



# funeral service insider

INDEPENDENT NEWS FOR THE FUNERAL PROFESSIONAL

## 2022 ICCFA Hall of Famers Reflect on the Funeral Industry

### New inductees Jim Price and Bill Wright share the experiences that led to this honor

By Lynn Cavanaugh

At the 2022 International Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association Convention & Exposition in Las Vegas in March, two industry leaders – Jim Price, president and chairman of the ICCFA Educational Foundation, and Bill Wright, former president of the ICCFA and founder of the ICCFA’s Political Action Committee – were inducted into ICCFA’s Hall of Fame.

Price and Wright join 35 other funeral industry professionals who have “demonstrated unselfish service and outstanding contributions to the ICCFA, to the cemetery, funeral, cremation and memorialization profession, and, ultimately, to the public,” according to the ICCFA.

We talked to Price and Wright, the two newest inductees, about the award, their years in the profession, their reflections on the changing industry and their hopes for the future of the funeral service.

#### Jim Price: President of the ICCFA Educational Foundation

“What is unique about this induction is that Jim Price is not being recognized solely for what he has accomplished in the past,” Ray Frew, president and CEO of Green Hills

Memorial Park, said at the ICCFA Hall of Fame induction ceremony in March. “It encompasses what he continues to do every day. He has served in this exemplary fashion without thought of reward or recognition for more than 40 years.”



Jim Price

Price is the senior vice president, industry relations for the Park Lawn Corporation in Houston. Previously, he co-founded Foundation Partners Group as well as Keystone Group Holdings.

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.

He began to serve in the funeral-profession at age 15. We reached out to Price to find out what drew him to the profession and what keeps him motivated to give back to the industry.

#### As an inductee into the ICCFA Hall of Fame, what do you want your legacy to be in the industry?

My hope is that in mentoring others, I have helped them to “pay it forward” – to teach others as well. I believe that this attitude of sharing will guide even

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# Editor's Desk

## Hall of Famers

“I truly love this profession and plan on being involved for a long time,” Jim Price, one of the 2022 International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association’s Hall of Fame inductees, told Funeral Service Insider. We had a chance to talk to Price (and Bill Wright, this year’s other inductee) for this week’s cover story, “2022 ICCFA Hall of Famers Reflect on the Funeral Industry.”



The two shared their experiences in the business, as well as thoughts about winning this prestigious award, their exemplary body of work, their reflections on the ever-evolving industry and how they stay inspired to be able to continue to serve families.

Both Price, senior vice president, industry relations for the Park Lawn Corp. in Houston, and Wright, vice president of cemetery operations/facilities maintenance for the Greenwood, Mount Olivet Funeral Homes and Cemeteries in Fort Worth, Texas, both grew up in the funeral business. Both have also been involved with the ICCFA for years: Price is now president & chairman of the ICCFA Educational Foundation and Wright founded ICCFA’s Political Action Committee in 2003, served as chairman for six years and currently serves as a member of the veterans committee.

Also, both talk about the importance of giving back to the industry. “Getting involved with something bigger than myself was the lesson I learned and encouraged all my adult life,” Wright says.

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**Correction:** In the April 14 issue, we included the wrong name of the COO in the “ClearPoint Federal’s New Focus on Strategic Partnerships” story. ClearPoint’s COO is Kristina Glassford.

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*(con't from page 1)*

more individuals to become better at caring for families, for their organizations and for themselves and their own families. Some of my very favorite inspirational quotes from (former UCLA men's basketball) coach John Wooden are: "Don't mistake activity for achievement," "Choose gratitude instead of resentment," "A player who makes a team great is better than a great player," "The best way to improve the team is to improve yourself," "Things work out best for those who make the best of the way things work out" and finally "Make each day your masterpiece. When you do that – as the weeks, months and years unfold

behind you – you will have the deepest satisfaction that your life has had relevance and significance." When it is all said and done, I hope that I have been an example of each of these inspirational quotes to others. It is what I have strived to do every single day. I truly love this profession and plan on being involved in for a long time.

**How have you made your mark in the funeral industry?**

Through my work with the ICCFA Educational Foundation, I hope that I have helped to make education more accessible for our profession's future leaders. I think all of us who have been lucky enough to

serve and have success in this profession have that obligation to the next generation of leaders – those who will continue in service to our families. (See more on the ICCFA Educational Foundation on page 4.)

