she loved nursing and always felt that it was her honor to serve others.

Marilyn or Gee, as her grandchildren affectionately call her, loved growing flowers and plants and for years put out a huge garden that all of her children and grandchildren helped her plant and harvest, sometimes grudgingly, but now remembered with much fondness. She passed on her love for growing flowers and food to her children and some of her grandchildren. A favorite memory among our entire family was an every Sunday after church lunch that she lovingly prepared. She watched her family expand and grow around that table and all of us have a favorite memory of those lunches. Not one of us ever left her house without her asking "Now, what can I do for you?" She was kind, generous, frugal, brilliant, hardworking and patient. She loved each of us unconditionally and we loved her the same.

Our family wishes to extend gratitude to many people who journeyed with us throughout her battle with Parkinson's and Lewy Body Dementia: Ann Walker and her beloved St. Mary's and Ft. Sanders retired faculty; her much loved Sunday School teacher, Debbie White and her Faith/Rebekah Sunday school class; sweet Gary and Elaine Wolfe for their unwavering support and attention and love; the kindness of the South High Senior Living 1st floor Memory Care; special neighbor, Keith Patterson, for all of his many kindnesses over the years; Chris Phillips for his kindness, lawn care and consistently checking in on her and in her final days; UT Palliative Care and Sacred Ground Hospice for their incredible care and kindness.

Marilyn was preceded in death by her husband of 47 years, Fred O. Berry, Jr; son-in-law, Jim Buchanan; parents, Vernon and Nora Brooks; brothers, Bill (Nancy) Brooks, Frank Brooks; sisters, Mildred (Allen) Wolfe, Polly (Marvin) Mize; brothers and sisters in law; G. Edward (Shirley) Berry, Nancy (Ed) Lee and David Berry. Survived by daughter, Kim Buchanan (late husband, Jim Buchanan); son and daughter-in-law, Fred and Kelly Berry; grandchildren, Jonathan and Amanda Buchanan, Katie and Hunter Beal, Dr. Lucas and Dee Buchanan, Zack and Morgan Berry, Bryce and Taylor Berry and Jesse and Allie Berry; great grandchildren, Remy, Cash, Elias, Mathis, Ashe, Maisie, Miller, Arlo, Brooks, Whit, Maeve and a new Buchanan baby on the way; sisters-in-law, Carolyn Brooks and Cheryl Berry; and many wonderful nephews and nieces.

A Celebration of Marilyn's life was held on May 23, 2026, at 12:00 PM at Mt. Olive Baptist Church, 2500 Maryville Pike, Knoxville TN, 37920. Pastor Bryce Berry (grandson of Gee) and Rev. Cesar Correa officiated the service. Memorials may be made to Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

Mr. Charles Neal was a longtime member and supporter of TFDA.

Charles R. Neal, age 88, of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, was born on December 17, 1937, in Lebanon, Tennessee, and passed away on May 10, 2026, at his residence.

Charles was a Christian and a devoted member of Immanuel Baptist Church, where his faith was an important part of his daily life.

A lifelong professional in the funeral service industry, Charles was a 1956 graduate of Lawrence County High School and a 1958 graduate of John A. Gupton College of Mortuary Science.



He served his country in the Tennessee Army National Guard and later devoted his career to helping families during some of their most difficult moments. He was the retired owner of Neal Funeral Home, Inc. and Lawrence County Memorial Gardens. Charles served as a licensed funeral director and embalmer for 68 years. His long and faithful service to the profession earned him the respect of colleagues and the gratitude of countless families. He was a member of the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association (TFDA), the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), Selected Independent Funeral Homes (SIFH), and The Independent Funeral Group (TIFG).

Charles was preceded in death by his parents, Oliver Marvin and Cornelia Louise "Connie" Stone Neal, one brother, Don Neal; and one great-granddaughter, Cameron Jo Neal.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Vickie Neal of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee; one daughter, Debbie McAfee and her husband Darren of Leoma, Tennessee; one son, David Neal and his wife Amy of Leoma, Tennessee; four grandchildren, Monica Burnett and her husband John of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, Matt McAfee and his wife Maycie of Hazel Green, Alabama, Hannah Neal of Leoma, Tennessee, and Braden Neal of Leoma, Tennessee; and two great-grandchildren, Braxton Burnett and Andi Burnett of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee.

