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**Jennifer  
Lindell-  
Roys**



**2024  
Funeral  
Director  
of the Year**





# Funeral Director of the Year

By Patti Martin Bartsche

## The Winner

**Jennifer Lindell-Roys**  
Kersey Funeral Home,  
Auburndale, Florida

**W**armth, kindness, and compassion. These three words often come up in conversations about the work and life of Jennifer Lindell-Roys. Inspired by the TV show “Quincy” at the age of 8, she pursued her interest in anatomy and her passion for serving families to become a funeral director, serving the families of Dade and Polk counties, Florida, for over 38 years.

“It’s what I was meant to do,” the 58-year-old says. “I’ve been fortunate to be able to do something meaningful, to have the opportunity to serve others.”

With an enduring commitment to her chosen profession, community, and the families she has served, it’s easy to understand why Lindell-Roys, location leader for Kersey Funeral Home in Auburndale, Florida, was selected the 2024 Funeral Director of the Year.

### THE EARLY YEARS

When you grow up watching “Quincy” on TV, it’s understandable if you imagined that one day you would be working in a morgue as a forensic pathologist.

“At 8 years old, I just knew it was a career I wanted to pursue,” Lindell-Roys laughed. “While that ultimately didn’t work out, it did lead to where I am today.”

A California native, Lindell-Roys first moved to Polk County, Florida, when her parents, Jerry, a professional golfer, and Merikay Lindell, moved to Winter Haven. At the beginning of her freshman year of high school, the family moved to North Carolina after her mother, a retail manager, received a promotion.

In North Carolina, Lindell-Roys began volunteering at local funeral homes, washing cars, taking pictures, and working the door during visitations. Later, after getting

advice from her school’s guidance counselor, she contacted the head forensic pathologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During her weekends, she would watch the pathologist perform autopsies to see if this career path was the right fit.

“I enjoyed it and was fascinated by the whole thing,” she said. “I just got more involved with local funeral directors, and I saw how they treated people, took care of people who would come in so distraught. They didn’t make it go away, but they made it better, and that’s what I wanted to do.”

It was during that time that Lindell-Roys came face-to-face with reality.

“The schooling for a forensic pathologist is about 14 years, and it costs a lot of money my parents couldn’t afford,” she said. “I wasn’t an ‘A’ student, and I wasn’t sure I could do 14 years of school.”

Her volunteering experience made Lin-

**Jennifer Lindell-Roys, location leader for Kersey Funeral Home in Auburndale, Florida, was selected as the 2024 Funeral Director of the Year.**  
*(Photo by Stacey Reid/ Pixel Bliss Photography)*

dell-Roys realize that her future had been staring her in the face: funeral director.

After graduating from Ben L. Smith High School in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1985, Lindell-Roys packed her bags and returned to Florida in February 1986 to enroll in the funeral service education program at Miami Dade College.

“While going to mortuary school, I started working at a local funeral home to put myself through school and get funeral experience,” Lindell-Roys said.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

“March 3, 1986,” Lindell-Roys quickly says when asked about her first job in funeral service. “I walked into Riverside Memorial Chapel and explained that I wanted to be a funeral director, that I wanted to help people, that I wanted to do anything I could to make it right.”

Her words convinced the funeral home’s owner, and she got the job. “I started washing cars, making removals,” she said. There’s nothing I didn’t do; I was starting from the ground up, and I wanted to learn.”

Lindell-Roys lived in Miami for 11 years, where she married, gave birth to a daughter, Baileigh, divorced, and graduated from mortuary school.

She and her daughter moved to Auburndale, Florida, to live with her parents, who had relocated there a decade earlier.

In February 1996, Lindell started working at Kersey Funeral Home, where she’s been ever since, only taking some time off to care for her mother, who died of cancer in January 2000, and then to mourn the loss of her father, who died in January 2005.

“After losing my mom to ovarian cancer in 2000 and my dad to congestive heart failure five years later and then my daughter’s diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes, I needed to take some time off to question my life’s path,” Lindell-Roys said. “What I found out about myself is that I love being a funeral director. I am passionate about helping oth-





ers who have lost a loved one, and there's no other place I would rather be than Kersey's."

In a surprise to no one, Lindell-Roys has developed wonderful relationships with many widows, widowers, and families with whom she has remained in touch.

Among those is Auburndale resident Tonya Gill, who has known Lindell-Roy for more than 25 years.