**What are some of the biggest positive impacts the pandemic has had on Park Lawn?**

One of the biggest positive impacts the pandemic has had on our One Park Lawn team (as we referenced ourselves) has been to take care of our own associates, as we take care of the families that we serve. This pandemic has been so draining on our society as a whole,

## Remember Together: A COVID-19 Day of Remembrance Planning Guide for Funeral Directors

For every COVID-19 death, nine close family members are left behind to grieve that loved one, according to a University of Southern California study. With more than one million people having died of COVID in the United States, communities are experiencing what some have called a secondary "pandemic of grief."

Now, funeral homes can help bring a measure of healing to their communities with the help of a new guidebook offered by the National Funeral Directors Association. "Remember Together," which is available to NFDA members, is a 24-page planning guide that offers guidance on how to organize and promote a COVID-19



memorial event and activities in the community.

Since many people were "unable to have a funeral," Gail Marquardt, NFDA vice president of consumer

engagement, said, "holding a memorial event for your community can bring comfort to people who may be grieving by acknowledging their losses, holding space for their grief and helping to keep the memory of friends and loved ones alive."

The "Remember Together" materials also include a toolkit that is filled with customizable templates – including social media posts, a news release, print ads and a postcard. NFDA has also made educational podcasts and blogs available for members to share on social media to bring solace to their community.

NFDA members can download the "Remember Together" guidebook and toolkit at [www.nfda.org/RememberTogether](http://www.nfda.org/RememberTogether).

but in particular those who are on the frontlines of serving the families after a loss. The sheer number of deaths has been staggering. We have done this by encouraging everyone to focus on their purpose – encouraging everyone to define for themselves just what that is. For most of us, it is truly a call to serve people in the darkest hour of need and to help them begin the grief journey. We believe that we must remain 100% present and committed to ourselves, our co-workers and our communities and that if we do so, it will greatly assist us in avoiding burnout.

We also partnered with Dr. Alan Wolfelt and the HeartLight Center to create educational videos to use by our internal teams to address: The Way of Meaningful Funerals; Responding to a Disaster; and Funeral Service and Stress. Additionally, for our community partners, we have videos wherein Dr. Wolfelt addresses issues such as: Prioritizing Your Self Care and Exploring COVID-19 and the Grief Overload.

Finally, at PLC we continue to place a strong emphasis on the well-being and development of our people. This has led us in establishing the following initiative – The Heart of the Company Committee, which offers employees meaningful and accessible grief support and education through seminars and workshops, facilitates programs for employee health and well-being, and oversees a company-wide assistance program for those suffering a tragic or catastrophic loss.

## ICCFA Educational Foundation Accepting Applications for 50 Scholarships

The ICCFA Educational Foundation, which is headed by new Hall of Fame inductee Jim Price who serves as president and chairman, just awarded 84 scholarships in January. “We are currently in the process of offering an additional minimum of 50 scholarships for ICCFA members to the ICCFA University in July,” Price said. “This university is the ultimate educational opportunity for our profession.”

The university is a five-day program, July 22-27, held on the campus of Emory University in Atlanta. There are eight colleges for attendees to enroll in: College

of 21st Century Services; College of Cremation Services; College of Funeral Home Management; College of Hospitality and Customer Experience; J. Asher Neel College of Sales & Marketing; College of Land Management and Grounds Operations; College of Leadership, Management & Administration; and a new one this year – the College of Technology.

For more information on the University, go to [iccf.com/university/](http://iccf.com/university/). To apply for an ICCFA scholarship, go to **ICCFA University Scholarship Application**; deadline is June 3, 2022.

### What are some of the biggest positive impacts the pandemic has had on the industry?

When COVID-19 struck, it forced societal changes around our world and in our profession. Nearly overnight, government-issued orders limited large gatherings of people and restricted so many in-person business operations, including funeral services and celebrations of life. We all had to turn to various collaboration platforms and video conferencing capabilities.

As a result, this created both opportunities and challenges. Some client families have expressed their interest in receiving services with little to no contact with people – calling for remote, or at least limited-contact operations. Our profession was forced

to adapt to an immediate need for more tech-savvy offerings. I am so proud of the way we have adapted to serve the needs of our grieving families.

### Aside from scholarships, what initiatives is the ICCFA offering this year to promote the profession and support those seeking careers in funeral service?

