

When Ownership Ends but the “Ministry” of Service Continues

IN THE FUNERAL PROFESSION, like many others, business succession plans take on many forms. In the most recent funeral association Member Succession Planning Study, 65% of funeral home owners surveyed said they plan to exit their business by transferring or selling to a child, another family member, a key employee, or co-owner. Only 30% of the owners surveyed said they plan to sell to a third party.

What studies like this do not cover, however, are the gray areas between these options. One of those gray areas involves funeral business owners who sell but stay on to devote more time to what they love most—personally supporting grieving families.

Funeral directors Steve and Nanci Trevino of Parker, CO, fall into this category of former owners. Unlike many of today’s most experienced funeral directors, Steve didn’t grow up in a family of funeral directors. As a teenager, he mowed lawns and parked cars at the funeral home of family friends and was moved by the grief-stricken families he watched enter the building. When these families came out, however, they were “changed,” and Steve wanted to know more about a profession that could have such a profoundly positive impact on families in need.

That exploration led him to mortuary school and a 44-year career in funeral service. In 2003, Steve and his wife, Nanci, founded Ponderosa Valley Funeral Services in his hometown of Parker, where Nanci joined him as a funeral director and administrator.

Future Planning

Over the next 16 years, they raised their two sons and provided compassionate support and outstanding service to area families. They also became indispensable fixtures in the Parker community. As devoted parishioners of Ava Maria Catholic Church, passionate supporters of the U.S. Armed Services, and committed volunteers, their service to families on and off



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the job became a “ministry” as well as a “profession.”

The Trevinos were diligent in running their business and created a succession plan based on their two sons taking over the family business. After their sons graduated from the nearby U.S. Air Force Academy,

it became clear that they were not going to follow in their parents’ footsteps. Plan B was to sell the business to a company that would carry on their legacy of service. Although they were still relatively young and wanted to continue their “ministry,” the burden of day-to-day business management often prevented them from personally supporting grieving families.

From Proprietor to Partner

In 2019, Steve and Nanci sold their business, and over the past four years, they have become a model for the successful transition from business owners to more active community servants.

“The core reason I entered the funeral profession was to help families, but as an owner you have to do it all. The day-to-day operations can become overwhelming, and you sometimes forget why you’re there in the first place,” Steve said. “Joining [a company] allowed us to step back and focus on serving families and community outreach. And we have more time to spend with our own family. I just love it and it’s been fun telling the transition story to peers and friends in the community.”

Nanci agrees. “Initially, we were still here full-time and carried on many of our duties. As the business has expanded, I’ve pulled back some to focus on preneed sales. I still meet with families on occasion and assist at funeral services, as needed, but I’ve had more time to mentor the staff. I’m confident we have the best people in each job and that they will maintain our high level of customer service, our integrity and our reputation in the community.”

Today, four years later, Steve and Nanci remain an inspirational presence at Ponderosa Valley Funeral Services and in the Greater Parker community. It’s not unusual to find them making “house calls” on grieving families, many of whom have been

not only clients but friends for more than 30 years.

When a call comes in from someone they know, Steve and Nanci never hesitate to jump in and assist the full-time Ponderosa Valley team in serving them.

"People detect sincerity," said Nanci. "When we sit with families in their homes to make funeral arrangements, we can connect with their loss on a much deeper level. We look around at family pictures and get a sense of the person whose memory we will honor. These are the opportunities we would miss if we still owned the business."

For Steve, the annual Memorial Day Veterans' Service of Remembrance remains the cornerstone of his community service and a 15-year labor of love. Held at the historic J.

S. Parker Cemetery, Steve chairs the steering committee, which begins planning every January and draws its members from across the state. Participants range from generals and congressmen to local public officials, veterans and youth groups. Event highlights include a flyover courtesy of the Colorado Air National Guard, patriotic songs by the Parker Chorale, and a 21-gun salute.

"We could have just gone away and traveled," Steve said. "But service is in our hearts and in our DNA; it's not only what we do, it's who we are."

As the former owner of a family funeral home, I can relate to Steve's sentiments and I'm confident those words are often repeated by our counterparts across the country. Deciding when and to whom to sell

or pass on your business is one of a business owner's most important and gut-wrenching decisions. Understanding that the decision is not always black or white—stay or go—can ease the anxiety, smooth the transition, and help you create the future of your dreams. 
