

COLLEAGUE WISDOM

Given present circumstances and information, what is your reasoning for (or not) joining state and national funeral service associations?

Professional associations are necessary to promote education, comradeship, lobbying efforts and to be responsive to the membership on various applicable issues. We have been members of national associations as well as state associations. Presently, we are only members of our state association and a small group of independent funeral homes that meet once a year for educational purposes.

North Carolina FDA and our study group are valuable resources. For many years we were members of NFDA, but for the first time we have elected to discontinue our membership. NFDA became unresponsive to numerous inquiries, and their efforts to level the playing field nationwide on preneed are nonexistent.

Beacham McDougald – McDougald Funeral Home & Crematory – Laurinburg, North Carolina (125 calls)

I was for many years a member of both the NFDA and the state association. As time moved on, I made the decision to remove myself from both organizations, having determined that return on investment did not warrant such memberships.

My geographic area (western part of the state) organized a regional association (in which I was a founding member and board of director) which ultimately died a slow death unto itself due to a lack of leadership and direction. It is my opinion that there are other venues (such as your publications and annual seminars) in which to engage in an exchange of healthy discussions of the true topics that govern the future of funeral service.

Kudos to you for providing those of us in funeral service a forum or platform to do so among colleagues who are interested in such issues, as opposed to those who only wish to participate in rumor-mongering about their competitors.

John Davis – McCarthy Funeral Homes – Greenfield, Massachusetts (125 calls – 2 locations)

I am a member of both the state and national associations. I have chosen to be a member not because I participate much, if any, in their programs but to be apprised of current information. Also, some of the legal advice that we as members are afforded is valuable. The national association does have some very good forms that are at our disposal. Music licensing fees appear to be more reasonable than others. Whatever knowledge gained is a value, positive or negative.

Michael Gladfelter – Diehl Funeral Home & Cremation Center – Mount Wolf, Pennsylvania (90 calls – 1 location)

I have not joined nor have I have missed belonging to NFDA. It is my perception that their staff and much of its leadership is “out of tune” with the demographics and changing traditions and customs of Southern California, which is the market in which I live and operate.

I do belong to CFDA, because I think the Association does an excellent job in legislative advocacy and professional education and development for funeral home staff training, and through its for-profit subsidiary, members have access to a preneed trust without having administrative responsibilities. I also enjoy very much the situational friendships, information and networking exchanges with suppliers at conventions.

On the other hand, I believe our most recent leadership has not held accountable the Association’s for-profit subsidiary to have a three- to five-year business plan pro forma, nor was it willing to deal with or develop a plan for the Association’s continuing annual deficits. Further, I believe the Association’s dues structure discriminates against independent small- to medium-size members while disproportionately favoring large corporate ownership. It is for these reasons that I recently chose not to seek reelection to the CFDA Board.

Bill Hawkins – Angeleno Funeral Homes – North Hollywood, California (600 calls – 2 locations)

I have not been a member of the Pennsylvania Funeral Directors Association for quite a few years. My reason for dropping my membership was when I saw the "association" going from a support source to business that often competes with its membership.

The sponsorship of profit-making ventures such as preneed programs, telemarketing scams and the like caused me to question the executives/administration of the association and the amount of profits they seem to need. When a group no longer has more things in common, and there are more activities causing controversy and competition, then it no longer represents the goal defined as an association.

Again, may I point out preneed as the greedy monster that has intoxicated our industry and caused associations to see dollar signs rather than performing as a tool for bettering our profession. I am a member of the NFDA, although I am seriously questioning it more and more. My reasoning to continue membership would certainly not be the leadership *The Director* magazine or the "forward thinking" (tongue in cheek) direction offered.

Operational benefits would have to be the overwhelming reasons to stay in the fold — credit card processing, music licensing, legal forms/information and an occasional interest-

ing convention location at a member-priced registration fee.

The looming increase in airfares and costs of traveling in our unstable economy will most certainly weaken the weight of the latter.

Honestly, anyone who has attended any of the ceremonious convention meetings would see what a self-stroking organization it tends to be. Then again, how can you get anyone to volunteer time, ideas and monies in today's world without stroking something? Take the ego out of volunteerism and you won't have too many individuals left with genuine altruism as a motivation.

Michael Tod Good, F.D. – Good Funeral Home & Cremation Centre – Reamstown, Pennsylvania (70 calls – 1 location)

It is of course, a matter of weighing the costs vs. the benefits. Is the current paradigm of belonging to an association and attending an annual meeting every year still a good one? Is there a better one? Are all trades/professions facing similar questions? Conclusively, I have membership in our state association and do not belong to NFDA.

Ted Wigger – Treadway & Wigger Funeral Chapel & Crematory – Napa, California (250 calls – 1 location)

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I believe there is a need and purpose for state and national trade associations. **A big voice is much better heard than a lot of unproductive nattering. For advocacy, a well-established association has a lot more influence than many unorganized funeral directors not properly expressing their views.** A forum for discussion of important issues is an important function of associations. Quick dissemination of events affecting our industry can only be performed by an association prepared to do this. The list goes on.

