

COFFINS & CASKETS

responding to changing times

At a time when funerals remain restricted by social distancing, making sure they remain meaningful and personal has, perhaps, never been more important.

This month, *Funeral Director Monthly* talks to some of the NAFD's coffin and casket supplier members to find out how they are supporting funeral directors and families at this unprecedented time.

Musgrove Willow helps families to stay involved

The past few months have been incredibly testing for the funeral industry. As a manufacturer of willow coffins, Musgrove Willow staff have listened to some very upsetting stories from both funeral directors and their families.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, those associated with the funeral industry have certainly had to adapt quickly in order to provide the best possible service to the bereaved - and often without much clear guidance from the Government.

Ellen Musgrove, Managing Director of Musgrove Willows, said: "Although our family business is based in Somerset, our successful ongoing relationship with JC Atkinson enables the coffins we make to be distributed to funeral directors across the UK. It has been interesting to notice a couple of trends that have emerged nationwide over the past couple of months.

"One of the devastating effects of social distancing has been the restriction on the number of people allowed to attend a funeral service. It is hard to imagine what it must be like to decide who can and cannot attend the final commemoration of a loved one.

"As a result, many families appear to be spending more time designing the coffin and incorporating personal touches. For us, there has certainly been a move towards



coloured willow, with sales of full colour and rainbow themed coffins having increased. There has also been an increase in orders for coloured coffin liners and pillows, in addition to more coffins being designed with coloured bands and/or handles (with natural dyes). Our weavers and seamstress always endeavour to help with special requests.

"Families of loved ones are usually welcome to visit our Somerset willow farm to see how willow is grown and actively participate in weaving the coffin they have chosen, with many finding this process incredibly cathartic.

"However, during the past few weeks this simply has not been possible. Therefore, in order to circumnavigate

this, our weavers have turned to modern technology. Several families have enjoyed watching a live streaming of the coffin they have chosen being made, which has provided the family with the opportunity to really feel part of the process - particularly if they weren't going to be able to attend the funeral service.

"Feedback on the streaming service has been incredibly positive and it will be with us long after COVID-19 has, hopefully, left these shores for good."

For more information on the full range of Musgrove Willow coffins available at JC Atkinson please visit www.coffins.co.uk/musgrovewillow

Colourful coffins: the personal touch has been even more important in lockdown

The number of mourners allowed to attend a loved one's funeral during lockdown may have been strictly limited, but Colourful Coffins' CEO, Mary Tones, says it hasn't stopped families wanting a very special farewell.

"We've always said that having a personalised picture coffin is something to share with all those who come to pay their respects and, with so few people allowed to attend funerals, we weren't sure how that would impact on us," says Mary.

"The reality, however, is that we have been incredibly busy. We had one family where only two people were allowed at the funeral, but they still wanted something very special for their loved one. Many more told us it was about creating a nice memory with a beautiful coffin that they could feel proud of, and one which captured the love and peace of the occasion."

Instead of mourners seeing the picture coffins first hand as they would in normal times, many families have been streaming funerals live over social media and sharing their photos online - another reason, says Mary, why they wanted a coffin that would really make an impact.

With an eye on when things start to return to normal and larger gatherings are allowed, Colourful Coffins has also seen an uptake in cremated remains caskets, often with a matching design to the picture coffin.

"Families are determined that they will still have a celebration wake with relatives and friends, albeit slightly later than planned, and having a replica design acknowledges the day while allowing them to move forward ahead of the ashes being interred," she concluded.



LifeArt builds team at critical time for funeral profession



In line with its UK & Ireland growth strategy, LifeArt Coffins has appointed a new Business Relationship Manager to strengthen existing partnerships and build new relationships with independent funeral firms.

Sales specialist, Dan Hughes, joins the Gloucester-based supplier of traditional and personalisable environmentally friendly coffins and caskets from BSE UK.

Dan will be supporting LifeArt Coffins' UK & Ireland CEO, Kevin Crute, to build on the excellent growth

of new customers so far in 2020 and to support the increasing number of independent firms that are choosing to partner with the business.

Speaking of his appointment, Dan commented: "I'm extremely excited about joining LifeArt's innovative UK team right now as it's such a critical moment for the country's funeral profession. I've seen how LifeArt has really stepped up during the crisis to help funeral firms facing supply challenges and ensure bereaved families have access to a diverse array of high-quality coffin products.

"During the coming months, I'll be seeking to build on our successes and forge strong relationships with independent funeral directors, for whom combining well-made coffins with consumer choice and solid environmental performance during cremation and burial are now absolutely essential."

LifeArt Coffins' UK CEO, Kevin Crute, added: "Dan is a fantastic addition to the team and already he's made some great relationships with new and existing LifeArt funeral directors. Thanks to his strong sales grounding, he brings to the role a superb ability to truly understand a customer's needs and create a tailored user experience. For this reason, he's a great fit for LifeArt in the UK and I'm sure he'll add value for our existing and new clients."

Originally from Margate in Kent, Dan lives in Gloucester with his partner, Sophie, and outside of work is a rugby and cricket fan. He also coaches juniors with Cheltenham North Rugby Football Club.

LifeArt coffins and caskets produce up to 87% less greenhouse gas emissions (based on a full life cycle analysis including emissions from cremation, expressed as kg of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) per coffin) during cremation and use up to 80% fewer trees during manufacture than chipboard/MDF coffins. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the business has succeeded in working to lead times of no longer than one week, thanks to its dynamic production and distribution process.

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