Journey to Serve! This is a unique marketing campaign launched in 2021 by the ICCFA Educational Foundation and the Funeral Service Foundation. This collaborative effort between organizations aims to engage, recruit, and hire more military veterans to careers in the funeral service profession – including meaningful work in funeral homes,

“I hope that I have helped to make education more accessible for our profession’s future leaders. I think all of us who have been lucky enough to serve and have success in this profession have that obligation to the next generation of leaders – those who will continue in service to our families.”

– Jim Price, senior vice president, industry relations at Park Lawn Corp.

cemeteries, crematories, funeral vendors, finance companies, insurance partners, and all levels of support roles.

We feel this is an especially important initiative for many reasons. The first one is that when asked to name their top business challenges, owners of funeral profession businesses rank finding and retaining strong employees at the top of their list! Additionally, there are nearly 220,000 honorably discharged veterans annually. Research indicates that 80% of them don’t have a job lined up. Veterans bring such a diversity from leadership and problem solving to a strong understanding of culture that is needed to succeed in this profession.

In October, the Department of Defense “Military One Source” approved Journey to Serve to be listed on their site. This is available to all 220,000 annually discharged veterans.

In addition, the Department of Labor has also approved the Career

One Source. (For more information, go to [www.journeytoserve.com](http://www.journeytoserve.com))

**What’s the best piece of advice you could give to someone new to the funeral industry?**

Hopefully they would learn it’s not about title or designation. It’s about impact, influence and inspiration. Impact is about getting results. Influence is about spreading the passion you have for your work, all while continuing to inspire the next generation of leadership.

**Are there any other associations or boards outside of funeral service on which you serve?**

Yes. I am very fortunate to be able to serve on the board of directors for the National Alliance for Children’s Grief. It is a nonprofit organization that, through the collective voice of our members and partners, raises awareness about the needs of children and teens who are grieving a death and provides education and resources for anyone who supports them.

Knowing now that one out of five children in North America are grieving based upon the loss of someone that is very close and significant in their lives, it is critical to understand the importance of reaching out to bereavement counselors in their communities, as well as supporting the wonderful efforts of NACG. I am hopeful that I will be able to better connect those in my profession regarding how very important it is to have the appropriate conversation with children’s parents.

**Bill Wright: Founded ICCFA’s Political Action Committee**

“I grew up in the cemetery business,” Bill Wright, vice president of cemetery operations/facilities maintenance for Greenwood – Mount Olivet, Funeral Homes, Cremation and Cemeteries in Fort Worth, Texas, told American Funeral Director. “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.”

When he was 15, his stepfather and mother bought a cemetery in south-central Kansas and put Wright to work on cemetery grounds maintenance. Three years later, he switched to the sales side when he was attending Wichita State University. In 2000, he purchased a defunct funeral home and renamed it the Heritage Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Hutchinson, Kansas.

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 started two colleges at the ICCFA University in Memphis: the College of Cremation Services and the School of Restorative Arts.

We talked to Wright about his lifelong involvement in the funeral industry, as well as the people who have inspired him, including two other ICCFA Hall of Fame recipients – John T. Bailey and Arlie T. Davenport Jr.



**As an inductee into ICCFA Hall of Fame, what do you want your legacy to be in the industry? How do you think you have made your mark in the industry?**

I shared a message to the ICCFA members during the Hall of Fame ceremony that I truly believe gets to the heart of ... legacy, at least from

my personal perspective ... “Very few of us will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of an event...”

Is making small changes to history a legacy? I don't know, but bending history certainly is. It's meant to describe accomplishments so innovative as to affect the trajectory of membership benefits. The folks I write about below are the ones who I spoke about during my presentation...

Dr. Hubert Eaton, for example, started in the cemetery business like many of us selling preneed cemetery property. He is credited as the founder of Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. He was the first person to establish the memorial park concept, which is a cemetery void of upright monuments. Dr. Eaton's idea was that cemeteries should be places where life is celebrated. That is why there are inspirational art works and statues in Forest Lawn and other memorial parks throughout the country ... His ideas are examples of an industry leader who started to bend history in 1912 ... Think of how many memorial park cemeteries we have in this country and Forest Lawn was the first. Dr. Eaton was also the first person to place a funeral home within a cemetery, thus the beginning of combination operations. Now that is a life full of accomplishments ... In other words, a legacy...

