

PROFILES

By Patti Martin Bartsche

Recognizing a Higher Calling

It all began Dec. 18, 2007, when U.S. Rep. Charles A. Wilson sponsored House Resolution 892, expressing support for the designation of a “National Funeral Director and Mortician Recognition Day.”

The Ohio congressman, who died in 2013, was a 1967 graduate of Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science and recognized the important role funeral directors and morticians play in assisting families in their times of sadness and grief, helping them mourn a death and celebrate a life.

Wilson took to the House floor April 29, 2008, to explain his support for the designation of March 11, as “National Funeral Director and Mortician Recognition Day”:

I introduced this resolution because I know firsthand how funeral directors help families through the grieving process in a most difficult time.

... I am a fourth-generation funeral director in my family, and I know very well the profound service that funeral directors provide to their communities. Funeral directors are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. When a family calls a funeral director to make arrangements for a recently deceased loved one, the funeral director must put everything else on hold and attend to the family's

needs immediately.

We all know that the death of a loved one can be emotionally devastating. Funeral directors play an essential role in giving families the space they need to navigate the grieving process. By taking care of all of the logistical arrangements, funeral directors allow families to celebrate the life of the recently departed and spending time together as a family.

As a lifelong funeral director, I know how important this service is to grieving families. This is why I think that it is proper that this Congress recognize the hard work and the sacrifice of thousands of funeral directors in this country by passing this bill.

The measure passed by a voice vote, and since 2008, March 11 has been designated to acknowledge the contributions of funeral directors and morticians throughout the United States.

In recognition of this day, we're sharing the stories of those funeral directors and morticians who found their way into funeral service – and why they stay.



**JENNIFER SCHLOSSER, OWNER
AND FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

**SCHLOSSER FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION
SERVICES, WAPAKONETA, OHIO**

In a way, Jennifer M. Schlosser finding her way into funeral service isn't that surprising. Growing up with a father who is a doctor and a mother who is a hospice nurse, talking about death was just a part of life.

When her beloved “Mamaw” died the summer before her freshman year of high school, Schlosser was very curious about everything going on at the funeral home. While she doesn’t remember the funeral director’s name specifically, she was just intrigued by the experience ... the ceremony, how things came together for the service for her beloved grandmother, how the funeral director cared for her family in their time of need.

Fast forward several years, and Schlosser, then a high school junior, started job-shadowing at a local funeral home. “I went there on a Saturday morning to watch a funeral and go to the cemetery, and in a way, I just never left,” she said. “I job-shadowed for the rest of high school, and I realized there wasn’t anything else I wanted to do.”

Attending mortuary school was a given.

The Ohio native graduated from Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, returned to the funeral home where she had once job-shadowed for her apprenticeship and then stayed at the firm for another seven years as a licensed funeral director and embalmer.

It was a love story, both professionally and personally.

“I knew being a funeral director was what I was meant to do,” she said. “I’m a first-generation funeral director, so going in, it was all new to me. But caring for others was something I knew I could do; more importantly, it was what I wanted to do.”

Originally enrolled in the Southern Illinois University mortuary school program, it was on a visit home to Ohio that Schlosser met her now husband, Brian M. Schlosser, himself a licensed funeral director and embalmer. Following a short, long-distance relationship, Schlosser transferred to CCMS.

The couple would marry, and her husband was able to realize his dream of opening his own funeral home in his hometown of Wapakoneta, Ohio, where Schlosser would later join him.

As the owners of Schlosser Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Jenn and Brian work side-by-side every day.

Schlosser acknowledged that working with a spouse has its perks and challenges. “It’s nice in the sense that your spouse understands that you might have to work a holiday or go out at 3 a.m. You don’t have to explain because that level of understanding is right there ... the need to be

there for a family, regardless of the time or date, is understood.”

It’s that passion for helping families that keeps Schlosser involved in her local community and the greater funeral service family. She is the current Northwest Regional Director of the Ohio Funeral Directors Association and co-chair of the OFDA Young Funeral Directors Committee.

The why of staying in the funeral profession is easy for Schlosser to answer.

“It’s the reward of when you’re done serving a family – whether it’s right after the funeral or the next week or the next month or a year later – they still have such gratitude. It makes the long hours and all of that worth it,” Schlosser said. “My husband and I have created something very special in our small community; there’s always something special in seeing someone in the store and knowing we’ve been able to be there for them every step of the way.”

