



## Creating a New Arrangement Conference: A Pile-Driver Approach

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

If you have an important point to make, don't try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile-driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time—a tremendous whack! — WINSTON CHURCHILL

**WHACK ONE:** Funeral service is long overdue in creating a new model for the arrangement conference!

As you know, you have new families out there who are not aware of the value of funerals. They are not accustomed to making funeral arrangements and have fewer ties to tradition.

The Problem: The majority of funeral homes are still using an old, outdated model for the arrangement conference. Essentially, the process in use today is the same one that was used in funeral service sixty years ago, yet the families you serve today are often radically different than the families of sixty years ago. Holding on to the old traditions of the arrangement conference process means you are risking having these new families leave you behind.

### Seek to Understand: Defining the New Families

We might be well-served to do a brief review of the potential realities you now confront. Often, today's families:

- Are not familiar with the individual elements of ceremony.
- Have not learned the value of symbols (particularly the function of spending time with the body).
- Are convenience- and efficiency-oriented.
- Are highly individualistic and self-reliant.
- Lack an understanding of emotional and spiritual pain.
- Are potentially defensive about what you attempt to offer them for a service experience.

Obviously, your very future hinges on your ability to creatively respond to these new families. Should you fail to do so, you may well go out of business. I challenge you to lead your funeral home staff in the direction of a new arrangement conference that better meets the needs of these new families.

### Decisions Versus Choices: Understanding the Critical Distinctions

**WHACK TWO:** Funeral service is long overdue in creating a new model for the arrangement conference!

Whatever new model you make use of, you would be well-served to know the difference between helping families make decisions and helping them make choices. I submit that the funeral director's role is to help families make choices, not just decisions.

You see, decisions are made with limited information. An example of a decision that families are often asked to make is: "Would you like to have a visitation?" The answer to this question is yes or no, black or white. In contrast, if you are helping families make choices, you might offer up a tentative question this way: "Many families find it helpful to receive friends before having a funeral service. Would it be ok with you if we talk a little about why people often choose to do this?" You are then able to go on to educate the family about the value of the element of visitation. Obviously, the more information a family has, the more their decision becomes an informed choice. This can and should be done with every potential element of the ceremony that the family might make use of (for example, music, symbols, readings, eulogy, actions, etc.).

So, ask yourself: Are you helping families make decisions or choices?

### Are You "Fitting Things Together" for the Families You Serve?

The word *ritual* comes from the Indo-European root that means "to fit together." It is related to such words as order, weaving, and arithmetic, all of which involve fitting things together to create order. In reality, when people are bereaved—which literally means "to be torn apart" and "to have special needs"—you help them create order out of emotional disorder through the creation of a meaningful funeral ritual.

Ritual is the conscious act of recognizing life has changed because of the death, and survivors are having a funeral to acknowledge and support this change through such elements as visitation, remembrance, music, symbols, procession, committal, and gatherings. In helping families during this difficult time, you are helping them "to fit things together again."

If families aren't taught the value of these elements, you will continue to see trends where people either eliminate or subvert the elements in ways that are less likely to create the "sweet spot of experience." They may have some form of a funeral experience; it just may not be meaningful. As T.S. Eliot once said, "You can have an experience and miss the meaning."

Ask yourself: Do the people on your staff know how the *why* of a meaningful funeral interfaces with the various elements of ceremony?

I challenge you to be an advocate for the value of helping families "fit things together" by teaching them how all of the individual elements come together to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. If families do not understand the value of the funeral experience, you will see more and more of them simply calling 1-800-DIRECT DISPOSITION.

The new model for helping families must be grounded in a three-phase process of *exploration* leads to *understanding* leads to *action*. This three-phase process interfaces with your need to inform people about the elements of ceremony, which demands that you educate people by sharing your knowledge, which leads to you eventually carrying out a ceremony that honors their choices. If you can work to do this, the future of funeral service will be very bright. If you don't act now, you may well be experiencing outplacement opportunities in the near future. The choice is yours!

**WHACK THREE:** Funeral service is long overdue on creating a new model for the arrangement conference!

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. is director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado and author of over thirty books related to grief and loss, including Funeral Home Customer Service A-Z and Creating Meaningful Funeral Experiences: A Guide for Caregivers. He presents numerous workshops across North America each year and can be contacted at [drwolfelt@centerforloss.com](mailto:drwolfelt@centerforloss.com).

