

A Pair of Hall of Famers

When Jim Price and Bill Wright were inducted into the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association's Hall of Fame March 25, they joined a short, exclusive list of honorees as they became only the 36th and 37th individuals to receive the association's highest honor.

The Hall of Fame was created in 1965 to pay tribute to those who have demonstrated unselfish service and outstanding contributions to the ICCFA, the cemetery, funeral, cremation, and memorialization profession, and, ultimately, to the public.

After not having any new inductees since 2018, Price and Wright were honored during the closing banquet of the 2022 ICCFA Convention & Exposition at the Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas.

"This year we are privileged to induct not one, but two remarkable members, Jim Price and Bill Wright," Nadira E. Baddeliyanage, the ICCFA's executive director, said.

"The ICCFA is incredibly fortunate to have members like Jim and Bill who volunteer their time, share their passion, and do it all for the benefit of the whole. They are both true gentlemen and have my sincerest gratitude for all they do. My heartfelt congratulations on their induction into the ICCFA Hall of Fame."

Price and Wright expressed how appreciative they are to join such an elite group.

"I am truly honored to receive this award," said Price, who has dedicated more than 50 years of service to the death-care profession. "It is even a greater honor to be placed in such distinguished ranks of the past honorees, most of who have

been colleagues or with whom I have been familiar with at one time or another, and all of whom have made significant contributions in our profession."

"It's quite an honor. I can tell you I am very humbled by it," said Wright who has displayed continued dedication to the ICCFA throughout his 36 years supporting the association.

"When I heard there were only 35 members who had been inducted, that's not many. If you look at the names and the careers of the people who have received this honor, it's quite the extensive list, many who I knew growing up. You are quite humbled when you are compared to that."



Jim Price was inducted into the ICCFA Hall of Fame March 25.
(Photo courtesy of Kim Price)

A 50-Plus Year Career

Price is the senior vice president, industry relations for the Park Lawn Corp. in Houston. He has served on the board of directors of the ICCFA and as a trustee for the ICCFA Educational Foundation which seeks to make education accessible to the future leaders of the death-care profession. In 2015, Price was elected president and chairman of the foundation, a position he continues to hold.

Growing up in the small town of Lake City, South Carolina, Price lived above the Price Funeral Home, owned and operated by his father, James, and mother, Marjorie.

“My father was the very first mentor I had,” he said. “He was

such a wonderful example of what it looked like to be a person who was dedicated, caring and committed to being of service to others. At 15, I had not yet contemplated what I really wanted to do later in life, but that all changed when I went with him on a resident transfer and, for the first time, I really saw and understood what he did. The entire large family seemed to feel such comfort and peace upon our entry into the home, ‘Everything is OK now – James is here.’ It really rocked me to hear that and realize just how much of an impact he had on their well-being and comfort in the loss of their loved one.

“It was then that I understood the

very deep impact he truly had on so many,” Price added. “That is when I knew I wanted to do the same – help others in their darkest hour of need – provide comfort and guidance through this difficult process.”

In the summer of 1967, before his senior year in high school, Price’s family moved to Oceanside, California, and he began an apprenticeship at Berry-Bell Mortuaries in Oceanside. Once his apprenticeship was completed, following two years at MiraCosta College, Price moved to Los Angeles and graduated from the California College of Mortuary Science (now Cypress College).

“Moving from South Carolina, where the cremation rate was less than 1/10th of 1% to a market that had 20% cremation in California at the time, had me concerned about long-term opportunities and success in the profession,” Price said. “I had not experienced families who did not see any value, or very little value, in what we did from a traditional memorialization standpoint. It was eye-opening for me.

“That was 50 years ago and the profession at that time did not recognize the many opportunities of service that could be offered to cremation families ... not to mention the vast array of product offerings that we have today,” he added.

Over the years, Price has had a variety of positions in the funeral and cemetery industry. Prior to joining Park Lawn, he co-founded and served as the executive vice president/chief operating officer of Foundation Partners Group, and formerly co-founded and served as COO of Keystone Group Holdings.

