

A Centennial for Selected

It was September 1917 when 10 funeral directors gathered in a Toledo, Ohio, hotel room.

That meeting was the start of what is now Selected Independent Funeral Homes, which for 100 years has been one of the premier associations in funeral service.

"What sets Selected members apart is that they are, by and large, learners," said Mark Higgins, a past president of the association. "They want to engage with colleagues and be in the know about best practices. They are always looking for ways to improve business and strengthen their teams."

Selected members will celebrate that spirit when they gather in Chicago this month for a meeting to celebrate the association's centennial and plan for its next 100 years. Group gatherings are called meetings and not conventions, to "emphasize the working nature of

the assembly," according to the organization's literature.

Selected's 10 original members have now grown close to 600 funeral homes representing 1,300 locations worldwide. To gain entry to the association, member firms go through an invitation-only selection process that ensures each business meets the standards set a century ago.

"If you are trying to operate a funeral home of the highest standard of professionalism of dignity and care, if you are concerned about the training and education of staff, if you see to the neatness and maintenance of facilities, equipment and furnishings, if you are keeping up with technology, if you have colleagues that want to do better and better so your staff is a cut above the

competition ... then you might get an invitation," said Lance Pauli, of Harden-Pauli Funeral Home in Eustis, Florida, who still has the letter he received in 1989 inviting him to join Selected.

"I was overjoyed," said Pauli, who'd purchased the firm seven years before receiving the invitation. "You could go your entire career and not get an invitation. It was very humbling. This membership is one of the things I treasure."

Pauli still remembers the strict vetting process his firm went through before being admitted to the association. It included an inspection, a review of his profit and loss statements and preneed accounts, and a search to ensure his business wasn't involved in any lawsuits or litigation.

Memorabilia from 100 years of Selected Independent Funeral Homes includes, opposite page, a photo of members from the 1930 convention; a 1918 photo of members, right, which is one of the earliest National Selected Morticians photos known to exist; a box of NSM Insignia Cuts from the 1950s, below; and a gathering of members in 1920, bottom. (*Photos courtesy of SIFH*)



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NSM President David M. Farris

President Farris Addresses NSM'ers At Group Meetings

The following is the President's Address presented by David M. Farris to Group Meeting participants this spring.

A new name for the association

The recent action by the NSM Board of Directors to recommend to the membership the change of the association to Selected Independent Funeral Homes was not a decision made in haste or without sensitivity to the long history of NSM.

The most recent suggestions that a name change should be considered surfaced in 1997. Since 1998, the NSM Board of Directors has been evaluating the identity of National Selected Morticians, seeking to determine if our current name and logo accurately convey to families, the media, prospective members, as well as other audiences the

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Members of the National Selected Morticians voted to change the organization's name to Selected Independent Funeral Homes in 2000. From left: Former Selected Board Member and President John Horan, Executive Director Rob Paterkiewicz and former Board Member and President Mark Higgins. Selected members attend the Spring 2016 Benchmark Forum in Saskatchewan. Right: The first Selected Women's Group Roundtable Meeting was held in 2016 in St. Charles, Missouri. (Photos courtesy of SIFH)

Higgins said.

"We have to continue to keep our fingers on the pulse of membership – who they are, what they need and how we can continue to give them the tools they need," he said.

The Leadership Academy is one of those tools, said John Horan, a former board member and president of the association.

"I have observed what a powerful effect this has had on my co-workers and the company," said Horan, a co-owner of Horan & McConaty and a variety of other funeral service businesses in Colorado.

Horan makes it a point to send an associate to the academy every year.

"This is developing leaders in our organization who bring an enlightened perspective to leadership and management in the 21st century," he said.

Dues at Selected are based on call volume. The average member pays about \$3,400 annually, Paterkiewicz said.

"There are a number of people who have maintained their membership for decades, but they have to make the decision every year whether or not to invest in membership. We can't take that loyalty for granted," Paterkiewicz said. "My focus is to make sure that every member can answer that they are getting whatever it is they are looking for. They need to find value in their membership, so they make the decision (to renew their membership) again and again."

That has meant enhancing old programs and adding new ones to



reflect members' current interests and challenges.

"Today, there are so many ways for business owners to get information, we have to up our game," Paterkiewicz said.

With an international organization serving members who do business in a variety of different circumstances, it means the association's 11-member staff keeps busy.

"We try to provide concierge service for each and every member, because what is of value to a firm in Chicago with one location could be entirely different than what a firm in Orlando with five locations values. It is our job to make sure we know in each case what that is," he said.

Association members also help one another through online forums and discussion groups, providing a wealth of collective knowledge.

"A member can post a question about a challenge they are dealing with and within 12 hours they have feedback from firms all over the world," Paterkiewicz said.

"Our members are students and

teachers at the same time," he said.

"Our members are constantly interacting with one another, listening to one another. It's a really cool environment. This is what associations are supposed to do, but here it seems to be at a very high level."

The 2017 Selected Independent Funeral Homes Annual Meeting will be held Sept. 10-13 at the Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel, in Chicago.

For more information, visit:
www.selectedfuneralhomes.org/Annual-Meeting-210

point where we ... can become almost like a consultant for them."

Selected already offers programs that help members analyze finances and connect with families they've served and get feedback. Paterkiewicz would like to see those programs grow and add additional services.

"I want to make sure that an owner who has a dues envelope in his hand can say, 'I need Selected as part of my business,'" he said.

And while this month's meeting will be a time to celebrate, it will also be a time to work. Paterkiewicz isn't content to let the association simply rest on its laurels.

"We are so excited to be at this point and commemorate 100 years. But we're focused on the next 100 years. We are determined to offer the kinds of programs and benefits that we will be able to share with members for a long time to come," he said. •