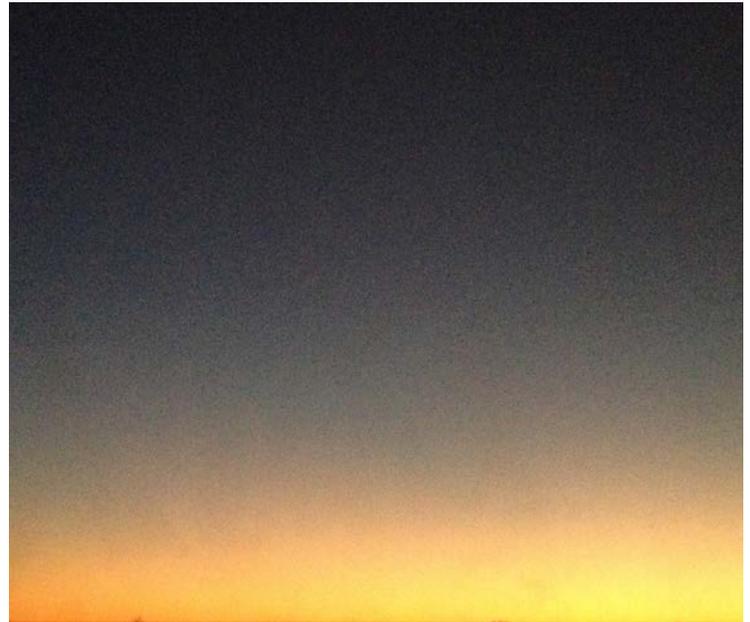


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Lechner Discusses New Role As CCMS President

CINCINNATI – As was reported in last week's edition, Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science (CCMS) has named Jack E. Lechner Jr. as its new president.

Lechner, a U.S. Army colonel (he retired from the Army in 2011 after serving 29 years on active duty), was assigned to Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) in 2010 as part of the new leadership team given the mission to restore the trust of the American public following an investigation by the U.S. Army's inspector general into operations at the cemetery that was based on allegations of lost accountability of some graves and poor record keeping, among other issues.

Lechner served as executive officer, cemetery administrator and deputy superintendent of ANC. His five-year tenure culminated in serving as superintendent until August 2015.

His funeral service roots trace back to the mid-1970s when he earned a mortuary science certificate of proficiency from Mercer County Community College. His long association with CCMS began in 1990 when he earned his bachelor's degree in mortuary science, graduating summa cum laude. He earned licensure as a funeral director and embalmer in Ohio, Virginia and New Jersey. Lechner is a certified funeral service practitioner by the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Prac-

tice and is certified in thanatology by the Association for Death Education and Counseling.

This week, Lechner talks about his background in funeral service and he also shares with us some of his thoughts and plans for his new position at CCMS.

First Jack, congratulations with the new position. We spoke shortly after you had taken your previous position at the headquarters of the Department of the Army at the Pentagon and you had mentioned then that you hoped that you would be able to return to funeral service. When did all of this happen?

Lechner – I signed a contract with CCMS and assumed the duties as president on January 21. Gene Kramer preceded me as president. Gene had a long career in higher education and a strong business background in college operations. He came from the university of Cincinnati to transform CCMS to the semester system used by the majority of colleges and put CCMS on a strong financial footing. He accomplished his mission – with distinction.

Jack, if you could just talk about your funeral service history a little bit. What initially drew you into funeral service?

Lechner – I had a friend who was a registered trainee at

a local funeral home when I was in high school. Because I expressed an interest, he invited me to accompany him on a hospital removal and, as they say, “the rest is history.” When I graduated high school I became a registered trainee and that fall enrolled in Mercer County Community College because they were starting the first Mortuary Science Educational program in New Jersey. I subsequently graduated from Mercer County Community College’s first Mortuary Science class with an Associates Degree and a Certificate of Proficiency in Mortuary Science.



Jack E. Lechner Jr.

