



**ICCFA**  
**THE EXPERIENCE**  
**2026**

APRIL 29 - MAY 1, 2026 | FORT WORTH, TX | [ICCFA.COM/ANNUAL](https://www.iccfa.com/annual)

# Schedule of Events









# Welcome

## From the 2026 Co-Chairs



**Nick Timpe, CSE**  
*webCemeteries*



**Janis Diamond**  
*Dignity Memorial*

**W**elcome to the 2026 ICCFA Experience! As this year's co-chairs, we are thrilled to welcome you to Fort Worth — a city known for its hospitality, resilience, and proud sense of tradition — for an event designed to inform, inspire, and energize you, and to reimagine what a deathcare event can be.

From the very beginning, our goal was simple: create an Experience that brings the most relevant conversations, cutting-edge ideas, and meaningful connections together in one dynamic space. This year's program does exactly that. With education delivered across multiple stages on the Expo Hall floor, learning isn't just confined to breakout rooms — it's woven into the heart of the action. From AI and technology to sales strategy, memorialization, marketing, leadership, and evolving consumer expectations, the sessions you'll experience are timely, practical, and designed for real-world impact.

The Expo Hall is more than an exhibit space — it's where innovation comes alive. Between educational sessions, networking opportunities, and hands-on interaction with the profession's leading suppliers, this is where ideas turn into solutions and conversations turn into partnerships. Be sure to catch standout

programming like America's Got Ashes, a high-energy, competition-style session that tackles one of the most pressing and overlooked challenges facing our profession with creativity, insight, and a little fun.

We're also excited to welcome our keynote speaker, Chris Bashinelli, whose powerful message on authentic connection will challenge you to rethink how trust, empathy, and human connection drive lasting success — in business and beyond.

Beyond the education and exhibits, we've built in time to connect, celebrate, and come together as a profession. Join us for the President's Welcome Reception, open to all attendees and exhibitors, for an evening of conversation and connection. We'll then gather for the President's Banquet, a ticketed event that honors leadership, service, and excellence within ICCFA — an evening worthy of the journey that brought us all here.

Thank you for being part of the 2026 ICCFA Experience. We hope you leave Fort Worth inspired, equipped with new ideas, and excited about what's next for your organization and our profession. We're glad you're here — and we look forward to experiencing it all with you.

## Expo Hall Hours

### Tuesday | April 28

1:00 – 6:00 PM Exhibitor Set-up

### Wednesday | April 29

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM Exhibitor Set-up

### Thursday | April 30

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM Experience Hours

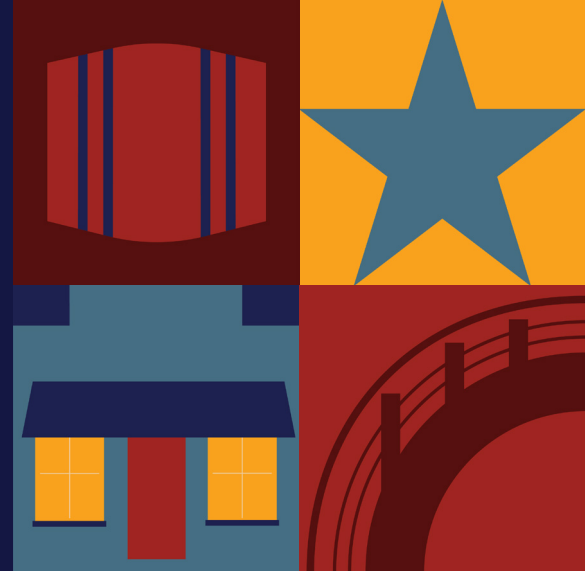
### Friday | May 1

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM Experience Hours  
1:00 – 9:00 PM Exhibitor tear down/move out