It has always been important to Price to give back to funeral service. “Any time someone is passionate about what they do, and blessed to do it for so many years, I believe it is their duty to find a way to give back,” he said. “Not only that – it is truly a blessing for me to be able to help others.”



ICCFA Hall of Fame inductee Bill Wright is the vice president cemetery operations/facilities maintenance for the Greenwood, Mount Olivet Funeral Homes and Cemeteries in Fort Worth, Texas. He has served in a number of leadership roles for the ICCFA over the past 36 years. (Photo courtesy of Bill Wright)

As president of the ICCFA Educational Foundation, Price's leadership has seen an unparalleled rise in donations, scholarships awarded and initiatives undertaken.

"I am very proud of the several million dollars we have raised, which has allowed us to award over 500 scholarships to our ICCFA educational programs," he said. "I am also extremely proud of the Journey to Serve veterans recruitment initiative that we have jointly created and equally funded with the Funeral Service Foundation."

In addition, Price added, "we have been able to provide phenomenal exposure to the final responders during the pandemic via a series of public-service announcements in the United States and Canada. According to Nielsen ratings, 109 million households have viewed the PSAs.

"Finally, I am very pleased with the 'Honored to Be Asked to Share' series of videos that we have created for the benefit of those already in death care and, most importantly, for those just entering the profession."

A Variety of Roles

Wright has served in a number of leadership roles for the ICCFA over the past 36 years, including director, vice president of education and vice president of the government & public affairs steering committee. He also served as ICCFA president from 2002-2003, and currently serves as a member of the association's veterans committee.

Wright founded the ICCFA's Political Action Committee in 2003 and served as chairman for six years. The PAC has made an impact on the death-care profession with its advocacy efforts and through the PAC he is proud of starting two colleges at the ICCFA University in Memphis: the College of Cremation Services and the School of Restorative Arts.

"My mantra with my entire work with the ICCFA was to do good work for the members," he said. "That is the most important part. I had that as my driving force and that is always where I came from."

The 60-year-old Wright is currently the vice president of cemetery operations/facilities maintenance for the Greenwood, Mount Olivet Funeral Homes and Cemeteries in Fort Worth, Texas. Like Price, he was exposed to funeral service at a young age.

"I grew up in the cemetery business. My mother was the secretary at a cemetery and when I was 6 she would bring home maps of the cemetery so I could color in what areas were available and what wasn't," Wright said.

When he was 15, his stepfather and mother bought a cemetery in south-central Kansas and put Wright to work. "I was carrying a weed eater. It was an important job. They were heavy, it was hot work and you couldn't ease the pain no matter what you did," he recalled.

Three years later, Wright switched from the maintenance side to the sales side when he was attending Wichita State University. "Sam McDonough, my stepfather, put a sales kit in my hand and at

Christmas break I sold my first cemetery deal to a World War II veteran and his wife,” he said. “I continued to sell cemetery property to pay for college. I would work in the summer during college selling cemetery property and earn enough money to pay for books and tuition. I would go door to door at night, cold calling.

“I always knew it would be my career,” Wright added. “I really loved the business and the people who work in it. Selling was just a big, big part of it. Every position I had from 1979-80 to 2016 when I started at Greenwood/Mount Olivet had a sales element to it. I had to make sales or teach others to earn a living.”

After graduating from Wichita State in 1985, Wright continued to work for his stepfather as a salesperson. “When I was 25, my sales manager called me up and told me he had to resign his position because of health problems,” he said. “He said I had an interview in 10 minutes and that’s the way I became a manager.”

In 2000, Wright purchased a defunct funeral home and renamed it the Heritage Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Hutchinson, Kansas.

“I built up the business and we sold it to StoneMor in 2010,” he said. “I owned half of the funeral home. I was a funeral director, sold prearrangements, made removals, conducted funeral services and was involved with every aspect for providing services to families. It was a nice business and I learned an awful lot in respect to what funeral directors do and things you would not understand unless you were in their shoes. Until you perform the work funeral directors do, you don’t appreciate all the work that goes into it.”