Shortly after graduating I became a licensed practitioner of mortuary science in the state of New Jersey. I worked as a licensee at a local funeral home and enjoyed the work. I was active in the community; past president of the rotary club, officer in the Masonic lodge, a volunteer fireman and soon began to realize that I had a passion for funeral service and helping others. I performed over 100 eye enucleations and instructed the practical portion of the training to enucleate eyes for the Delaware Valley Eye Bank. I incorporated with two friends and started a trade/shipping service that began to thrive. I became a Certified Funeral Service Practitioner and developed a desire for continued learning.

When did you begin your career with the military?

Lechner – After 10 years working as a funeral director in the same area I became restless. I wanted to travel and see more of the world. I sold my interest in the firm to the partners (which is still active today) and enlisted in the U. S. Army Infantry. I always missed funeral service and maintained my professional licensure. I fully intended to return to the death care profession.

How did you begin your relationship with CCMS?

Lechner – Because I was in the Army and had been selected to become an officer, I needed to earn a bachelor’s degree. The quickest route to that degree for me was to attend an accredited mortuary college that could award a bachelor’s degree. So I selected CCMS and graduated summa cum laude in 1990, earning a Bachelor of Mortuary Science (BMS) degree and it changed my life. Because I earned a BMS from the CCMS I have had many opportunities open to me during my career.

The Army subsequently sent me to earn two graduate degrees in logistics, which would have been impossible without the BMS from CCMS. It created the opportunity for me to be promoted from private to colonel in the U.S.

Army. I was afforded the opportunity to train and command soldiers in peace time and in combat.

This brings up an interesting point. You first entered funeral service with an associate degree but later earned a bachelor’s degree. That has been an ongoing debate in funeral service for years, two years vs. four years. Given your perspective, what are your thoughts on this question?

Lechner – I believe it is each state board’s prerogative to determine the level of education required for licensure. But if you were to ask me what are some of the advantages of earning a Bachelor of Mortuary Science degree, I would simply say that “education equals opportunity.”

Because I earned the BMS degree I was afforded the opportunity to earn graduate degrees, I was afforded the opportunity to advance in the profession of arms where a bachelor degree was required, and I am now able to draw upon my 40 years of varied experiences from the grass roots to the executive level to give back to the death care profession.

Students who earn the BMS will enter the death care profession better prepared for the future. Their curriculum is longer than the curriculum specified by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE).

For example, BMS students are trained as Certified Crematory Operators (CCO) by National Funeral Directors Association personnel and graduate as certified celebrants. Even if they never run a crematory or act as a celebrant, the student has been training to understand both aspects. A CCO-trained funeral director is better prepared to inspect a third-party crematory to ensure that the service being provided to the family he/she is serving is of the highest quality. The longer program provides more “hands on” opportunity to develop their embalming skills under the watchful eye of skilled instructors in a modern lab stocked with a variety of chemicals from multiple manufacturers is extraordinary.

Restorative art and cosmetic skills are developed in a setting that affords them an opportunity to make a mistake and learn to develop their own techniques under the constant mentorship of a professionally licensed and accomplished faculty member. Because we embalm all of the remains for a major university anatomical donor program there is always an abundance of hands-on opportunities for our students.

What are some of the major changes you’ve seen in the funeral profession over your career?

Lechner – The most obvious is the significant rise in cremation. When I entered the profession in 1973 the annual percentage of cremations was 5.69 percent nationally. The statistics for 2014 reported that cremation was 46.7 percent nationally! I can remember a time when if a family expressed interest in cremation it was not uncommon to

hear many funeral directors say “. . . it’s only a cremation.” Fortunately, today we understand that the method of disposition doesn’t have to keep us as funeral service professionals from ensuring that every families’ needs are met regardless of the method of disposition selected.

Another major change has been the addition of women to the profession during my career. When I graduated from mortuary school in 1976 there were only two women in my class of 19, just over 10 percent. Today, funeral service is much more gender integrated. Women routinely make up over 60 percent of most graduating classes and have contributed immeasurably to the advancements of our profession.