### Saturday | May 2

8:00 – 10:00 AM Carrier Pick-up only

# Schedule at a Glance



## KEY

Meeting ●

**Education**

**Registration**

**Event**

## Tuesday, April 28

9:00 – 10:45 AM

12:00 – 6:00 PM

1:00 – 5:00 PM

Board of Directors Meeting ●

**Registration Open - Exhibitors Only**

**Off-Site Tour(s)**

## Wednesday, April 29

8:30 AM – 5:00 PM

9:00 – 10:00 AM

9:00 – 11:30 AM

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

10:00 – 11:30 AM

10:00 AM – 2:50 PM

12:00 – 1:00 PM

12:00 – 1:00 PM

3:30 – 4:30 PM

5:00 – 6:30 PM

6:30 – 10:00 PM

### Registration Open

CCSC Committee Meeting ●

PLPA Committee Meeting ●

Sales & Marketing Committee Meeting ●

Veterans Committee Meeting ●

### Educational Sessions

Membership Committee Meeting ●

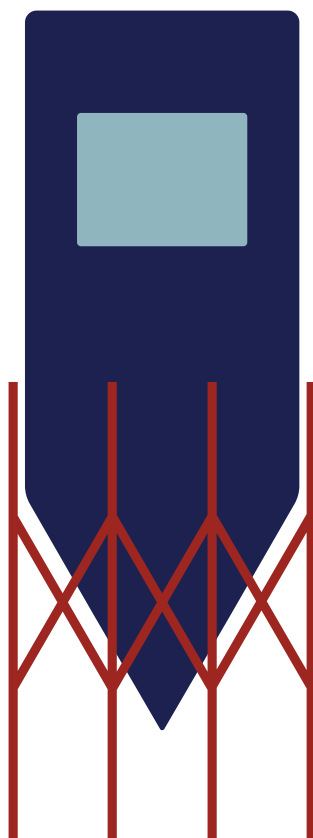
Women in Leadership Committee Meeting ●

IMSA Exhibitor Meeting | All Exhibitors

Welcome ●

**President's Welcome Reception | Open to all**

**President's Banquet | Ticketed event**



## KEY

Meeting ●

**Education**

**Registration**

**Event**

### Thursday, April 30

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM **Registration Open**

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM **Expo Hall Open**

9:00 – 10:00 AM Grand Opening & Welcome Coffee

10:00 – 11:50 AM **Educational Sessions**

11:30 AM – 1:30 PM **Past President's Lunch | Invite Only**

12:00 – 1:30 PM Lunch & Networking

1:45 – 2:30 PM ICCFA Annual Board Report & Awards

2:30 – 3:30 PM **Keynote Speaker – Chris Bashinelli**

3:30 – 5:00 PM **Expo Hall Open with Happy Hour**

4:30 – 5:00 PM New Board Orientation ●

5:15 – 6:15 PM Organizational Board Committee Meeting ●

### Friday, May 1

8:00 – 9:00 AM Prayer Breakfast

8:00 – 9:00 AM **Educational Sessions**

8:00 AM – 4:00 PM **Registration Open**

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM **Expo Hall Open**

9:00 – 10:30 AM Welcome Coffee & Brunch

10:00 – 12:50 PM **Educational Sessions**

1:00 – 3:50 PM **Educational Sessions (outside Expo Hall)**

1:00 – 2:50 PM **The Irwin W. Shipper Legislative Session & Luncheon**

*Program and schedule subject to change.*



# Experience Program



## Tuesday, April 28

12:00 – 6:00 PM

**Registration Open - Exhibitors Only**

9:00 – 10:45 AM

**Board of Directors Meeting**

1:00 – 5:00 PM

**Off-Site Tour(s)**

## Wednesday, April 29

8:30 AM – 5:30 PM

**Registration Open**

9:00 – 10:00 AM

**CCSC Committee Meeting**

9:00 – 11:30 AM

**PLPA Committee Meeting**

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

**Sales & Marketing Committee Meeting**

10:00 – 11:30 AM

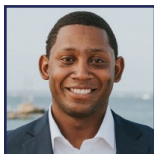
**Veterans Committee Meeting**



## Educational Sessions

10:00 - 10:50 AM

### Bridging Generations & Building Trust: The Current & Future of Funeral Home Success



**Court Bluford**  
Lissiland

Funeral service professionals face a unique challenge: honoring tradition while staying relevant in a rapidly changing world. This session will share proven, practical strategies that helped transform Court's parents' funeral business from struggling with just 2-3 services a year to handling 4-7 a month without chasing leads. You'll explore how grassroots marketing through tools like Google Business Profile, NextDoor, and Facebook (groups), can create consistent inbound calls and community trust. Beyond marketing, Court will tackle building meaningful aftercare programs/solutions, and ensuring your funeral home remains the go-to choice across generations. Attendees will leave with simple, repeatable tactics they can implement immediately. Most importantly, this presentation emphasizes bridging the generational gap so funeral homes remain trusted pillars for both today's families and the next generation.

*Court has been involved in the funeral service profession since the age of 16, working hands-on in his family's funeral home under his mother's guidance. In 2018, he helped transform the business from struggling with minimal leads to thriving through grassroots digital marketing, leveraging Google Business Profile, Facebook groups, and thoughtful aftercare follow-ups, while moving away from costly traditional advertising. A former professional basketball player turned mobile app expert, he specializes in behavioral economics and emotional design, helping legacy industries attract younger generations.*

10:00 - 10:50 AM

### Don't Let This Happen to You: Lessons from the Global Direct Cremation Outbreak



**John Finlay**  
Fortitude Research and Marketing

"Direct cremation" is a term that makes many Funeral Directors cringe, but in the UK and Europe, it's a downright epidemic that has sent shockwaves through the traditional funeral market since 2020. What went wrong? And what can we do to avoid the same mistakes.



Join John Finlay, a long time US and UK funeral professional as he identifies some of the mistakes the Europeans have, learn some surprising facts about these “direct cremation” customers, and uncovers tips on how your locations can avoid these traps and turn “direct cremation” consumers into customers.

*John is an experienced sales, marketing, and merchandising strategist specializing in the funeral profession. He serves as Managing Director of Fortitude Research and Marketing Ltd. (UK) and Senior Vice President of Global Business Development, partnering with funeral businesses across the UK, Ireland, North America, and Australia to deliver data-driven strategies that drive growth and resilience. His work combines consumer insights with practical strategy to enhance experiences, revenue, merchandising, and innovative marketing. John holds an MSc in International Business from Trinity College Dublin and has completed executive education at IMD and Babson College.*

11:00 - 11:50 AM

## That Cemetery is the First Place I Want to Go!



**Donald Wilson**  
Evergreen Memorial Trust

Beyond funerals, many cemeteries struggle to attract visitors—but it doesn’t have to be that way. In this session, a seasoned cemeterian recognized for outstanding community outreach shares proven events and programs he has hosted or sponsored that brought thousands of new visitors—and valuable leads—into his properties. Learn how a little creativity and intentional thinking can transform cemeteries into vibrant community spaces by celebrating their unique attributes, whether historic or new,

and discover practical, actionable strategies for building community partnerships that benefit everyone and leave your cemetery top of mind.