"I've known Jennifer since 1996, when my grandfather passed away. Jennifer took care of the arrangements for my family. She could answer every question, had solutions for anything that arose, and helped plan the funeral that my family wanted. While doing so, she comforted my family," Gill said. "Since then, we have had many others pass on and have seen Jennifer many times. She has always treated every person with dignity and respect while constantly comforting the loved ones left behind."

Gill added that her parents gave her strict orders that they wanted Lindell-Roys to take care of them when it was their time.

"My mother had Parkinson's and want-

ed to pick out her funeral. My mom was not easily moved about, so when I called Jennifer, she said, 'I will bring everything over to her tonight,'" Gill said. "Jennifer came to my parents' house, and Mom and Dad picked out the funerals they wanted. Mom even asked Jennifer if she would do her hair and makeup ... and she did. Jennifer makes her clients feel special and comfortable when planning their loved one's funeral service."

### A SERVANT LEADER

As location leader at Kersey Funeral Home, which was purchased by Foundation Partners Group in 2010, Lindell-Roys says her first responsibility is to the families she serves. She is a hands-on "servant leader" who exemplifies caring and professionalism daily as she remains personally involved with the families she serves with dignity and respect.

Tim Pospichal, a former mayor of Auburndale, has known Lindell-Roys for more than 20 years and has seen numerous examples of her serving the needs of the Auburndale community. "Whether

I am attending an Auburndale Chamber luncheon, the annual Kersey Expo, or the funeral of a friend or colleague, Jennifer is always a role model for kind service and support," he said.

Yet, as Pospichal learned, the most impactful aspect of Lindell-Roys is her unfailingly compassionate approach to working with customer families.

"On the darkest day of my life, when my father passed in May 2017, our family was at a complete loss. I did not know how to move forward," he explained. "My father liked to travel the world with my mother. Years ago, they had set up a Neptune Society account in case of a death overseas. I called my dear friend Jennifer. She told me whenever my mother and I could come to Kersey's she would be available. My family will never forget the great professional care and extreme kindness expressed by Jennifer and the staff."

### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

As Pospichal mentioned, community service is important to Lindell-Roys, personally and professionally.

"It's very important that community

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**Jennifer Lindell-Roys serving food during the annual Pastor Appreciation Lunch.**  
*(Photo courtesy Kersey Funeral Home)*

members see you out and about; you need to show them that you care – that you’re just like them but have a different job. I love this community and its residents and will do all I can to help them,” she said.

Lindell-Roys was a member of the Tri-County Funeral Directors Association from 1997 until it folded in 2012 and served terms as vice president and secretary. “She’s a consummate professional,” funeral director and former Tri-County Funeral Directors Association President Tim Hardee said. “She takes a lot of pride in her job and enjoys not only in the association working with other colleagues but working with families and healing those in times of need.”

A former Greater Auburndale Chamber of Commerce board member, Lindell-Roys continues to serve as an ambassador and “caring and dedicated” project leader. Chamber President Sandra D. Hall said, “Jennifer helps to make projects a success even if they are not directly related to her job, but it helps with her community.”

In April, Kersey Funeral Home was title sponsor of the chamber’s Annual Business Expo, in which nearly 100 businesses shared information about their products and services.

Lindell-Roys also leads the Kersey Funeral Home team in a variety of annual community service events, including a shredding event each May, where hundreds of residents bring their documents to the funeral home to shred at no cost; a Pastor Appreciation Lunch in October; and Hope Illuminates, an annual December event where area residents are invited to pick up ornaments to commemorate lost loved ones during a remembrance service.

### **LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

In addition to serving families and managing her team of nine, including two funeral directors, an intern, and full- and part-time support staff, Lindell-Roys is responsible for maintaining the funeral home building and vehicles, caring for the grounds, leading all outreach and local marketing, and “anything else that

comes along.”

“You don’t ask anyone to do anything you haven’t done already or can’t do yourself,” Lindell-Roys said, explaining her management style. “I listen to my staff, guide them in their duties, and feel a strong responsibility to guide young people entering the profession.”

### **A BEACON FOR RISING FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS**

Because she was intrigued by funeral service at such a young age, Lindell-Roys is passionate about sharing her love of the profession with young people. She’s a regular guest speaker at area high schools, including Davenport High School, where she has introduced hundreds of students enrolled in College Success and Career Planning courses to the rewards of a career in funeral service.