But most significant, and I feel most importantly, the death care profession is becoming more diverse. In 1973 when I entered the profession, there were very hard religious and racial lines. Roman Catholics worked for and were served by Roman Catholics, Caucasians worked for and were served by Caucasians, and African Americans worked for and were served by African Americans. Today it is not unusual to see gender, racial and religious diversity reflected by a firm’s staff and by the families they serve.

For students today, what are some of the toughest challenges they would face coming out of a program that perhaps weren’t considered 20 years ago?

Lechner – The statistics show that a substantial amount of graduates will leave the funeral profession. The BMS degree is transferrable nationally because, in addition to being accredited by ABFSE, the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science is also accredited by the High Learning Commission. If a student enters and subsequently leaves the funeral profession after earning a BMS degree he or she has a degree that will allow them to pursue graduate degrees or move into another field that simply requires a bachelor’s degree. If they choose to stay in funeral service they are poised to pursue graduate educational opportunities that will complement the profession such as business programs, MBA programs, or sociology just to name a few.

What do you feel are your strengths that you would bring to the table in this position?

Lechner – Diversified experience in the death care profession at various levels including the senior executive level and 29 years of professional military education and experience. I spent 10 years working as a licensee in a funeral home, established and owned a shipping/trade service, supervised mortuary affairs collection points in combat, and during my five years at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) I was responsible for more than 8,000 funerals per year. The incredibly large volume of funerals allowed me to gain a tremendous amount of funeral experience in a short period of time. I was in a position to sharpen my powers of observation. I met and resolved problems for numerous grieving families and worked to turn around a national shrine. So, one of my strengths comes from being able to

draw on such a vast amount of experience.

For example, at ANC I realized I had to establish a training program to help our staff work with grieving families. I turned to the CCMS for assistance in developing a program for ANC personnel. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding about death, dying, and bereavement studies myself, I spent three years becoming Certified in Thanatology from the Association of Death Education and Counseling. I think this is another strength I bring to the table; appreciation for a lifetime of learning and knowing how to reach out for expert assistance.

Sometimes it seems that the lessons about the value of grief, memorialization and even the funeral is being eroded in the eyes of the public. It seems death is becoming too disposable.

Lechner – I’ve learned that grief is natural emotion and not a medical diagnosis. I believe that assisting the families we serve is an affair of the heart; it is about us taking the time to listen rather than treating grief like a medical diagnosis that needs to be resolved by a prescriptive list of steps to be followed. I believe that is how we, as death care pro-

“Our challenge as death care professionals is to be certain that we include all of the elements in the celebration of life that will help those mourners begin their grief journey in a meaningful way that will facilitate a transition from a relationship of presence to a relationship of memory.”

professionals, distinguish ourselves and become truly helpful to the families we serve. Conveying these sentiments and beliefs to the next generation of death care professionals is important to their success. I also bring that passion and commitment to the table at CCMS.

I also learned that the value of the funeral is not determined by the cost of the casket; or whether disposition is by cremation or casketed burial. The value of the funeral is found in the celebration of a life that has been lived; where ceremony is used to facilitate bringing grieving individuals together to mourn their loss. We add value to the funeral by being the experts at designing personalized and custom ceremonies that speak louder than words to honor our loved ones who have died.

I believe that understanding the needs of grieving individuals to come together with family and friends, at a safe place, to mourn together, facilitated by ceremony is critically important to the funeral director of the future. Especially now as many families are becoming less religious, the “usual” routine doesn’t satisfy the needs of many mourners. Being able to design and customize ceremonies for the families we serve must become the new norm.

What do you think funeral service practitioners can do to re-emphasize the value of the funeral?

Lechner – Our challenge as death care professionals is to be certain that we include all of the elements in the celebration of life that will help those mourners begin their grief journey in a meaningful way that will facilitate a transition from a relationship of presence to a relationship of memory. Our role is critical and I bring that understanding gained through 40-plus years of experience with me.

My educational background and varied experiences will serve me well at CCMS. As an Army officer I taught, coached and mentored young Americans as they entered, advanced, and departed the Army. I prepared them to fight alongside me. I believe that CCMS offers me the opportunity to continue to teach, coach and mentor the next generation of funeral service professionals; today’s students will be serving next to us as our colleagues in the profession in just a few short months.