*Donald E. Wilson is President of Evergreen Memorial Trust in Roanoke, Virginia. He is a seasoned veteran in cemetery management, with over forty years’ service that began at Evergreen Burial Park and has now expanded to four additional cemetery locations in southwest Virginia. Don is a graduate of the University of Iowa. Currently, he is vice-president of the Virginia Cemetery Association and member of the Virginia Cemetery Board. Don is a past board member of the Historical Society of Western Virginia and past-president of the Local Office on Aging, where he continues to serve as a Meals on Wheels volunteer.*

11:00 - 11:50 AM

## Obituaries 2.0: Protecting Your Families, Your Brand, and Your Bottom Line



**Rehan Choudry**  
Chptr

Funeral homes lost control of their obituaries during the Internet 1.0 era, as third-party platforms captured traffic, families, and revenue. Now, with the rise of AI and demand for video, there’s a chance to rewrite the rules in the funeral home’s favor. This session will show how obituaries—long overlooked as a commodity—are in fact one of the most powerful tools for community connection, brand visibility, and sustainable growth. We’ll examine how losing control has hurt funeral homes financially and reputationally, and why the next chapter requires reclaiming this



essential asset. Attendees will gain practical strategies to take back ownership, protect their brands, and leverage obituaries to build trust, deepen family relationships, and drive new revenue streams. Through real-world examples and case studies, you'll leave with a roadmap to make obituaries a cornerstone of your business success.

*Rehan Choudhry, founder and CEO of Chptr, is an entrepreneur redefining how communities celebrate life. Chptr is a digital platform that blends storytelling and multimedia to preserve memories. Partnering with local media and businesses, it helps communities commemorate milestones and honor loved ones.*

*Choudhry also founded Life is Beautiful, the acclaimed Las Vegas festival known for immersive cultural experiences. With a background in hospitality and event production at The Cosmopolitan and Caesars Entertainment, he is recognized for creating transformative experiences. Through Chptr, he continues to foster creativity and connection, helping people celebrate life's meaningful moments.*

12:00 - 1:00 PM

## Membership Committee Meeting

12:00 - 1:00 PM

## Women In Leadership Committee Meeting

## Educational Sessions

1:00 - 1:50 PM

## Become The Funeral Home That ChatGPT Can't Stop Talking About



**Scott Jensen**  
FirstCall Marketing

As AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Google's AI Overviews change how people search, funeral homes are no longer competing with dozens of listings—AI often recommends just two or three providers per market. That makes it critical to “make the cut” by building the authority, trust, and credibility AI relies on. In this high-energy, interactive session, funeral directors will learn how to position their firm for AI recommendations through strong SEO and GEO fundamentals. Through audience participation, storytelling, and a fast-paced team challenge, you'll see firsthand how building a solid digital foundation early determines who rises to the top—and who gets left out.

*Scott is an expert in digital marketing and AI with a sole focus on the deathcare profession for the past 3 years. He is a co-founder of FirstCall Marketing. Scott and his team have generated over 10,000+ qualified at-need leads and 2,000+ death calls for 100+ funeral homes across the country. He is a fanatic for data and making marketing decisions that affect the profitability of funeral homes.*

1:00 - 1:50 PM

## Data-Driven Decision Making to Drive Cemetery Profitability and Growth



**Matthew Borowski**  
*Chronicle*

Effective cemetery management is transitioning from a model based on tradition to one grounded in quantitative analysis. This session provides a structured framework for implementing data-driven decision-making across an organization's core operational pillars.

The session demonstrates methodologies for analyzing three critical datasets: geospatial data for optimizing land use, sales data for revenue management, and demographic data for strategic service planning. This presentation moves beyond general concepts to provide specific, analytical techniques that turn existing records, whether paper or digital, into a powerful tool for forecasting and strategy. Attendees will leave with a clear understanding of how to leverage existing data to mitigate risk, optimize resource allocation, and drive sustainable growth.

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*Matthew Borowski is CEO and Founder of Chronicle Cemetery Software. With a background in Geomatic Engineering and over a decade of GIS and surveying experience, he has led cemetery digitization projects in six countries, transforming operations for more than 650 cemeteries and enabling 250,000 users to access burial records online.*

*Matthew combines GIS mapping with modern AI to help cemetery operators boost plot sales, reduce workload, improve customer experience, and maintain regulatory*

*compliance. His leadership has earned the RH Dougherty Award and an ICCFA KIP Award Honorable Mention.*

2:00 - 2:50 PM

## What Works for Women at Work



**Gwen Mooney, CCFE**  
*Cave Hill Cemetery*



**Jennifer Olvera, CCE**  
*Green Hills Memorial Park*

In leadership roles, women encounter both internal and external barriers—from self-doubt and imposter syndrome to workplace bias and double standards. This session will highlight research-based strategies and practical approaches to help women recognize and overcome these challenges. This presentation will guide participants through real-world examples, evidence-based tools, and interactive discussion to strengthen confidence, authenticity, and leadership presence.