As a small-town funeral director, Schlosser has asked herself many times whether she is a reminder of the worst time in a person’s life when she meets families at the grocery store or soccer field. The thought is fleeting, though, when she recalls what families have told her: “You are literally the best memory of that dark time.”

It’s heartfelt words like that that keep Schlosser engaged and energized. “What we do matters, so we will continue to find ways to best serve our families,” she said. “What we do is so important.”



**LOGAN PHILLIPPE,
FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

**FUNERAL ALTERNATIVES OF WASHINGTON,
TUMWATER, WASHINGTON**

I came to the funeral service profession via the military. I was privileged to serve two deployments at the Port Mortuary at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. During my time there, I was honored to reunite soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen who had been killed in action with their loved ones at home. I had never felt such a sense of accomplishment. When I returned home, my wife was gracious enough to allow me to attend school full time so that I could earn my mortuary degree.

The people I work with daily are what keep me in the profession. I love serving families to the best of my ability. Not only do I get to serve families, but I get to work with amazing colleagues – genuine people who love the profession just as much as I do. Days may be stressful, but I feel good going home at night knowing that my work family has my back, as they know I have theirs.



**ROHAEMA SMITH, FUNERAL
DIRECTOR, EMBALMER,
MANAGING PARTNER**

**BAIRD-CASE JORDAN-FANNIN FUNERAL
HOME & CREMATION SERVICE,
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA**

As a child, I would often accompany my mother to funerals. Fueled by a naive curiosity about death and the afterlife, I found myself peering into the casket, trying to grasp the finality of life. This curiosity, which was initially just a child’s wonder, stayed with me through my high school years. It was then that I decided to shift my academic focus from accounting to mortuary science.

I was driven by a desire to have a career that would allow me to help and guide others. After conducting thorough

cultivated experiences and opportunities destined for me to heed my call in a ministry of serving others.

What keeps me in funeral service is multifaceted. There is a unique interweaving of components that, for me, effortlessly come together to make my experience extraordinary. To begin, each and every day is different. No one day is like the other, and every new day is full of possibilities. I get the distinct honor to connect with all different types of people from all walks of life and for a brief moment in time, get to walk beside them as they embark on their journey of life-altering grief.

There is no greater reward than when a family shares with you how grateful they are that you were there when they needed you most. I get to continually learn and grow. Whether it's a new technique or trend or a lesson in humility, I am consistently challenged to better myself, my craft, and my capabilities so I can provide unsurpassed service to my community.

I have an unwavering support system of people who encourage me to spread my wings and take leaps of faith toward any-

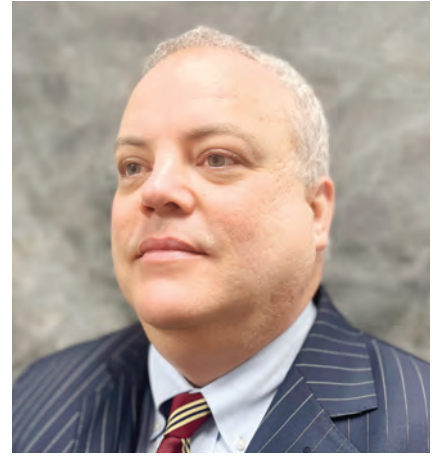
thing I put my mind to. Their pride in me, regardless of failure, is what motivates and reminds me that nothing is impossible.

Finally, it's the people I work alongside of who keep me in funeral service the most. I am unbelievably blessed to be surrounded by like-minded people who personify teamwork and are always willing to lend a hand or provide a listening ear. In such an emotionally demanding profession, I cannot express how thankful I am to share all the laughs and tears with those who understand it most. We have a rare bond that feels more like family than coworkers, and I couldn't imagine what my life, career, or profession would be like without them.

PHILLIP PRIDGEN FUNERAL DIRECTOR

EMERALD COAST FUNERAL HOME
FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA

When I was 10 years old, my grandmother passed unexpectedly. While it was a shock to me as a young man, I was both comforted and amazed at how well



the funeral directors carried out their duties of preparing her for viewing and how compassionate they were with my family. As well, when the directors arrived to take her into their care, I felt a sense of relief. I knew they would do for her what we could not do ourselves. Their effort was nothing short of extraordinary!