“Nothing in my professional career has ever been more meaningful than the simple thank you from a family served, whether spoken or just understood.”

I bring high expectations for this next generation of funeral service professionals. They will have to overcome the limitations caused by letting others (24-hour news cycle, bad press, public perceptions, government, etc.) define who we are as funeral directors; they have the opportunity to define themselves by becoming the best generation of funeral service professionals the country has ever known.

What advice would you offer to a perspective mortuary student?

Lechner – Earning a degree or certificate in mortuary science is different from attending a general educational college program. From day one the student is on a comprehensive learning journey. It is not a matter of just passing individual tests and assignments; it is a matter of studying and retaining in preparation for a comprehensive

examination at the end of the program – i.e. the National Board Examination (NBE).

It is very hard for a young student to fully comprehend that they need to know and understand everything in their curriculum from day one in order to be fully prepared for the NBE. Each student needs to start their mortuary science program with the commitment to do their best at everything, all the time, in order to understand and learn everything that is being presented each day.

I was a terrible student my first time through mortuary school. I was young, immature and mistakenly thought it was just a matter of passing the next test or assignment. I didn’t put the effort into valuing my education. Fortunately for me, I got a second chance when I went to CCMS to continue my education. I learned that the more effort I put into studying, the more valuable my education became. I learned to love to learn and soon realized that education equaled opportunity. It is never too late for a student to put forth 100 percent effort because it will pay back a lifetime of dividends.

Is there anything you going to miss about government work?

Lechner – After approximately 35 years in the government I am ready to return to the civilian sector and the funeral profession. I will miss the hundreds of soldiers that I had the opportunity to serve with in harms way, in peace time, overseas, and in the states.

There is a special bond that is established among soldiers, marines, sailors, airmen, and coast guardsman serving together. Acts of bravery are often said to be motivated not by valor but because one soldier didn’t want to let another down. Soldiers find that they are willing to do anything to protect their comrade in arms and come to realize they will do anything to protect you.

But I will tell you that I have also experienced that deep sense of camaraderie in funeral service. As funeral directors we are invited into a sacred place – the family’s private space at a very special and sensitive time. We are entrusted to care for their loved one when they no longer can. Funeral directors share that special camaraderie that others can’t understand.

When I left Arlington I was assigned to Headquarters Department of the Army to work in the logistics directorate; a field in which I was well trained and experienced. But as I told you when I left Arlington, I wanted to stay in funeral service. I entertained several offers, both in and out of funeral service, but wanted to wait for the right opportunity to present itself. I had a long affiliation with CCMS of more than 26 years and felt my skills could be used best at CCMS.

And what are your plans/goals as president?

Lechner – Much of the success in my career is due

to the professional and dedicated faculty/staff at CCMS who invested their time, experience, skills, and talents to help position me to take advantage of the opportunities my education at CCMS provided. As I look forward to the final years of my career, I want to give back to funeral service. Nothing in my professional career has ever been more meaningful than the simple thank you from a family served, whether spoken or just understood. I've always felt lucky to have chosen such a rewarding profession and now I look forward to helping our college pass the tradition of excellence on to the next generation of funeral service providers.

Upon graduation from CCMS, I hope each student can

honestly reflect back on their time at the college feeling that they will truly miss the faculty, staff, and fellow classmates. That as they look forward to their new roles in funeral service they will be confident that they are fully prepared for the challenges that lie ahead; and that they will proudly take their place at the end of a long line of CCMS graduates that has continued the tradition uninterrupted for 134 years.

I expect this generation of funeral service professionals to define the death care profession for decades to come.

MBJ

Superior Court Rules in Favor of Cremation Society of New Hampshire in Trademark Infringement Suit

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE – A Hillsborough County Superior Court found the Remick & Gendron Funeral Home in violation of trademark infringement by offering cremation services under a trade name that included “cremation society.” The court ruled in favor of the Cremation Society of New Hampshire, prohibiting the defendant from using a trade name that includes “cremation society” and awarded CSNH damages and attorney fees.