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*Gwen M. Mooney has served as President and CEO of The Historic Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, KY, since 2015, overseeing its 300-acre grounds and two related entities. A licensed funeral director and embalmer in Ohio and Kentucky, she previously led Gwen Mooney Funeral Homes at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati. Gwen is active on the ICCFA Board, has held various leadership roles, and frequently speaks at deathcare events. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation and is a member of the Rotary Club of Louisville.*

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*Jennifer Olvera, a lifelong resident of*

*Southern California, is the Manager of Community Engagement and Safety at Green Hills Memorial Park, where she's worked for over 25 years. She actively represents her company in the community and serves on several boards, including her roles as Chair of the Lomita Chamber Board and Chair of the Torrance Police Foundation. Jennifer's extensive volunteer work includes leadership roles with the Kiwanis Club of Torrance and past involvement with the Torrance Area Chamber of Commerce, YMCA, and various local organizations. Recognized for her commitment, she has received awards such as the Outstanding Military Volunteer Service Medal and the J. Walker Owens Volunteerism Award. A Certified Cemetery Executive, Jennifer holds a Certificate of Honor as a Quarter Century Member in her field.*

2:00 - 2:50 PM

## Green Light on Green Funerals



**Darren Crouch**  
Passages International

Green alternatives provide cemeteries and funeral homes with interesting opportunities to align with current consumer demand and significantly increase revenues. Whether you are a cemetery looking to sell more graves, a funeral home wanting to better serve families or a cremation operator looking to delivery tangible value to increase revenues, greener options can be your path forward. Join Darren Crouch, President and CEO of Passages International and the current President of the Green Burial Council to learn how.

*Darren Crouch is President and CEO of Passages International, Inc., which he co-founded in 1999 in his family's funeral home. Over the past 25 years, Passages*

*has helped funeral homes better serve less traditional consumers seeking cremation, scattering, and natural end-of-life options. Darren is a widely published and quoted industry thought leader, with features in major trade publications and national media, and a frequent speaker at funeral service conventions worldwide. In 2022, Passages International was a finalist for Fast Company's World Changing Ideas: Enduring Impact. Darren holds a BSc (Hons) from Manchester Metropolitan University and serves as President of the Green Burial Council.*

3:30 - 4:30 PM

## IMSA Business Meeting

5:00 - 6:30 PM

## President's Welcome Reception

The ICCFA invites you to kick off the 2026 ICCFA Experience at the President's Welcome Reception, featuring an open bar.

6:30 - 10:00 PM

## President's Banquet

Join us for the President's Banquet, featuring dinner, drinks, and a comedy performance by Matt Friend. The evening includes the Celebration of Remembrance, and the ICCFA Presidential transfer as Robert Gordon Jr., CCE, passes the torch to incoming President John Bolton, CCE, CCE, CSE, CXE. A special highlight will be the induction of Darin Drabing into the ICCFA Hall of Fame. Additionally, we will be honoring Ray Frew, CCFE, recipient of the 2026 ICCFA Educational Foundation's Lasting Impact Award, in recognition of his visionary leadership and service. **\*A ticket to this event is included with every full attendee registration.**



# Thursday, May 1

8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

## Registration Open

9:00 - 10:00 AM

## Grand Opening & Welcome Coffee

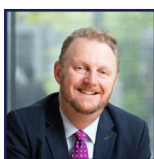
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

## Expo Hall Open

## Educational Sessions

MAIN STAGE 10:00 AM-11:50 PM

## America's Got Ashes



**Poul Lemasters, Esq.**  
ICCFA

### Panel: TBD

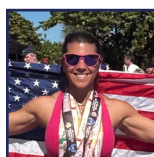
Across the country, millions of urns are sitting forgotten in closets, garages, and storage spaces. America's Got Ashes (AGA)—a lively, competition-style session hosted by Poul Lemasters, Esq.,—shines a light on this growing issue and highlights creative solutions from across the profession.

Part forum and part game show, AGA invites deathcare professionals to share innovative programs, events, and tools that help families pick up cremated remains, understand memorialization options, and move remains from "left at home" to meaningful, permanent places of honor. A panel of judges will evaluate ideas for creativity, practicality, impact, and scalability.

*Poul Lemasters, Esq., began his career in deathcare more than 20 years ago as a funeral director and embalmer. Recognizing the profession's growing risks and limited support, he pursued a legal education. Today, as an attorney and principal of Lemasters Consulting, Poul leverages his combined experience in deathcare and law to advise professionals on risk management, operational disputes, contract review, valuations, and regulatory compliance. He counsels funeral homes, crematories, cemeteries, and trade associations nationwide and serves as ICCFA's General Counsel.*

NGL STAGE 10:00 - 10:50 AM

## Find Your Inner Spark



**Natalia Lazarus**

Inspired by her book *The Inner Race*, ultra-distance runner and health coach Natalia Lazarus reveals how pursuing bold goals can reignite purpose, resilience, and clarity—no matter where you are in life. This session isn't about marathon training; it's about navigating transitions, overcoming fear, and discovering what's possible when you take action toward the life you want, whether you're facing a career shift, an empty nest, or simply seeking a deeper sense of fulfillment.

Fresh off completing The Great World Race—seven marathons on seven continents in seven days—Natalia shares powerful lessons from a journey that nearly didn't happen. Just one month before the race, she could barely walk and had every practical reason to quit. Instead, she reshaped her mindset, adapted her plan, and pushed through 183.4 miles and countless moments of doubt to reach the final finish line transformed. In this motivating talk, Natalia will share how to confront challenges head-on, reframe fear, and move

beyond perceived limitations to uncover your true potential.