This experience inspired me to imitate the care those directors gave to guide my career in funeral service. I will always be a funeral director not only because I enjoy what I do, but more importantly, because I

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truly see my career as a calling to give others the same trusted, professional experience I had. The way I see it, I handle funerals daily but the families I serve do not. They trust me to direct them appropriately and to care for them with first-class hospitality to make a difference in their lives. The care and hospitality I afford each family isn't just nice, it is necessary to lighten the load of grief and help them to celebrate the life of their loved one with dignity and honor.

**BRANDY CLINTON
FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

**OMEGA SOCIETY
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA**

I started my first job in the funeral industry at the age of 18. A friend who had just gotten hired at a local mortuary and cemetery told me it was a great place to work. I was hired as a file clerk, filing cemetery cards before computers, then moved to the mortuary office, taking death calls, preparing death certificates, and getting cases ready for their services. I found my-



self quick to answer the phone and took great satisfaction in helping the bereaved who were making one of life's most difficult calls. I loved helping callers through that conversation and preparing for what came next. My goal was to become an arrangement counselor, and after a lot of training and experience, I eventually made it. I continue to be honored by opportunities to meet with families in person to help them make funeral and cemetery arrange-

ments. I love what I do and can't imagine doing anything else.

While I am no longer an arrangement counselor, my 34 years as a funeral service professional have taught me cemetery laws, mortuary rules, and management skills that prove this still is where I belong. Today, I mentor the arrangement counselors at my location, answer phones on the weekends, and speak with families about what happens next. The funeral industry is a very fulfilling profession, and I feel blessed to have found my way here. Families tell me it takes a special person to do what I do, and I firmly believe that.

**JOSEPH STONE
FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

**BRINGS BROADWAY CHAPEL
TUCSON, ARIZONA**

I came into this profession as a recent graduate of the University of Arizona. I had a longtime interest in funeral service and reached a point in my life where the pursuit was possible. Thanks to some in-



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able to share what I have learned with a new generation currently pursuing an education in mortuary science. The profession is very interesting, and all aspects of this career still fascinate me. Technological changes and evolving consumer expectations keep me motivated to learn.

**DANIELLE BICKER
FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

**FARLEY FUNERAL HOMES & CREMATION
SERVICES, VENICE, FLORIDA**

My sister oversees and teaches in the radiology program at our local community college, and I had always thought that's what I wanted to pursue. After I graduated high school, I worked as a certified nursing assistant for a home hospice facility in my hometown. I would go to different patients' homes and assist them with whatever they needed. Some patients were in the final stages of life, and it was my responsibility to make sure they were comfortable. When patients passed away during my shift, I followed proper proto-

col and contacted funeral homes. When funeral directors came into the homes and performed the transfer, I was intrigued by their work and hungry to learn more about the profession. After a lot of research and many phone calls, I reached out to a mortuary college that was two hours from my hometown. They immediately invited me for a visit. After that visit, I knew funeral service was the career choice for me. •

credibly generous and highly respected mentors, I worked in the profession part time for several years before earning professional certification in embalming and funeral directing and making funeral service my career.

I have stayed in this profession for the last 24 years primarily because I enjoy learning new things every day, and I am



Thank You

As we observe National Funeral Director and Mortician Recognition Day, we want to extend our deepest appreciation for your outstanding dedication and heartfelt service to grieving families.

Your unwavering commitment to guiding individuals through the difficult journey of bidding farewell to their loved ones does not go unnoticed. Your caring nature, combined with your professional expertise, has provided solace and comfort to those who needed it the most.

Your role as a funeral director goes beyond the professional realm; it is a calling that requires empathy, compassion, and a genuine concern for people. Your commitment to ensuring that each family receives the support they need during their time of loss is truly commendable.

In celebrating National Funeral Director and Mortician Recognition Day, we recognize the significant impact you make in the lives of those you serve. Your ability to bring solace and peace to grieving hearts is a testament to your exceptional skills and the genuine care you extend to every family.

Thank you for your tireless efforts, your compassionate approach, and the meaningful difference you make to the lives of so many. Your service is a source of strength and support for many, and on this special day, we want to express our gratitude for the profound impact you have on the lives of those around you.

With heartfelt thanks,

The Wilbert Group