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HALLOWEEN PARTY  
NEW FAMILY LOUNGE AREA  
A PILE-DRIVER APPROACH

# Legacy LEDGER

Serving One Family at a Time

FALL ISSUE 2011



## Emken-Linton Joins the Legacy Family



From Left to Right:  
Philip Roberts  
(attorney), Mr. & Mrs.  
Emken Linton, Bill  
Wimberly, Michael  
Soper, Harry Drew, Chris  
Martin & Liat Avivi  
(Legacy Attorneys)

Michael Soper  
Legacy President  
and CEO



We are proud to announce the addition of a new firm to our family of funeral homes. Emken-Linton Funeral Home in Texas City, Texas, was acquired in October of 2011 after several months of discussion with the owner and his family.

Emken-Linton was founded in 1911 by H.B. Emken and the firm has since served generations of families in the Texas City area. The 100-year old firm dates back through three generations of family ownership, and the family remains committed to their community and looks forward to continuing with the same level of personal care and service they have always provided.

The former owner of Emken-Linton, Mr. Emken Linton, stated that he was pleased to be able to "cut back a little," and take a more active role in the community. Legacy handles time-consuming paperwork and regulatory-reporting issues so that Mr. Linton and his

employees are free to do what they do best—take care of families at their time of need.

The employees, management, and staff at Emken-Linton will continue in their positions. Emken-Linton did just fine for 100 years, and we see no reason to mess with a good thing! They are doing it right, *servicing one family at a time*. Emken-Linton is a wonderful fit for the Legacy family, and we are thrilled to be a part of what they are doing in Texas City. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Emken Linton and Mr. Scott Walker and their dedicated staff to our Legacy family.

In this issue of the Legacy Ledger, we will be looking in on several locations that are also 'doing it right'. There are so many ways that our funeral homes are interacting with the community and getting involved, and we just want to share a few stories with you! Also included in this issue is a special article by Dr.

Alan D. Wolfelt. Dr. Wolfelt reminds us that if we want to remain relevant to families in this day and age, we cannot be order takers anymore...we have to be consultants, offering our guidance, advice, and creativity to every arrangement conference.

I would like to thank each and every one of our firms who give it their all every day to serve families who need a warm welcome, a compassionate listening ear, and sometimes a shoulder to cry on. As you read, I encourage you to think of new creative ways that you can connect with your families and the community you serve.



Keep the small company feel.

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## Sibille's Builds Legacy of Service LOCAL FUNERAL HOME OPENED IN 1972

By Judy Bastien  
The Daily World Newspaper of Opelousas, LA



Sibille Funeral Home manager, Lowell Sibille, and funeral director, Sylvia Provost, have served for more than 20 years.

PHOTO BY FREDDIE HERPIN

For more than 20 years, Sibille Funeral Home has stood on the corner of George and Heather drives. But its history goes back to 1972, when Lowell Sibille, Jr. opened the funeral home at its first location on Main Street, across from J.B. Sandoz Hardware.

Sibille, the son of a sweet potato shipper, cattle farmer and thoroughbred horse rancher, grew up in Sunset. He was an engineering student at what was then the University of Southwestern Louisiana, now USL, when he first became acquainted with the funeral industry.

"My wife's sister had married a funeral director from Church Point," Sibille said. "I went with him on death calls. I became very interested in that."

It was his brother-in-law, James Gardiner's influence that eventually led to Sibille's pursuing a career in the industry, he said. Sibille left USL and enrolled in the Commonwealth College of Science in Houston to become a funeral director and embalmer. After graduation, he found that there were no jobs readily available in the area, so he wound up moving to New Orleans, where he went to work for P.J. McMahon and Sons Funeral Home.

"They were good Irish people and they hired me," Sibille said. "They were a big Irish family."

Sibille's former wife, Sylvia, also a Sunset native, worked at American Hospital Supply in New Orleans.

Eventually, Sibille decided to go into

business for himself. He also wanted to come home.

"We decided to make it or break it," Sylvia Provost said. "And we made it."

Sibille was able to get a loan from E.J. Ourso, the owner of Security Industrial Insurance in Donaldsonville.

"He would loan money to young men who wanted to go into the funeral industry and service his customers," Sibille said.

In 1972, Sibille Funeral Home opened on Main Street and just a year later, Sibille opened a second funeral home in Port Barre.

"There was a need for one in Port Barre and I jumped on it and it was a good decision," he said.

In 1979, he opened an additional funeral home in Grand Coteau.

"It was basically across the street from where I was born," he said.

The following year, Sylvia, also became a funeral director.

"I did that so I could handle funerals," she said.