*Natalia is a devoted wife and mother who shares her adventurous life with her husband, Ryan, their two teenagers, and their golden retriever, Charlie. A local fitness instructor and ACE Certified Health Coach, she brings her passion for wellness into her work as an ultra-distance runner, CrossFit competitor, and dedicated yogi. Her love of nature fuels her holistic approach to health, inspired by family travels to National Parks, global adventures, and time spent exploring the outdoors. Along with certifications in personal training, group fitness, Olympic lifting, yoga, and eco consulting, she is committed to promoting sustainable, balanced living. In November 2025, Natalia completed The Great World Race—an extraordinary challenge in which she ran seven marathons on seven continents in seven days.*

CARRIAGE STAGE 10:00 - 10:50 AM

## Balancing Care and Boundaries: Improving CX by Caring for Yourself



**Lori Bolton, CSE, CXE**  
Park Lawn Corporation

When empathy crosses into emotional exhaustion, both professionals and families suffer. This workshop provides strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries while offering heartfelt service—grounded in the idea that caring for yourself allows you to care more deeply for others. Through reflection and guided exercises, participants will discover how to process their own grief, protect their mental health, and create a better experience for the families they serve.

*Lori Bolton, CSE, CXE, has over two decades of experience in cemetery and funeral home management and developing technology solutions in the deathcare profession. She started her career in cemetery sales and management and owned a final expense company in Northern California. Her professional experience includes business consulting and business development for Catholic Funeral and Cemetery Services and Johnson Consulting Group. She has spent years studying how Customer Experience impacts the bottom line. She has two Customer Experience Certifications and is a member of the Customer Experience Professional Association (CXPA). She also serves as a member of the ICCFA Sales and Marketing Committee; and is Dean of the CX and Hospitality College at the ICCFA University.*

NGL STAGE 11:00 - 11:50 AM

## What Does Gathering Look Like to You?



**Glenda Stansbury**  
Insight Books



**Brent Patterson**  
Ingram, Smith and Turner Funeral Home

Many discussions in the deathcare profession are focused on the contemporary customer who is not interested or does not find value or meaning in our offerings. Funeral professionals sometimes find difficulty in the arrangement process, specifically with cremation customers, because we are utilizing words and descriptions that do not resonate with them such as “traditional” or “service” or “church” or “chapel”. The result too often is “direct cremation” or “direct burial” with no opportunity for a tribute or

a ceremony or a gathering because families only see what they have already experienced and do not wish to have again because it does not speak to them.

Recent research published by Foresight informs us that only 37% of the public believe that they are receiving adequate or complete information about their options. If they don't understand what is possible, then they will choose to do nothing. Or if we have nothing else to offer beyond what we consider "traditional" then they will find ways to do it away from your firm or cemetery.

In this presentation we will discuss new ideas for arrangement language that opens doors for further conversation, how to utilize Celebrants to create meaningful gatherings, how to offer and implement ceremonies and family involvement, how to brand your firm through pictures and video and social media.

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*Glenda Stansbury, MALS, CFSP, LFD/Emb, is the CEO of InSight Books, an instructor for UCO Funeral Service Program and Worsham Mortuary College, a co-creator of InSight Institute Certified Celebrants, and a practicing Celebrant.*

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*Brent Patterson, LFD, Director of Creative Experience for Ingram, Smith and Turner Funeral Home, Brent spend 20 years as a national awarded event planner and returned to funeral service in 2020 where he has created incredible and healing gathering experiences for families.*

CARRIAGE STAGE 11:00 -11:50 AM

## From Risk to Reward: The Unexpected Lessons of Pet Deathcare



**Jodi Clock**  
*Clock Timeless Pets*

In the traditional deathcare profession, pet cremation is often treated as an afterthought or a B2B service for veterinary clinics. But what if the pet-to-consumer model is the key to unlocking a new kind of legacy planning? This session will explore the surprising and compelling insights we've gained from building a consumer-facing pet deathcare business that now serves nearly 1,000 above and beyond boutique in home euthanasia vet clinic families a year.

We'll share the story of our risky, but ultimately successful, pivot and offer a new perspective on growth, best practices, and community trust.

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*Jodi M. Clock, owner of Clock Timeless Pets, is a certified expert in pet loss and grief companioning. The business was founded because of the death of her own funeral home's therapy dog. With 22 years of experience at her family's funeral home, Jodi focuses on compassionate community outreach. She is charter member of the ICCFA's PLPA and PLPA College, she is a trailblazer who represented the ICCFA with their first pet loss presentation in Brazil at ALPAR.*

11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

**Past President's Lunch | By Invitation Only**





12:00 - 1:30 PM

## Lunch & Networking

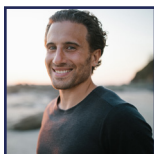
1:45 - 2:30 PM

## ICCFA Annual Board Report & Awards

## Keynote

MAIN STAGE: KEYNOTE 2:30 - 3:30 PM

# Authentic Connection: The Superpower to Better Sales and True Business Growth



**Chris Bashinelli**

What if the real secret to sales success wasn't persuasion—but connection?

Today's customers are more discerning than ever. According to Edelman, 90% will walk away from a brand they don't trust. And yet, in our rush to "influence" or "close the deal," we often sacrifice the very thing that fuels long-term growth: authentic human connection!

In this game-changing keynote, National Geographic Explorer and Scientist of Human Connection, Chris Bashinelli, reveals the overlooked superpower in business: putting people first. Drawing on years of global research—from living with nomads on the Mongolian steppe to learning from financial advisors in Fort Worth – Bash shows that when we are fully present, deeply empathetic, and driven by service, we unlock the kind of trust that leads to exponential sales growth.

This is not about manipulating your clients—

it's about meeting them with genuine care, turning "them" into "us," and building bonds that last far beyond the sale. Whether you're leading a sales team or building client relationships one conversation at a time, this keynote will transform the way you sell—and the way you connect.