Phaneuf Funeral Homes and Crematorium, founded in 1906, is one of the state's oldest and largest providers of funeral services. In 1995, Phaneuf established the Cremation Society of New Hampshire and has since performed more cremations throughout the state than any other firm. CSNH also registered its name in New Hampshire as trademark in 2006.

In 2014, Phaneuf opened a CSNH business office in Hampton, New Hampshire. Remick & Gendron Funeral Home, also in Hampton, had been running a crematory for many years, but up until this time, CSNH held that the firm had not created a separate identity for cremation services. Around the same time Phaneuf opened the Hampton office, CSNH charged that Remick & Gendron Funeral Home began holding itself out as “Cremation Society by the Sea.”

In a civil suit, CSNH alleged that “Cremation Society by the Sea” infringed on its name by utilizing the words “Cremation Society” in its name, asserting that it would intentionally cause confusion between the two organizations.

Remick & Gendron Funeral Home denied the allegations and argued that “cremation society” is a generic phrase and “of New Hampshire” is merely descriptive, holding that any funeral home should be able to use the

phrase “cremation society” in its business name.

However, generic and merely descriptive trade names do not qualify for protection unless their commercial usage invests them with secondary meaning that associates the name with that business. Secondary meaning arises when consumers have come to identify a trademark with a certain product or service over time, usually a minimum of five years. CSNH asserted that it had been well known for 20 years.

The Superior Court ruled in favor of CSNH, finding that it had established secondary meaning in its trade identity through extensive promotion and advertising, exclusive use, and recognition by consumers and the industry. A competitor offering crematory services under a similar name constituted trade identity infringement and unfair competition.

Additionally, the court found that the competitor had violated the New Hampshire Consumer Protection Act and awarded CSNH damages, costs and attorney fees as part of the verdict.

“We are very happy with the ruling,” said Arthur “Buddy” Phaneuf, president and CEO of both Phaneuf Funeral Homes and Crematorium, and the Cremation Society of New Hampshire. “We realize this is an unprecedented ruling given that ‘cremation society’ is used widely in other states. Having been a family-run business in New Hampshire for more than 100 years, we have worked diligently to meet the needs of families by continuing to expand our services and products, including the affordable options that the Cremation Society provides. It is imperative that, given our history and our mission, we maintain the integrity and identification of our name.”

MBJ

SCI Promotes Webb to President, COO

HOUSTON – Service Corporation International has promoted Michael Webb from executive vice president and chief operating officer, to president and chief operating Officer.

In his new role, Webb will continue to report to Chairman and CEO Tom Ryan. Webb will be responsible for leading SCI's operating activities and working with senior management to drive performance excellence.

Webb is a 25-year veteran of the company. He joined SCI in 1991 when it acquired Arlington Corp., a regional funeral and cemetery consolidator where he served as chief

financial officer. Webb led SCI's global Corporate Development effort in the 1990s. He has served as executive vice president since 2002 and was elected chief operating officer in 2005.

“Mike and I have worked closely together since 2002,” Ryan said. “He has played an integral role in the growth and development of SCI, particularly in driving improved business and process efficiencies, execution of key strategies, and strengthening of our management teams.”

MBJ

NFDA Issues Call for Board of Directors Candidates

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – The National Funeral Directors Association is seeking applicants for open seats on the Board of Directors for the 2016-2017 leadership year, which begins at the conclusion of the 2016 NFDA International Convention & Expo.

Under the new NFDA governance structure, adopted during the 2015 NFDA International Convention & Expo, NFDA members have a say in the governance of the association and will be responsible for electing the officers on the Board of Directors – president-elect, treasurer and secretary. The Policy Board will continue to elect at-large representatives.

However, before anyone can vote, NFDA needs qualified candidates to run for office.

Open positions are: president-elect (one-year term), treasurer (one-year term), secretary (one-year term) and two (2) at-large representatives (two-year terms). The president-elect, after completing his or her term, automatically succeeds to the office of the president.