Today, Lowell Sibille, Jr. and Sylvia Provost continue to operate the business. For nearly 40 years, they have been part of the community in which they work. Lowell is the manager and director of the firm. The funeral home is owned by a family in Houston, Texas.

"We've touched a lot of lives," Sibille said, "and we've made a tremendous amount of friends."

## Library Receives Donation for Children's Books on Grief



Carol Mangham (right), pre-arrangement specialist with Palmer Mortuary, and Sunshine Andersland (left), with FDLIC, present a check to Megan Clark, children's librarian at the Seguin-Guadalupe County Public Library in Seguin, TX.

One of our Legacy firms, Palmer Mortuary & Cremations in Seguin, Texas, recently noticed a need at the Seguin-Guadalupe County Public Library. The staff there realized that there was a lack of resources on grief, especially for children.

"We called the library wondering if we could send families there to help their children understand how to cope with grief. It seems there is a great need for resources," said Carol Mangham, pre-arrangement specialist with Palmer.

"We decided to make a donation to the library," said Ariel Olmos, who manages the funeral home. "It is the least we can do, now that we are aware of the need."

"We are extremely grateful to receive this donation," commented Megan Clark, Children's Librarian. "The funds will enable the library to significantly enhance the juvenile nonfiction collection in this area. Having these materials will enable the library to provide assistance to the numerous families throughout Guadalupe County who are struggling to deal with grief and loss. We could not be more grateful for the generosity of Palmer Mortuary."



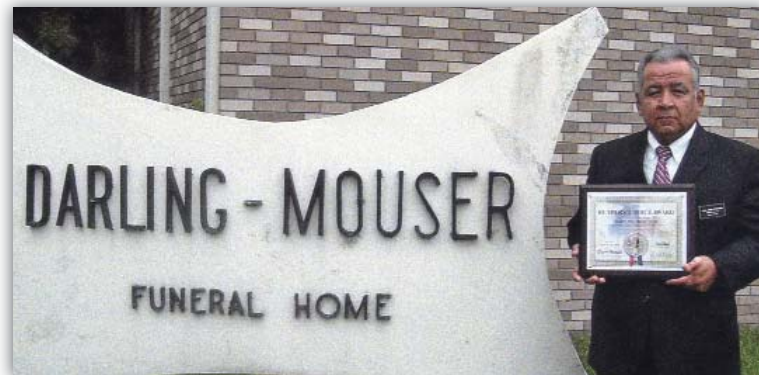
Ardoin Funeral Home Eunice, LA cooks BBQ plates on 9/11 for Firefighters & Police Officers



Legacy Funeral Group Halloween Party - From Left to Right: Lee Gaskill, Janie Colin, Taylor Greene, Blanca Burciaga, Corinn Russo, Harry Drew, Ivonne Piedrahita, Joyce Piedrahita, Michael Soper, (Angela Human & Ronnie Davis with Gemini Graphics) Beth Gresso & her husband Steve.

## Darling-Mouser Presented with Favorite Funeral Home Award

By Juan Gallegos  
Manager of Darling-Mouser Funeral Home | Brownsville, TX



A representative from the local newspaper of Brownsville, Texas, *The Brownsville Herald*, presented the Darling-Mouser Funeral Home staff with the 2010 Reader's Choice Award for Favorite Funeral Home. Out of six funeral homes in Brownsville, Darling-Mouser Funeral Home has received this award four times since the award began five years ago.

The local newspaper presents this award based on readers' response to their favorite local businesses. The staff at Darling-Mouser Funeral Home is extremely honored to have received this award and is extremely grateful to the community for their tremendous support.



The staff of Darling-Mouser Funeral Home accepts the Favorite Funeral Home Award, presented for the fourth time in five years by The Brownsville Herald. From left to right: Paul Leal, Mary Alice Rodriguez, Juan Jose Gallegos, Oscar Alvarez, Judith Alvarez, Loraine Knoch.



## New Family Lounge Area Added to Funeral Home in Temple

By Calvin Evans  
Manager of Harper-Talasek Funeral Home | Temple, TX

At Harper-Talasek Funeral Home in Temple, Texas, we have remodeled a room that was formerly the family seating section of the chapel. With the approval of Michael Soper, we decided to make it into a Family Lounge so that families could sit and have coffee, sodas, refreshments or just visit. This multi-purpose lounge has proven to be very convenient for our families. We have already received many positive comments about the comfort and convenience of the lounge, and we look forward to serving families even better with this comfortable and versatile space.