### Key Takeaways:

- Bash's patented "Discover Our In" method to build instant, lasting trust
- Practical tools to become fully present and emotionally attuned to clients
- How to shift from transactional selling to transformational relationships
- The science behind empathy—and how to apply it in real sales conversations
- Strategies to build a "People-First" Sales Culture that fuels growth and loyalty

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*Chris Bashinelli—known as "Bash"—is an internationally recognized speaker, National Geographic Explorer, and Executive Producer and Host of Bridge the Gap on PBS and National Geographic. After filming his first documentary in Tanzania at age 20, a personal turning point shaped his life's mission: when we change our mind, we change our world.*

*Through powerful storytelling and global adventures, Chris inspires audiences to step courageously into their fears. A United Nations moderator, Eagle Scout, and interviewer of Time magazine's most influential leaders, he has shared the stage with icons including Stevie Wonder, Ban Ki-moon, and Dr. Jane Goodall, delivering a simple, transformative message to audiences worldwide.*

3:30 - 5:00 PM

## Expo Hall Open with Happy Hour

4:30 - 5:00 PM

**New Board Orientation | By Invitation Only**

5:15 - 6:15 PM

**Organizational Board Meeting | By Invitation Only**

## Friday, May 2

8:00 - 9:00 AM

**Prayer Breakfast**

8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

**Registration Open**

9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

**Expo Hall Open**

9:00 - 10:30 AM

**Welcome Coffee & Breakfast**

### Educational Sessions

NGL STAGE 8-8:50 AM

## The Viral Content Playbook Every Funeral Company Is Missing



**Ryan Thogmartin**  
*Disrupt Media*

Short-form video now drives visibility, trust, and consumer decision-making in the deathcare profession, as platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube rely on interest-based algorithms—not follower counts. In this hands-on, high-energy workshop, funeral directors, cemetery

professionals, and crematory operators will learn why short-form video is the most effective marketing tool for 2026 and how any firm can use it to stay top of mind, build community trust, increase preplanning, and grow call volume. This is not a slide deck session—participants will create scroll-stopping content in real time, using proven examples from funeral providers who are already going viral and seeing real business results.

*Ryan Thogmartin is widely recognized as one of the most influential and disruptive voices in deathcare, transforming a traditionally quiet profession into a dynamic, content-driven conversation. As CEO of DISRUPT Media—the largest creative agency in funeral service—he has spent more than a decade helping funeral providers build brand authority, expand reach, and drive growth through innovative, results-focused digital strategies. He is also the founder and publisher of ConnectingDirectors.com, the industry's largest and most influential online publication. A pioneer of social-first marketing in deathcare, Ryan has led viral campaigns, national partnerships, and creative initiatives studied by firms ranging from single-location funeral homes to publicly traded companies. Outside of his work, he is devoted to his family, active in his church, an enthusiastic golfer, and an avid sneaker collector.*

CARRIAGE STAGE 8:00 - 8:50 AM

## Building the Bridge: How Cemetery & Funeral Operators Fuel a High-Performing Sales Team



**René Negrete**  
*Inglewood Park Cemetery*

In many cemeteries and funeral locations, sales and operations technically work for the same families – but often feel like they’re playing on different teams. This workshop is designed specifically for operators who want to better support their sales teams and, in turn, drive revenue, customer satisfaction, and long-term loyalty.

*René has been a leader in the deathcare profession since 2009, beginning his career with Service Corporation International (SCI) in Los Angeles before advancing to SCI’s Houston home office as Director of Pre-Need Sales for North America. There, he led the strategic expansion of the Pre-Planning Advisor program, growing the sales organization to more than 2,000 advisors and 100 leaders, and increasing annual pre-need sales from \$385 million to over \$500 million. In 2021, Rene joined the executive leadership team at Inglewood Park Cemetery, where he oversees sales and marketing strategy for its portfolio of companies, including Inglewood Park Cemetery, Park Lawn Cemetery, and Centinela Consulting Group. His work centers on driving innovation and implementing technology that advances client acquisition, customer engagement, and sales performance.*

MAIN STAGE 10:00 - 10:50 AM

## Abandoned Urns: Confronting the Hidden Crisis in Cremation Memorialization



**Honnalora Hubbard**  
Coldspring

Across the country, millions of cremated remains sit in closets, basements, and storage—never given a permanent resting place. These abandoned urns are not just

forgotten containers; they represent a growing crisis in how we honor, heal, and preserve the legacies of those we love. Families are left without closure. Stories go untold. Grief is left unanchored.

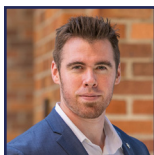
This session delivers the answer to this crisis. Through powerful insights, practical strategies, and a call to action, it shows how we can move families from hesitation to healing—ensuring that every life entrusted to us is given the dignity of a permanent place of peace. You will leave with the tools, conviction, and urgency needed to confront this crisis head-on.