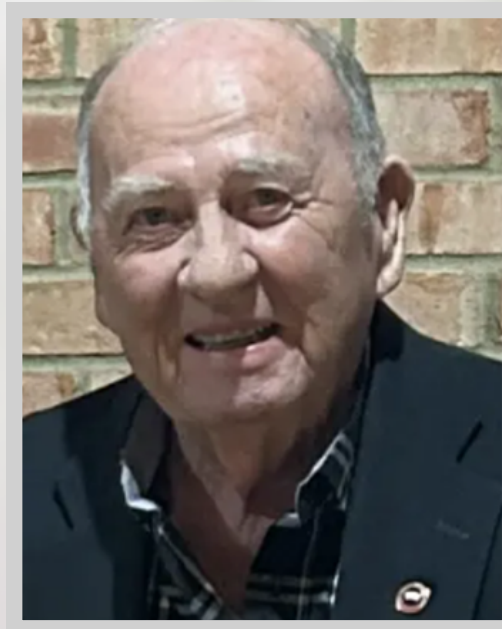
The family wishes to express special thanks to the caregivers with GoodWorks at Home and to Caris Healthcare for their compassionate care and support.

Funeral services were conducted at Neal Funeral Home at 2:00 PM Thursday, May 14, 2026, with Reggie Coleman officiating. Interment followed at Lawrence County Memorial Gardens in Lawrenceburg, TN.

Bobby Dale Herring, a longtime resident of Shelby County, was born July 12, 1936. He left this mortal realm on April 15, 2026.

Bobby was a member of the Germantown Church of Christ and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

He was a graduate of Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service in Houston, TX. He served as a Sales Representative at Pierce Chemicals Mortuary Supply for over 40 years. Bobby Dale was an avid reader, and Blue Grass Music Fan. He loved being with his family and friends in The Circle for Ole Miss Football games. Bobby's greatest loves were Patty, Virgie, Burma, Sophie, Nancy, Robert, and Sadie the Shih Tzu.



Bobby is survived by his son Robert (Nancy) Herring of Germantown, TN; granddaughter Sophie Herring of Germantown, TN; grandpup Sadie; sister Joyce Herring Robinson of Saltillo, MS; sister-in-law Peggy Herring of Saltillo, MS; and a host of family and friends. Bobby was preceded in death by his wife Patricia Ann Herring, his father Bob Herring and his mother Virgie Herring.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Expressions of sympathy may be sent to the family.

Funeral Services were held at Canale Funeral Directors on Monday, April 20, at 10:30 a.m. Burial followed at 2:30 p.m. at Lee Memorial Park Cemetery, Tupelo, MS.



John A. Gupton College

Spring 2026 - Top 10%

Samantha Blake - Maryville, TN
Crystal Douglas - Antioch, TN
Olivia Giordano - Las Vegas, NV
Lily Goad - Kingston, TN
MarTeze Hammonds - Fort Wayne, IN
Emily Lester - Fairview, TN
Brynn McPherson - Clarksville, TN

Jared Nelson - Apison, TN
Breanne Rainey - Dale, IN
Joseph Rushing - Tompkinsville, KY
McKenzie Savage - Gruetli-Laager, TN
Matthew Sellars - Lebanon, TN
Jessica Williams - Greenville, MS

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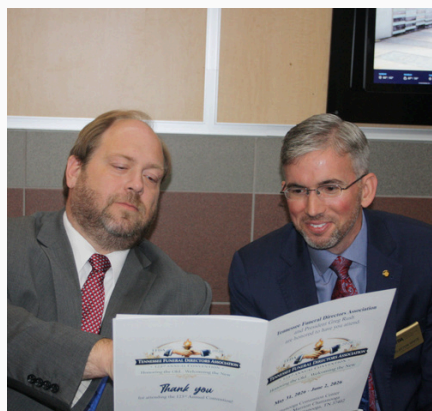
You can contact the office at 615-321-8792 or office@tnfda.org



2026 CONVENTION

The 123rd Annual TFDA Convention was held in Chattanooga this year. A great time was had by all. Thank you to all of those who attended as well as our wonderful vendors and sponsors. Make plans to attend the 124th Annual Convention in Franklin, TN, at Embassy Suites by Hilton Franklin Cool Springs which will be held June 6th - 9th, 2027.

Thank you to Linda Yarbrough of Yarbrough Mortuary Services for taking photos at all of our TFDA events!