R. L. Waltrip and Frank Stewart were funeral directors turned cemetery owners ... They gave voice to how wonderful this business can be

on the largest of scale through consolidation, which was a new industry business plan at the time, building monetary value by individual or family-owned and operated cemeteries and funeral homes became the norm ... Many careers have been launched and many industry leaders have been mentored by what these two men accomplished. They are perfect examples of folks who possessed the greatness to bend history for the industry ... Therefore, a legacy ...

My accomplishments, while being president of the association, are inextricably tied to the actions of two people ... Irwin Shipper was the first and long-time chairman of the government and legislative affairs committee of the ICCFA. He and his brother Leon were patriarchs of a very well-respected cemetery family from New Jersey and New York. He was also a NYU trained attorney. The purpose of his work was to provide a membership benefit the individual members could not otherwise effectively provide for themselves. Combining federal and state legislative representation with the collective power of a united membership benefits all ... Every cemetery issue we could think about was addressed ... Shipper certainly had a profound effect upon membership benefits ... a legacy. It was due to his previously laid groundwork that made feasible the ICCFA PAC that I established as president of the association.

The second person was Arlie Davenport. He served as the association president in 1993 and 1994. Davenport exponentially expanded the membership by changing the membership base from purely cemeteries

to include funeral directors and funeral homes that were in favor of pre-funding. This of course opened up all kinds of positive possibilities in membership benefits, inner industry education, consumer outreach, association financial security and government representation, all due to Mr. Davenport’s vision and hard work ... a legacy.

Yes, one of my accomplishments as president was to add the first funeral-related college and cremation-related college to the curriculum at the ICCFA University. But it could never had been possible but for the actions Arlie Davenport took a decade earlier. This describes a true legacy. If I’ve made a mark in the industry

through expanded educational opportunities and enhanced government outreach, it is because they established the environment for one generation to the next to thrive.

**What do you hope to change/improve in the industry in the years ahead?**

## **This Funeral Service Firm Shares Three ICCFA Hall of Famers**

Aside from the newest ICCFA Hall of Fame inductee Bill Wright, vice president of operations/facilities maintenance for Greenwood, Mount Olivet Funeral Homes and Cemeteries, there are two other hall of famers from the same Greenwood/Olivet team – Arlie Davenport, current chairman of the board of trustees, and the late John T. Bailey, a former CEO and son of William J. Bailey, founder of Greenwood Memorial Park. When we asked Wright what he could attribute to this prestigious distinction, “the short answer can be described as a culture of service, but for me, it goes deeper and needs exploration,” he said.

“My stepfather, Sam McDonough, started in the cemetery business in the mid-1960s at Rest Haven Memorial Park in Wichita, Kansas. Hap Bledsoe (a hall of famer himself) owned the operation. Sam had started and sold two very successful businesses he built from the ground up after his service in World War II,” Wright said.

In the late 1980s, Wright’s stepfather asked him to attend a small



**ICCFA inductee Bill Wright, right, shares his honor with two other members of the Greenwood/Mount Olivet team – Arlie Davenport, left, and the late John T. Bailey. (Photo courtesy of Bill Wright)**

cemetery convention. “On my return I told him that I had ‘hit if off’ with members of the Small Cemetery Advisory Committee, and they had asked me to become a member. Sam responded. ‘I hoped that would happen. I have my own network of friends but you need a network of your own.’ Getting involved with something bigger than myself was the lesson I learned and encouraged all my adult life.

“The same message can be delivered when describing John Bailey (son of the founder of Greenwood)

and Arlie Davenport, his protégé and current chairman of the board,” Wright said. “Both men are hall of fame recipients. There existed for me in my professional formative years, and theirs as well, an expectation of giving back. Greenwood has a culture of service.

“Most cemeterians share one thing in common,” he added. “There are not a whole bunch of folks who do what we do. I’m fond of saying ‘While in the public space, no matter the size of the room I am the only cemetery guy.’ Since we share this in common, then it makes sense that we want to gather and to contribute to organizations whose members think alike on most things. Surrounded by people who know the challenges and are now lifelong friends, letting them down by not contributing our time, talent and treasure in not acceptable. It really gets in your blood and becomes very meaningful. And if we are so fortunate to have received the Hall of Fame Award for what we did in service, that in no way matches what we received in return.”