*With a family background in funeral services and more than a decade of deathcare profession experience, Honnalora serves as a Regional Sales Manager for Coldspring. She has earned multiple sales awards and brings over 30 years of professional public speaking and ministry experience. Her dedication to permanent memorialization is rooted in her belief that every person dies twice—once when they pass away, and again the last time their name is spoken. Guided by this conviction, she delivers value-added solutions in bronze and granite memorials, Private Estates®, Mausoleums, Columbaria, and cemetery construction-related sales.*





## AI in Deathcare: Practical Tools, Generational Shifts, and the Future of Funeral Service



**Jeff Butler**

AI is rapidly reshaping the deathcare profession, offering practical tools that can streamline operations, support staff, and enhance the experience families receive. This session focuses on real, actionable ways funeral homes and cemeteries can use AI today—whether for administrative efficiency, marketing, aftercare, training, or everyday communication. Attendees will also learn how to introduce these technologies in a way that respects the multi-generational workforce, reduces hesitation, and fosters a culture of confidence and adoption across all roles.

*Jeff Butler is an author and workplace strategist who explores what organizations need to do to navigate uncertainty. His experience spans over 40 industries in 4 continents on how different cultures and employees interact with each other. He studies common threads of behavior in industries such as IT professionals, underground utility workers, police officers to clothing retail chains. In addition, Jeff has also worked with various Fortune 500 companies to mom and pop shops. His ideas have made it to TEDx twice, appeared in dozens of media outlets including two books on human behavior: - The Authentic Workplace and The Key to the New You. Currently, he lives in Dallas, Texas as an out of place Californian.*

## Experience Reimagined: Meeting the Demands of Today's Consumer



**Sherri Hauer**  
*Forest Lawn Memorial Park*



**Jenn Parvin**  
*Batesville*



**Devin Dardanes**  
*B&N Industries*

Today's funeral consumers are more informed, more selective, and increasingly influenced by their experiences in retail, hospitality, and tech-driven industries. They expect an omnichannel journey—one that is seamless, transparent, and personalized from start to finish. Whether they're planning online, in person, or somewhere in between, they want the process to be intuitive, modern, and respectful of their time and preferences. This shift in consumer behavior challenges funeral homes to rethink how they present their products and services. It's no longer just about what's offered, but how it's offered—through clear communication, digital tools, and environments that feel welcoming rather than transactional. This presentation explores practical strategies for aligning with today's expectations, from introducing new technologies, to designing new customer spaces. Attendees will gain insights into how to create a consistent, value-driven experience that connects with modern, needs-based buyers. The future of funeral service is evolving—this session shows how to evolve with it.

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*Sherri Hauer is the Vice President of Products and Services at Forest Lawn Memorial-Parks & Mortuaries, the premier memorial park located in Southern California and Coachella Valley. She brings 20 years of experience to her role managing the product assortment, planning merchandising presentations, establishing package offerings, and directing cemetery property inventory to ensure that mix and pricing align with evolving consumer needs. Originally from the East Coast, Sherri has called Los Angeles home since 1994 and offers a broad perspective shaped by her diverse professional journey. In 2025, she earned her Cemetery Manager's License, further strengthening her leadership in the profession. Known for her creativity and retail acumen, Sherri continues to shape offerings that honor tradition while meeting the needs of today's communities.*

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*Jenn Parvin is the Chief Marketing Officer for Batesville, a leading North American manufacturer and provider of funeral service products and technology solutions. Since joining the organization in 2008, she has built a distinguished career as a sales and marketing executive, recognized for her strategic leadership and commitment to supporting funeral professionals. In her role, Jenn oversees the development and marketing of innovative products, digital platforms, and e-commerce solutions that enhance brand engagement and meet the evolving needs of today's consumers. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Marketing from Florida State University and is an active community leader, serving on the Funeral Service Foundation Board and the Summerville YMCA Board. Jenn resides in South Carolina with her husband and two children.*

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*Devin Dardanes is the Executive Vice President of Business Development at B+N Industries, guiding commercial strategy and expanding the company's reach across*

*banking, hospitality, retail, and healthcare. With a career rooted in retail, branding, product development, and manufacturing, he has partnered with leading brands including 7 For All Mankind, Abercrombie & Fitch, Skims, Gap Inc., Kate Spade, and Nordstrom. Prior to B+N, he worked at NOA Brands, helping shape the visual and spatial identities of global retailers. Devin holds an MBA from the University of Colorado and is a design: retail 40 Under 40 honoree.*

CARRIAGE STAGE 12:00 - 12:50 PM

## Hands-On Uses for AI in Your Operation



**Nick Timpe, CSE**  
webCemeteries

This is a working session—bring your laptop or phone. We'll cut through the hype and focus on practical, everyday uses of AI that cemeteries and funeral homes are already using to streamline operations, reduce administrative workload, and better support families. You'll see live examples and get hands-on experience applying AI to real operational tasks.

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*Nick Timpe is the CEO of webCemeteries where for the past 15 years he has built exceptional teams and processes for helping cemeteries computerize records and leverage technology. Nick is the Dean of the ICCFA University College of Technology, a member of the Catholic Cemetery Conference Committee of Information and Technology and is a frequent speaker and article contributor. Nick is a Certified Crematory Operator, has a Bachelor's Degree in Government from Patrick Henry College, and is an elder at his local church.*

## Educational Sessions (outside the Expo Hall)

1:00 - 2:50 PM

### The Irwin W. Shipper Legislative Session and Luncheon

Join us for the Irwin W. Shipper Legislative Session & Luncheon. This session offers insights into key federal and state issues impacting the deathcare profession, including taxes, OSHA, employment, FTC regulations, and changes in funeral and crematory laws across the U.S. and Canada. It's also the perfect opportunity to discuss the challenges you're facing with deathcare experts. Don't miss this chance to engage and stay informed.