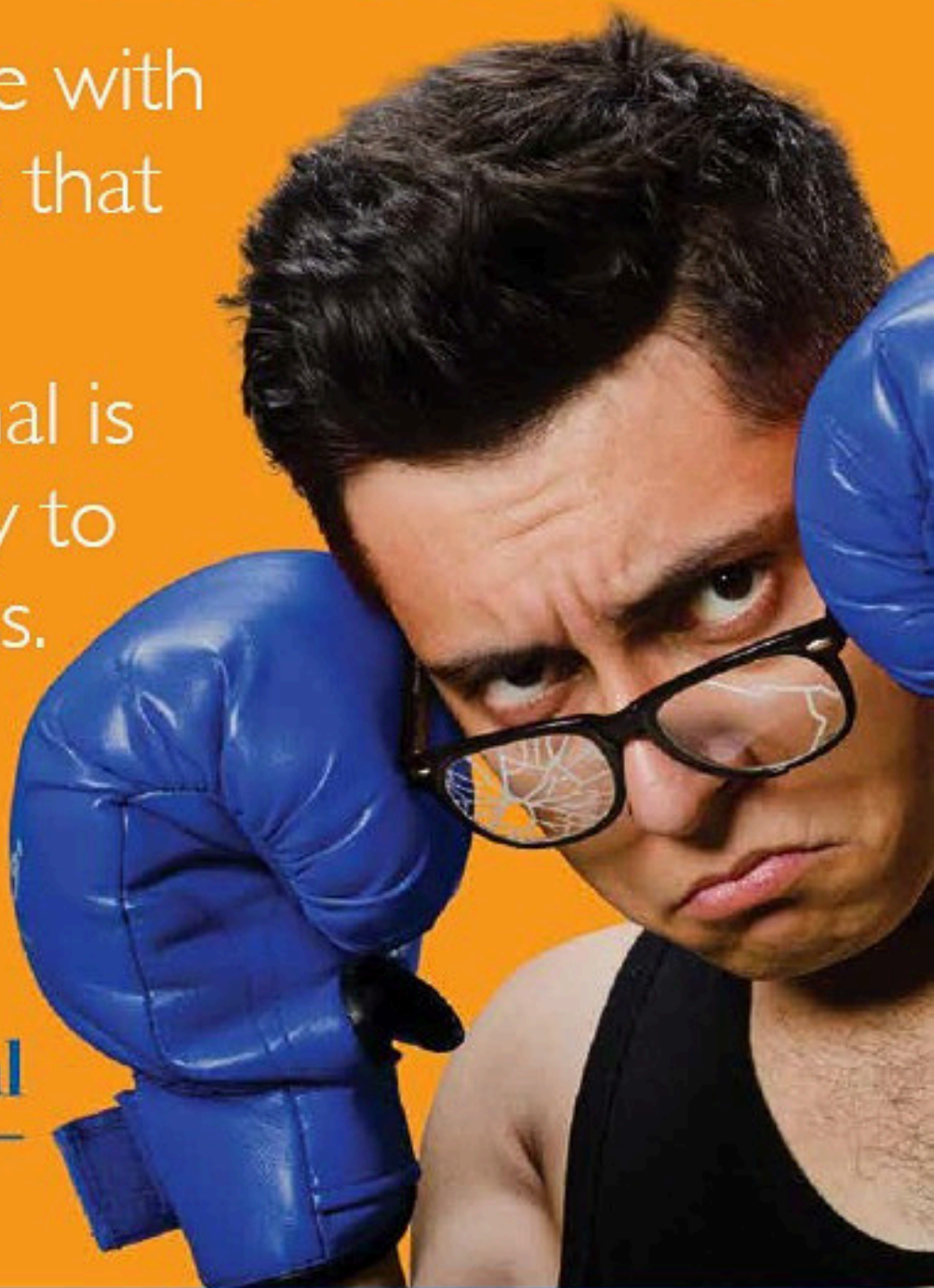




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The Conference Honors Steve Spann with Partners in Professionalism Award

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (The Conference) proudly recognizes Steve Spann, President of John A. Gupton College, as the recipient of the inaugural Partners in Professionalism Award for his thoughtful advocacy on behalf of the funeral service profession.

The Partners in Professionalism Award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional dedication to advancing the funeral service profession through collaboration and leadership. Spann's work exemplifies these values, reinforcing the importance of unity across education, examination, regulation, and practice.

Spann was selected for this honor following the publication of his article in the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association magazine, in which he offers a comprehensive defense of the integrity of the National Board Exam (NBE) and addresses broader workforce challenges facing funeral service.

"I was honored to present the very first Partners in Professionalism award to Steve," ICFSEB Executive Director Dalene Paull said. "He was one of the first people I met when starting out in funeral service regulation and he has been the embodiment of professionalism from day one. He is a staunch advocate for high standards within funeral service and is a servant leader in many professional circles. This organization has been the beneficiary of his volunteerism and The Conference is better for it."

In his article, Spann addresses common misconceptions surrounding funeral service education and licensure examinations. He details the data-driven process behind the exam's development, including its reliance on subject matter experts and validated testing standards.

Furthermore, he encourages licensed professionals to look for ways to implement universal licensure or reciprocity while maintaining standards that protect the public and uphold professional competency. A link to the full article can be found on The Conference's website and in the Conference's upcoming newsletter.

About The Conference

The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards is a non-profit organization comprised of licensing boards from across the United States. The Conference develops and administers the National Board Examination and promotes high standards of competence and professionalism within the funeral service profession.



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