If the association is not of the quality or of the mind-set the member wishes, then the member is at least partially at fault. The association is comprised of those practitioners who stand up and spend the time to make these groups effective and responsive. If the officers and committees are not doing that, get active and let your voice be heard. As with any elected or appointed bodies, don't complain if you won't work for change.

Anytime anyone wishes that NFDA, ICCFA, CANA or your state association would just give up and go away, remember the consumer groups and the like are well organized and are dedicated advocates of their point of view. **Can we afford not to have an association speaking for us?**

*Steve Palmer – Westcott Funeral Homes –
Cottonwood, Arizona (425 calls – 2 locations)*

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In the '60s, '70s and into the '80s it was prestigious to be a member of a group or fraternal organization. The Lions Club, Rotarian, Kiwanis and other civic clubs flourished. Our trade associations did also. Over the years, priorities have changed and being members of these groups are rarely important anymore. There are 250 television channels to watch at home, and the business is demanding time.

The Lions Club is barely getting by, and Kiwanis and Jaycees went out years ago. Our trade associations struggle with financial challenges and membership retention problems they didn't experience years ago. **It's sad to say, but the only people really excited about the association are usually the board members themselves — and sometimes they aren't too excited.**

With my state trade association — I think **continuing education should be the core of what they do.** I do appreciate the **communications from them about state issues that affect us.** With NFDA, I have found their **credit card servicing program** to be of benefit to me (after we got over the hump of them drafting a sales tax amount out of my bank account sometime after the purchase because “someone forgot to charge you that...”); their **music licensing program** is of benefit also. However, issues like sending me an “anonymous” survey — that is coded on the last page to identify me only serves to break down that trust that should exist between us.

One of the biggest issues to face our firm (and others, I hear) is insurance companies refusing to release important insurance information to us so we can secure an insurance assignment for payment prior to our services. I hope our state and local associations will address this serious issue, and get proactive on attacking this at a federal level to ensure we are paid, and ensure continued acceptance of insurance assignments from families.

*Kent Dorsey – Washburn & Dorsey –
Bostic, North Carolina (50 calls – 1 location)*

Local involvement is mainly to get to know local funeral directors and support local dialogue. We belong to our state association and NFDA primarily for regulatory and legislative reasons. We belong to Selected, CANA and ICCFA because of **the more-focused educational offerings.**

*John Horan – Horan & McConaty Funeral Homes –
Denver, Colorado (2,500 calls – multi locations)*

Membership dues and **special event costs** are **too frequently unreasonable.** Association leaders seem to be immune to the economic realities of contemporary death care.

*Ellsworth Purdy – Founder, Uniservice –
Washington and Oregon states*

We have always been members and habitually depend on the associations to communicate and act on our behalf with government issues. We take their purpose and agenda for granted. I have never seen a ballot for any officer or issue from Massachusetts FDA or national FDA, yet doubt my opinion or input would matter. Having studied them, they are not much better than no representation at all and often misrepresent us yet give us a false sense of security. Association management and leadership applaud their perceived values while ignoring their slow demise.

John McDonough – McDonough Funeral Home – Lowell, Massachusetts (150 calls – 1 location)

I am a member of both the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association and the National Funeral Directors Association and each year when I write my checks to these groups I ask myself why. I cannot truly find any reason why I should belong to or support these groups, other than they supposedly are representatives of our industry. NFDA is drifting further and further away from anything important and the only reason I continue to support them is for their political lobbyist. It appears that OGR and NSM have been doing the work of associations in my area.

Wayne F. Brasco Sr. – Brasco & Sons – Waltham & Belmont, Massachusetts – (300 calls – 2 locations)

I continue to belong to my state association because only as a group can we move our profession forward to face the challenges we all encounter on a daily basis. I may not always agree with all members of the association on certain issues, but thus far the organization is trying to make positive, forward-thinking changes.

I dropped membership in NFDA years ago because they seemed to be only interested in maintaining the status quo and the financial health of the organization and its high-paid staff. The cost of the dues did not even begin to

equal the benefits I received from them. I just returned from a seminar sponsored by CANA (my first time to attend any of their functions) which was lively, thought-provoking and full of information that was both significant and timely. I will most definitely continue my membership in this group.

Erin Phelps – Omega Funeral & Cremation Service – Portland, Oregon (800 calls – 1 location)

We joined the state association several years ago to have access to resources and to support a unified voice in the industry. Unfortunately, one of the major resources is a funeral trust fund holding account that has essentially become irrelevant due to the lack of interest growth of the product. We still feel that the state association acts as a watchdog and represents the industry as it relates to our market area. We have never joined the national association and believe it is out of touch with local market conditions.

Willard Phipps – Yost & Webb Funeral Home – Fresno, California (725 calls – 1 location)

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