1:00 - 1:50 PM

### Farewell with Purpose: Eco-Innovation in Pet Loss Services



**Ana Palencia**  
*Señoriales Corporación de Servicio*

In today's world, where sustainability and environmental care are top priorities, the pet loss profession has a unique opportunity to lead with innovative and eco-friendly solutions. This session will explore how to transform pet cremation and memorialization into meaningful, environmentally responsible experiences that honor beloved companions while regenerating life. Through real-world case studies and practical strategies, attendees will discover how to integrate green initiatives—such as biotransformation into life-giving nutrients—into their

operations. We will also examine how to effectively communicate these values to increasingly conscious consumers, creating memorable tributes that resonate deeply. By uniting sensitivity, innovation, and sustainability, funeral professionals can build lasting trust with families and position their businesses at the forefront of responsible pet bereavement care.

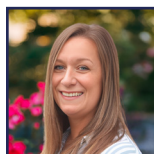
*Ana Palencia leads the Guau Señoriales and Pet Dignity programs at Señoriales Corporación de Servicio, bringing innovation to emotional support and dignified farewells for pets in Guatemala and Mexico. With strategic vision and a deep passion for animals, she developed the Guau Señoriales therapy dog program and the groundbreaking biotransformation of pets into life-giving nutrients, integrating sensitivity, sustainability, and innovation. She is certified as a Pet Loss Grief Coach and in Leadership and Coaching, which allows her to bring a comprehensive approach to every project. Her work inspires professionals to rethink pet funeral services by uniting empathy, innovation, and environmental responsibility.*

2:00 - 2:50 PM

### A New Tool for a New Era: Natural Organic Reduction in Funeral Care



**Katey Houston**  
*Return Home*



**Mandy Stafford**  
*Return Home*

Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) is the newest legal form of disposition in the U.S., and it's changing the conversation about



end-of-life choices. Funeral directors who embrace NOR aren't replacing tradition—they're expanding their offerings to meet the needs of today's families. This session will walk you through what NOR is, how it works, and why it's gaining attention nationwide. We'll talk real-world logistics, family conversations, and how to add NOR to your "toolbelt" alongside burial and cremation. You'll learn how to present it confidently, answer tough questions, and position it as a legitimate, meaningful option. Whether your families are eco-conscious, curious, or just looking for something different, NOR can be the service that sets you apart.

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*Katey is a licensed funeral director and embalmer in Washington and her native England, and a certified celebrant. At Return Home, she meets with families to create meaningful, personalized experiences, cares for decedents throughout their terramation journey, and leads educational outreach. After 10 years in traditional funeral service, she sought work aligned with her values, offering eco-friendly, family-centered care without sales pressures. The 60-day NOR process allows her to build deep relationships, guiding families through grief with compassion.*

*Mandy is a licensed funeral director with nearly 15 years of experience in compassionate, personalized deathcare. Her work in developing natural burial offerings sparked a passion for sustainable practices, leading her to Return Home as preneed coordinator, where she helps families plan meaningful, eco-friendly end-of-life care. Recently returning to her family farm in southern Minnesota, Mandy balances rural life with her commitment to the funeral profession. She is dedicated to advancing green deathcare and supporting families through their unique journeys.*

3:00 - 3:50 PM

## From Heritage to Hashtags: Modern Marketing Strategies for Deathcare



**Kirsten Ono**  
PlotBox

Today's families make decisions in very different ways than they did even a decade ago. From digital-first research habits to rising expectations for personalization and transparency, consumer preferences are reshaping how funeral homes, cemeteries, and deathcare providers must communicate. Exploring how deathcare professionals can remain relevant and trusted in an era where families turn to social media, online reviews, and community-driven content before they ever walk through your doors.

Examining real-world strategies to modernize your outreach—highlighting how social platforms, digital storytelling, and authentic community engagement can differentiate your brand while maintaining dignity and compassion. You'll learn how to align services with evolving needs, how to adapt messaging for today's consumer mindset, and how to use practical marketing activities that strengthen trust and increase visibility.

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*Kirsten is a seasoned marketer with more than 20 years of experience across global consumer goods and the deathcare profession. She holds a Master's degree in Communication and currently serves as Head of Marketing at PlotBox, leading strategy and execution for a company at the forefront of cemetery and crematory technology.*

*Passionate about "marketing that matters,"*

*Kirsten focuses on human-centered strategies that create meaningful connections, blending consumer insight, practical expertise, and genuine care for families.*

3:00 - 3:50 PM

## Using Company Culture to Create a Competitive Advantage



**Annie O'Mara**  
SCI Direct – National Cremation & Burial Society

Company culture hasn't been at the forefront previously. However, there is starting to be a marked transition as Millennials become managers and Gen Z is entering the workforce. Between wages and inflation being disheartening, people are seeking purpose – the psychological capital that helps renew their spirit and the continued desire to serve others.

Company culture is set by espoused values and collateral. It is then reinforced by employee and managerial behavior. Company culture is used to recruit new employees, as well as vital in retaining the employees you have. More importantly, it is the basis of your reputation and the outside perception of your integrity. Happy

employees stay put, are more productive, and have more positive client interactions than unhappy employees.

*Annie O'Mara is a Licensed Funeral Director in Southwest Florida where she leads a Team that has the right vibe. Success has become the Team's middle name. In a possible stint of educational dedication (or insanity), she returned to school to do an M.S. – Management and an MBA, both with a focus on Organizational Culture & Leadership, while still working full-time. She had fallen in love with what culture could be during undergrad while studying Cultural Anthropology, but has enjoyed the perks of corporate life way too much to go back to field study.*

