

History

By Steve Cronin

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)



A 4-foot golden pyramid featuring the guiding principles of NSM was used during a speech by past-President Porter Loring Sr. at the 1953 meeting. In 1950 a cornerstone time capsule was laid in the new National Foundation of Funeral Service headquarters in Evanston, Illinois. National Selected Morticians was instrumental in helping form the foundation. In 1972 the cornerstone, below, was recovered and opened at the 75th annual NSM meeting. Board member and past-President Michael R. St. Pierre, in glasses, and Fred L. Bates, former executive director, are shown with the time capsule. (Photos courtesy of SIFH)



Code of Ethics

NATIONAL SELECTED MORTICIANS, INC.

The Practical Application of the Golden Rule:
"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them."

Our Paramount Obligation to Society Requires:
Obedience to the laws and loyalty to the ideals of public service.
Respect for all creeds, religions and customs.
Adherence to the highest standards of business honesty and moral decency.

To Those We Serve We Pledge:
-A completely confidential relationship.
-Respect for the inviolability of the dead human body.
-An accurate description of all materials and a truthful representation of all services.
-Dignity and tact in the conduct of services.
-A continuous vigilance on the part of our Association in its efforts to make practically effective our ideals and standards.

The Dignity and Honor of Our Profession can be Best Achieved by:
-High standards of moral responsibility, character, and business integrity.
-A continuous endeavor to promote scientific research in the problems affecting our work and a development of a better informed public opinion with respect to its requirements.
-More rigorous licensing regulations controlling those who are permitted to serve the public in our profession.
-Charges which shall be commensurate with services rendered, with business soundness and with the economic self-respect of our members.

Among Our Members We Aim to Have:
-Frankness, cooperation and loyalty.
-Such interchange of knowledge and ideas as will be of mutual professional benefit, developing the highest standards of competency among morticians.

National Selected Morticians

"They want to know everything is on the up and up," he said.

Membership also has its responsibilities. Firms must not only meet Selected's standards to gain entry. They must also maintain them once a member. Funeral homes that let standards slip have been asked to leave the association, Higgins said.

Raising the bar in funeral service was the key motivation when the founders of Selected first got together to form what was then called National Selected Morticians.

"One of the main reasons National Selected Morticians was created was to provide funeral directors in various locales the opportunity to regularly meet, exchange ideas and discuss problems in an atmosphere of sincerity and mutual respect," a history of the group states.

Today, Selected members can also take advantage of a variety of training opportunities the association provides.

"Selected has helped us keep abreast of the changes in funeral service," said Tiffany A. Hofer, co-owner of Luce, Luze & Reck Funeral Homes, which has five locations in South Dakota. "Sometimes the consumer comes in and says, 'I want cremation,' but they don't know what that entails. We have to educate them. Selected has been a big player in helping us with resources."

Being a member of the association since 2012 has enabled Hofer to attend Selected's two-year leadership academy, join study groups and co-host a roundtable of female funeral directors.

"The key to finding value in any organization is by staying involved," she said. "It's been a very good partnership for us."

Higgins knows how being a Selected member guarantees the quality of a firm. He spent a decade working for the association. When he decided to buy a funeral home, he knew where to look.

"I was plugged in to a coast-to-coast network. That allowed me to keep my ear to the ground for businesses that were looking for a succession plan," he said.

What he found was Hall-Wynne Funeral Service & Crematory in Durham, North Carolina, which has been a member of the association since 1944.

"I know, probably more than others," how a firm being a member of

Selected impresses a buyer, Higgins said.

Keeping Selected a good partnership for firms is the aim of Rob Paterkiewicz, the association's executive director and CEO.

"We know if we are helping them, if we are providing what they are looking for to be successful in their business and help their families – that is the driver for me and the rest of the staff," he said.

Funeral service is changing. Firms are facing challenges. So are the associations that serve them. Selected is no different, Higgins said.

Consolidation in the funeral industry in the 1980s and 1990s "hit us hard. We lost a lot of old-line, multi-generational firms," he said.

"When national consolidators come in, the first places they hit are Selected Independent funeral homes," Pauli said. "They know they are well run and well maintained."

The graying of funeral service and the trend away from multi-generational ownership are also posing

challenges, as longtime member firms are sold to younger funeral directors who don't understand the benefits of being involved in the association.

And, like everyone else in funeral service, Selected members are dealing with the rise in cremation and the challenges to profits that has posed, Higgins said.

Paterkiewicz, who did not have a funeral service background when he came to Selected in 2007, is aware of the challenges. He's working to position the association for the future.

The association has been experiencing growth, with association leadership also striving to increase diversity within the group. Selected is "making a very conscious attempt" to increase membership among African-American and Hispanic funeral directors and to recognize the growing role of women in funeral service,

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NSM Members To Vote On Proposed Name Change

The proposed name change of our association from National Selected Morticians to Selected Independent Funeral Homes was discussed vigorously during the recent NSM Group Meetings. NSM President David Farris addressed the subject during his after-dinner speech to members. The complete text of his address begins below on this page. George Clarke, NSM Executive Director, also discussed the proposed change during his address and answered members' questions.

It is apparent to everyone in the funeral service industry that there have been enormous changes during the last decade—from shifts in consumer attitudes, to the emergence of the consolidators and third-party providers, to government rulings and mandates. The contemplation of a change to the name of our association is concurrent with, and a necessary response to, what is happening in today's world. While there is no question that change is difficult, it is also sometimes necessary and can be an opportunity for growth.

In early 1998, the NSM Board engaged the help of Interbrand, an international branding and identity specialist, to conduct research about the funeral service industry and determine the feasibility of a name change for NSM. Over the subsequent months, Interbrand interviewed not only the boards of directors of NSM and NSM Resources but also a representative portion of the NSM membership to obtain feelings about a potential change. That work was distilled

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President Farris Addresses NSM's 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 National Selected Morticians. A name change has been discussed on other occasions throughout our long history, and even the early founders struggled with whether they should adopt the name *morticians* in place of *undertaker*.

Their choice of the word *morticians* is now history and we have been known as National Selected Morticians for many years. I feel that it is important for you to have some background information about the process which we used to arrive at this decision.

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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NSM President David M. Farris



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**

Selected staff provides training on a variety of topics such as dealing with the rise in cremation, communicating the importance of memorialization and ceremony, how to create a low-cost offering while still maintaining a heritage firm, succession planning, leadership development, cultivating future staff and leading an innovative culture.

"We try to tap into subject matters that people should know about," Paterkiewicz said. "We discussed green burial at one of our meetings. Some people had raised eyebrows, but we were like, 'Someone might ask you about it, so here is an opportunity to learn about it.'"

Paterkiewicz sees Selected's concierge approach only growing in the future.

"We have to face facts that all funeral service practitioners are challenged more and more each day," he said. "We want to grow to the

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. •