NFDA has posted information on its website, www.nfda.org/elections, covering:

nfda.org/elections, covering:

- Board of Directors responsibilities and composition
- Position descriptions, including specific requirements and expectations for each role
- Leadership commitment to NFDA's mission, values and vision
- Nomination and election process
- Candidate guidelines
- Application Form

NFDA encourages all members to view this information so that they can better understand the role of the Board of Directors and the men and women who serve in these leadership roles.

Members interested in becoming a candidate, must submit a completed application by 5 p.m. CT on March 1 to be considered by the NFDA Leadership Development Committee for an open position.

The Leadership Development Committee will announce their list of qualified candidates on May 1.

MBJ

NFDA Slates Professional Women's Conference for April 8-10

BROOKFIELD, WISCONSIN – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) will hold its 2016 Professional Women's Conference from April 8-10 at the Westin Cape Coral Resort in Cape Coral, Florida.

The conference begins on Friday, April 8, with a complimentary welcome reception. A special event, “Funeral Service Foundation: Full Steam, All Aboard the Murder Mystery Dinner Train,” will immediately follow the reception.

Attendees may enjoy this entertaining “whodunit” while enjoying a five-course dinner and train ride with fellow attendees. A ticket is required for this event.

The schedule of educational sessions kicks off April 9. Sessions include:

- “Leading the Conversation – How to Connect with Seniors in the Arrangement Conference” presented by Lacy Robinson, NFDA director of member development

- “Community & Family Engagement: Filling the Void presented” by Jason Troyer, PhD, of Mount Hope Grief Services

- Celebrate the accomplishments of women who have earned Professional Women’s Conference scholarships from the Funeral Service Foundation during the complimentary recognition luncheon

- Attendees will exchange great ideas on a variety of topics with like-minded funeral professionals during the popular Roundtable Discussions

On Sunday, April 10, attendees may choose from two concurrent workshops: “Win/Win Thinking in a Win/Lose Market” by Bill Hudson, Matthews-Aurora Funeral Solutions; or “Seeing is Believing: Facial Reconstruction Techniques and Transforming the Decomposed” by Karl Wenzel, The Dodge Company. The program concludes with “Peaks, Pitfalls and Parades, Oh My,” presented by Dawnna St. Louis, a business growth expert.

Attendees can save up to \$50 when they register on or before March 15.

The Funeral Service Foundation will award at least five scholarships to the Professional Women’s Conference; scholarships will cover recipients’ conference registration fees and provide up to a \$1,000 travel and accommodation stipend. For more information and to apply, visit www.funeralservicefoundation.org. Applications are due February 26.

Complete details about the NFDA Professional Women’s Conference, including registration and hotel information, can be found on the NFDA website, www.nfda.org/pwc.

MBJ

The Notebook

Foundation Partners Group (FPG) has acquired **Ballweg & Lunsford Funeral Homes** in Syracuse, New York. These two funeral home locations join eight other FPG funeral homes operating in New York State. “This acquisition of Ballweg & Lunsford offers an exceptional opportunity to build upon our network in central New York,” said Brad Rex, FPG president and CEO. “As part of our growth strategy, we look to affiliate with firms that complement both our existing infrastructure and promote high quality, personalized service in their operations. Ballweg & Lunsford delivers on both these objectives and we are thrilled that Kurt Lester and his team have chosen to join the Foundation Partners family.”

Ballweg & Lunsford Funeral Homes was established in 1912 when Carl J. Ballweg founded the firm in Syracuse. In 1964, William A. Lunsford Jr. purchased the business after working for Ballweg for 15 years. Lunsford’s grandson, Kurt Lester, is the current president and owner, and will continue to manage the two locations. The original Ballweg & Lunsford facility is located on the south end of Syracuse and the second was opened in 1995 in Lafayette, New York, 10 miles south of Syracuse.