A dose of positivity and reality is needed when it comes to direct cremation and how to address it. In the environment we work in, cremation is viewed by some as “Oh, it’s just a cremation.” There is little enthusiasm, when in fact it is a wonderful opportunity to serve. Funeral homes and cemeteries share in the same message, only in different forms, and that is the healing power of memorialization.

operation, small or large, against another ... or us against the competition down the street ... There was a certain amount of comfort in knowing everyone was in the same boat. Cemeteries and funeral homes were considered essential. We had to stay open to provide services, limited as they were, and to try to help families deal with the reality of the moment.

under so much duress so that in some instances families chose to go elsewhere for their service because of all the delays the funeral homes had to manage. Many families transferred their pre-arrangements, which added insult to injury. It takes years to build up generational trust, and time will tell if those establishments will still be the preferred choice for that same family, ... or did they lose them as a result of the unprecedented times?

“The effectiveness of the interaction between the funeral director and the family is as critical to the survival of the funeral home as any other element, especially today in the world of cremation memorialization.”

– Bill Wright, vice president of cemetery operations/facilities maintenance for the Greenwood, Mount Olivet Funeral Homes

**Can you talk about the ICCFA’s Political Action Committee that you founded and the impact it had on the death-care profession?**

It is important to remind the readers why the PAC was established. Everyone should remember the Tri-State Crematory debacle in Noble, Georgia, which burst onto the scene when I was president of the ICCFA in the early 2000s. You will remember the story was fueled by the national press coverage: Newspapers, TV and magazines brought the ugliness to the nation’s living rooms and the halls of Congress as well. Former Democratic Sen. Chris Dodd of Connecticut and former Florida Republican Rep. Mark Foley sponsored a bipartisan bill that would take the regulatory authority for cemeteries and funeral homes away from state jurisdiction ... I told (Bob Fells, then ICCFA legal counsel) it may be too late for this issue, but we need to start a PAC ... The bill died in Congress, but it was a shot across our bow and foretold the potential of battles yet to come.

If we could get this message across to front-line professionals, including executives in our industry, then I believe it would not only go a long way in changing consumers’ attitudes toward what we do for a living, but actually help them understand the importance of memorializing their loved ones.

**What is the biggest impact the pandemic has had on Greenwood? On the industry?**

The pandemic, in an unusual way I think, brought the industry together, in spirit at least. The challenges that were faced and overcome were not a matter of one

Developing new ways daily in order to operate personally and operationally was a challenge. Getting supplies, working short staffed, dealing with family and personal anxiety, fear if you want to call it, was all around. Yet the perseverance and the “we can do it” attitude permeated throughout the industry. At least it did at Greenwood-Mount Olivet. Leadership is a hot commodity and in my opinion our operations here in Fort Worth shot to the stars.

There may be many unknown consequences associated with the pandemic. One that comes to mind is this: funeral establishments were



The establishment of the PAC was truly the beginning of the one association representing the whole of the industry is becoming the premier go-to organization for legal and government representation to which our national leaders reach out. Giving earmarked campaign donations to senators and congress committee chairs on both sides of the aisles enhance the ability of the association to catch the attention of lawmakers. For the first time having a seat at the table gave us a real opportunity to affect legislation on the national stage.

**What's the best piece of advice you could give to someone new to the funeral industry?**

If someone starting out came up to me and asked me my advice for their career within the cemetery

business? My learned opinion would be to learn sales. Dr. Eaton started this way and so did I. I sold my first cemetery contract when I was 18 years of age going door to door earning money for college tuition. I'll never forget it – two spaces, two vaults and one companion bronze on a granite memorial for a total of \$2,190 ... Learning to harmonize with people is an invaluable skill you learn while doing the job ...

What is lacking in the classroom training that must be learned is how to effectively communicate with families around the arrangement table. The effectiveness of the interaction between the funeral director and the family is as critical to the survival of the funeral home as any other element, especially today in the world of

cremation memorialization.

If you are a young person just starting out, what we are referring to is a learned skill that requires mentoring and then practicing over and over again. If getting started is a second career choice, or you have some maturing and developed life skills from the get-go, then it could be a matter of breaking bad communication habits or redirecting your talents to fit the job and then redefining yourself. Either way, the most vital skill to sharpen is the art of “active listening.”

What my mom and stepdad instilled within me was a very simple concept. No matter who you come in contact with ... pretend they have “make me feel important today” written across their forehead and then do it.