“Jennifer has spent precious time with the students who attend my College Success and Career Planning courses. These students are being introduced to the college world through a dual enrollment ex-



**Jennifer Lindell-Roys with Pastor Kyler Lanier and his daughter, Kira, at the annual Pastor Appreciation Lunch hosted by Kersey Funeral Home.**  
*(Photo courtesy Kersey Funeral Home)*



perience,” said Davenport High School teacher Leah Tribble. “As a result, I reach out to those in the community who offer unique services to help students examine multiple career pathways they may not have considered before attending my class. Jennifer has always been ready and willing to step up and help the community and the youth.”

Lindell-Roys spends time discussing her work and answering questions on the path to becoming a funeral director. In addition to guiding and mentoring students on what it takes academically to become a funeral director, Lindell-Roys brings in examples of products used in the profession, including a hearse, different examples of memorial products offered, tools of the trade, and more.

“These extra steps she has taken have assisted in building interest in her career choice and engaging students at a deeper level,” Tribble said. “Jennifer always lights up when the students get excited to learn more about her career choice. It’s a joy to watch her share the love of her career with my students. I appreciate Jennifer and her constant willingness to be of service to our community and our youth by taking the time to invest herself and immerse herself in reaching out to the public in the manner she has and continues to do.”

## THE NEXT GENERATION

Lindell-Roys’ commitment to the future of funeral service can also be found within the walls of Kersey Funeral Home.

She loves working with mortuary school students and has mentored many interns who have gone on to successful careers at Kersey and beyond.

For Lindell-Roys, that includes being open, approachable, and honest.

“The most important thing I tell new funeral professionals is that it’s not about you; it’s about families. This job is 24/7/365; our days do not end at 5 p.m.,” she said. “Some new mortuary school graduates do not understand that. They think they will get out of school, make big bucks, and drive fancy cars. Your heart must be in this profession 100%. Thankfully, we’re still finding young people willing to rise to this calling.”

Among those rising to the call is Jacqueline Williams, an intern at Kersey Funeral Home. “Jennifer has been a beacon for those wishing to learn more about this occupation,” Williams said. “When mortuary students call the funeral home with questions, she does not hesitate to set aside time to assist them, even offering a walkthrough of the funeral home to show them around on a one-to-one basis.”

Williams began working alongside Lindell-Roys three years ago when she joined the Kersey Funeral Home family.

“My first impression of Jennifer can be summed up in one



**Jennifer Lindell-Roys with former Auburndale Mayor Richard Hamann at the annual Hope Illuminates event held each December. Area residents are invited to pick up ornaments to commemorate lost loved ones during a remembrance service.** *(Photo courtesy Kersey Funeral Home)*





**Above: Jennifer Lindell-Roys and her husband, Chris Roys, stopped by the Kates-Boylston booth during the recent National Funeral Directors Association convention in New Orleans.**

*(Photo courtesy Kates-Boylston)*

**Left: Jennifer Lindell-Roys (left) with her daughter, Baleigh.**

*(Photo courtesy Jennifer Lindell-Roys)*

word: passion. Jennifer has a drive and a passion not only for her art of funeral directing and embalming, but a sincere passion for serving her families to the fullest,” Williams said. “It is no wonder countless families who call Kersey Funeral Home ask for Jennifer directly. These returning families have entrusted their loved ones to Kersey Funeral Home’s care for many years and specifically request that Jennifer take care of them.”

As an employee and mortuary student at Kersey, Williams has been taken under Lindell-Roys’ wing as her apprentice for the last three years.

“Jennifer has not only guided me through my schoolbooks, but she also provides me with hands-on training whenever an opportunity arises, con-

necting what I am learning at mortuary school with real-life scenarios,” Williams said.

### MANAGING CHANGE

There is little doubt that there’s been a lot of hands-on learning in recent years.

“In the past five years, many things have changed. I was promoted to manager of a location and now ambitiously lead my other funeral directors and staff daily,” Lindell-Roys said. “We also had to deal with the tragedies and challenges of COVID and the technological revolution that followed. Paper records are becoming a thing of the past, and virtual interactions are replacing many face-to-face meetings. From writing and submitting obituaries online to choosing

caskets and urns on a computer screen, both families and professionals are adapting to a new world of death care.

“Innovation is good and challenging, and it means that we are moving forward with the trends; however, some families still want traditional hands-on service,” she added. “As funeral directors, we need to be flexible and adapt to each family’s individual needs. Not every situation is the same, so my approach is specific to each family. Family members put their full trust in our funeral home during their most difficult days, and it is my passion to treat each family with integrity and empathy. My goal is always to make the funeral arrangement seamless and help ease the stress after their loved ones have passed away.” •