During that time, Wright knew how important it was to hear what the families he served needed.

“We really listened to the family and what they wanted,” he said. “We read between the lines and exceeded their expectations every single time. The surveys we got back

Members of the ICCFA Hall of Fame

(Listed by year inducted)

	1995: Daniel E. Reed
1965: Raymond L. Brennan	1997: Harry “Hap” D. Bledsoe
1965: Eric S. Marmorek	1999: Harold Brown
1969: Roy Hatten	1999: Hugh Keatley
1969: R. Lee McNitt Jr.	2000: Edward C. Laux
1970: William Boyd	2000: J. Asher Neel
1975: George Young	2002: B. David Daly
1981: Herschel Auerbach	2004: Irwin W. Shipper
1981: James E. Watkins Jr.	2006: Samuel B. Saxton
1986: Frederick Llewellyn	2008: Robert T. “Ted” Nuckolls
1987: Robert G. Garrison	2009: Robert A. Gordon, Sr.
1987: Kenneth R. White Sr.	2011: Robert M. Fells
1988: John T. Bailey	2012: Arlie T. Davenport Jr.
1989: Alvin E. Melton	2013: Richard T. Sells
1990: C. H. Shackelford	2014: David J. Shipper
1991: Robert G. Neel	2015: Frederick W. Miller
1992: Charles B. Locke	2018: Paul M. Elvig
1993: H. E. Burton	2022: Jim Price
1994: Frank L. Karnes Jr.	2022: Bill Wright

showed we were doing something right on all levels.

“The listening part is what I learned as a cemetery salesperson.” Wright added. “I learned how to listen for things they aren’t telling and aren’t saying and being able to pick up on that. We were able to do some real fine things for the families we served.”

In 2010, Wright became the GM and sales manager for Sunset Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens in Evansville, Indiana.

“I went to work in Evansville for David Shipper who is my best friend

in the cemetery business and the experience was invaluable and served me well,” he said. “It was a beautiful operation and I was there for three-and-a-half years.”

Shipper is also a past president of the ICCFA and a 2014 Hall of Fame recipient.

Eyeing a move to Texas to be closer to some family members, Wright became the general and sales manager for Lakeview Cemetery and Funeral Home in Longview, Texas. He was there for three years before moving on to Greenwood/Mount Olivet.

Committee Work

Wright started on committees in the mid 1980s with the then American Cemetery Association, a prelude to today's ICCFA. In 1996, the ACA became the International Cemetery and Funeral Association, expanding its membership to include funeral homes and other related businesses and extending its reach beyond U.S. borders. In 2007, "Cremation" was added to the name.

"My stepfather sent me to a small cemetery conference in Greeley, Colorado, and afterward I was asked to join their advisory committee," he said. "I joined the Small Cemetery Advisory Committee in 1986 and was its chairman from 1989 to 1994.

"Being chairman of the SCAC I became a member of the strategic planning committee established by Arlie Davenport, and I was there throughout the transformation of the ACA to the ICFA, advocating for the interest of small cemetery members. Volunteering for the association

became personally and professionally rewarding and there were many networking opportunities."

One of those rewards was meeting Davenport.

"In 2016, Mr. Davenport called me and he wanted to interview me to come to Greenwood/Mount Olivet," Wright said. "What's interesting is that I had known Mr. Davenport since 1993 when he put together that strategic planning committee. Things really go full circle. I came to Greenwood/Mount Olivet because of not only the opportunity but my previous friendship with Mr. Davenport."

Advice for Those Starting Out

For those just entering funeral service or considering it as a career, what advice do Price and Wright have?

"This is one of my favorite areas to talk about. There is so much opportunity in funeral service if you are willing to be creative and open-

minded," Price said. "For those new to the profession, learn your craft diligently and expertly and always be respectful of tradition and the structure that is already there. But don't be afraid to bring suggestions of new ways of doing things to the table. This profession is changing and we must be forward thinking.