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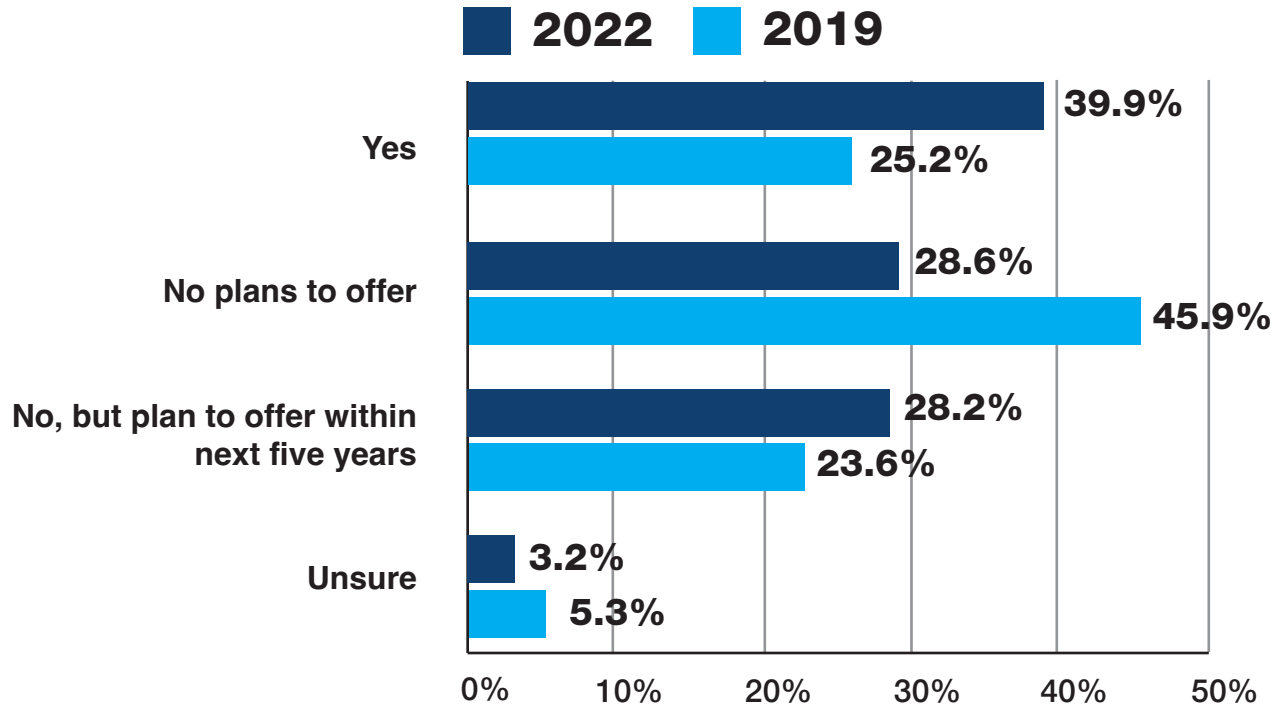
**fsi** Funeral Service Insider's Annual Compensation Survey

The survey is anonymous, so participants should feel free to be as honest and candid as possible with their responses. The results will appear in an upcoming issue.

**Take the survey now**

# Is Your Funeral Home Offering Direct Cremations Online?

Does your firm offer the option to make cremation arrangements online?



There has been a significant shift toward online cremation arrangements since the pandemic. This year, 39.9% of funeral homes offer the option to make cremation arrangements online, a significant increase from 25.2% in 2019. In addition, 28.2% plan to offer online cremation arrangement options within the next five years, up from 23.6% in 2019. While there is real value in making arrangements in-person, funeral homes need to learn to market differently and to what appeals to the consumer, according to the National Funeral Directors Association. *Source: National Funeral Directors Association*

## the last word

“Never before in our lifetimes has death been so present. Society has a desperate need for spaces of healing – from the traumas of COVID, as well as other forms of grief and grievances ... A sense of community and ritual are important scaffolds around life’s transitions, and we need options and practices commensurate with current individual values and planetary priorities. Relative to just a decade ago, the public interest and willingness to engage in discussions of death and disposition are truly remarkable.”

– from Karla Rothstein, founder and director of Columbia University’s DeathLab and co-editor of “The Future of the Corpse: Changing Ecologies of Death and Disposition”

### in the next issue

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