Batesville has announced a new series of free educational webinars, “Finding Easier Ways” which will be offered during the company’s quarterly Education Week, February 23-25. Launched in 2014, Education Week has become a forum for funeral professionals looking to enhance their knowledge about new solutions and key industry and consumer topics without leaving their office. The 2016 lineup starts with a week focused on helping funeral professionals guide families through the often-challenging selection process. Three different sessions cover simple, effective ways to improve the selection experience in both digital and physical environments. Each session includes a 30-minute presentation followed by an open question-and-answer session. Webinars include: “How to Connect with Families Using Meaningful Selections” by Sean Townsley, customer value manager, Feb. 23, 1–2 p.m. (EST); “How to Easily Guide Families through Casket Selection” by Jancy Motz, Marketing Manager, Batesville, February 24, 1–2 p.m. (EST); and “How to Simplify the Cremation Arrangement and Selection Experience” by Mary Ziegler, Cremation Merchandising, Feb. 25, 1–2 p.m. (EST). For more information, visit <https://www.batesville.com/webinars>.

Service Corporation International has been presented with the J.D. Power President’s Award in recognition of its dedication to service excellence including quality improvement, customer satisfaction and the development of enduring client relationships. SCI has worked with J.D. Power for the last 10 years to measure customer satisfaction. SCI and its family of brands including Dignity Memorial, join an exclusive group of only twelve other companies to receive this award in J.D. Power’s 47-year history. “This notable distinction exemplifies our dedication to outstanding service, innovation and the personalized care we provide our client families, as identified in the J.D. Power proprietary recognition process,” said Tom Ryan, chairman and CEO. “We are truly humbled to be acknowledged for cultivating a culture of consistent, high-quality customer satisfaction.” SCI joins a prestigious group of honorees including USAA and General Motors.

MBJ

The Post-Game Show

It's really not a coincidence that Groundhog Day and Super Bowl Sunday fall within the same week. This year Punxsutawney Phil, the official spokes-groundhog for groundhogs day, did not see his shadow, which means an early spring. So accordingly, I write this on the fourth straight day of snow.

The day after the Super Bowl seems like another Groundhog Day but only for critics, analysts and commentators. As the game clock ticks down, if an analyst sees his shadow cast by a TV spotlight, it means six more days of talking about the game. This year was no exception. The final gun may have ended the game, but it signaled the beginning of the post-game analysis. How did the Broncos hang on to win? Will this be Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning's last game? And, really Cam?

And, for the nonsports fan, plenty of attention is given to the nonsports events such as the half time show and the commercials. What was the most memorable ad that aired during the Super Bowl? Super Bowl commercials, or the hype surrounding them, can often be as odd as they are entertaining. Manning seemed to have a deal with a beer company that whenever he was asked if he would be retiring, his answer would include a reference to "having a few Budweisers tonight." Even once he answered with a generic "few beers" before catching himself and reinserting the brand name into his response. Subtle.

It's the hype that receives much of the mainstream coverage. At a cost of \$5 million for 30 seconds, you'd better be able to inform and entertain and, most importantly, deliver a call to action. And while regular advertising by funeral homes and cemeteries does not lend itself to the hype of a Super Bowl ad, one hopes that whatever ad or marketing plan a business engages does undergo some kind of scrutiny by the public – since the worst thing that can happen to an ad is that it is ignored. Although after reading about the backlash from Mountain Dew's "puppy/monkey/baby" commercial, maybe being ignored isn't the worst thing.

Every commercial or product reference is not meant to go under a microscope, but the details of a serious marketing campaign should never be glossed over. In the public arena, funeral service marketing already starts from a negative. Let's face it; there is a percentage of consumers who don't want to hear from you, period. So the first order of business, is defining who do you want to receive your message? What is the call to action? What is the vehicle that will deliver this message? What are the anticipated results? These are some of the basic steps and questions to ask yourself when contemplating and developing any marketing campaign.

And just before you think you are ready to proceed, test your campaign with a sample audience. Testing will stop you from throwing good money after bad. Advertising and marketing are too expensive just to throw ideas at the wall and hope that something sticks. Like a player preparing for the Super Bowl, every advertising campaign needs to be representative of your best work. And like the Super Bowl ads, you have a short time to make the connection and to make your message register with those you want to attract.



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