"Find a mentor that is passionate about their own career in funeral service," he added. "A good mentor will always know that helping people leverage their strengths is one of the most rewarding parts of their role as a leader."

Price recommends those starting out to use the resource that the ICCFA Educational Foundation provides with the "Honored to Be Asked to Share" series (honored2-share.org).

"The series includes 100 short video clips of some of the most incredibly successful leaders and entrepreneurs providing their perspective that will be of benefit to them," he said. "Finally, above all, treat others with dignity and respect, while expecting others to do the same for you."

Wright has recommendations for those who want to work at a cemetery and for those who are considering a career as a funeral director.

"On the cemetery side, learn sales and start there," he said. "The reason for that is you can start out with a professional income, while at the same time learn to harmonize with people. Your people skills will accelerate and it will serve you in good stead. In other words, it allows you to expand your career.

"My advice for being a funeral director is I wish people getting involved would concentrate on the arrangements with the family. That is where that focus must lie," he added. "It's not about vital stats, making folders, and contacting ministers and newspapers. It is concentrating on the needs and wishes of the family at the arrangement conference. They need to become professional arrangers, listening with a mighty purpose and

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follow through. Put yourself in position to be the best arranger and your value as a funeral director goes up in the minds of the families you serve. Funeral homes are begging for funeral directors who can make solid arrangements. You can do all the things that exceed the families' expectations, simply because you actively listened."

Many to Thank

It's been a productive journey for Price and Wright to the Hall of Fame and they're very appreciative of all those who have supported them along the way.

"There are so many that I could name, but Bob Horn and Tom Johnson are at the very top," Price said. "I have had the pleasure of knowing Bob Horn since the mid 1970s, which goes back to the IFS Industries days. Shortly thereafter we were at Pierce Brothers together with Tom Johnson, followed by a few years together in Batesville with Prime Succession. Both are truly icons that have had major positive impacts on my career and so many others. I think they both saw my passion for the business and my desire to grow, learn and gain more responsibility in the companies we were leading together.

"I really enjoyed our partnership together and working with them in the profession in general," he added. "They were supportive of my ideas when it made sense and provided clear guidance when maybe another way would be better. But they both offered an open door, collaborative partnership and creative environment. They helped me to become a much better leader that would then know how to offer the same type of leadership for my associates. I consider them both great mentors and close friends."

Wright is looking forward to hanging his Hall of Fame plaque with two others who have received the honor at Greenwood/Mount Olivet.

"John T. Bailey, a former CEO, who is the son of William J. Bailey, the founder of Greenwood Memorial

Park, was inducted in 1988 and Arlie Davenport, who is the current chairman of the board of trustees, was inducted in 2012," Ward said.

"I've had a blast over the years. I really loved doing the ICCFA work. The association has done more for me than I have done for it," he added. "It really propelled me professionally. The legendary industry leaders encouraged me along the way. It's the reason I am getting this award. So many members and people I have met and the life-affirming friendships I have made have been so valuable to me. It's just been enormously rewarding."

Price and Wright, who have known each other for close to 25 years, are proud to have been selected to the Hall of Fame together.

"Jim is a terrific gentleman," Wright said. "His stewardship of the educational foundation has brought it to levels unimagined in the beginning. As a result, more

and more members are benefiting and more opportunities for the association are captured. With Jim starting in the funeral business, and me in the cemetery business, the ICCFA brings us together and we find ourselves on the same podium. Jim is well deserving and it's an honor for me to stand side by side with him."

"I am very honored to be sharing the spotlight with Bill," Price said. "He has had an enormous impact on our profession with his dedication to founding the ICCFA Political Action Committee. I have enjoyed numerous trips with the Government and Legal Affairs Committee to Washington, D.C., and know that this PAC has been instrumental in representing the needs and interests of our profession as well as consumers. His service and dedication to this association are impressive and I am proud to know him and be in his company for our induction into the Hall of Fame." •

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