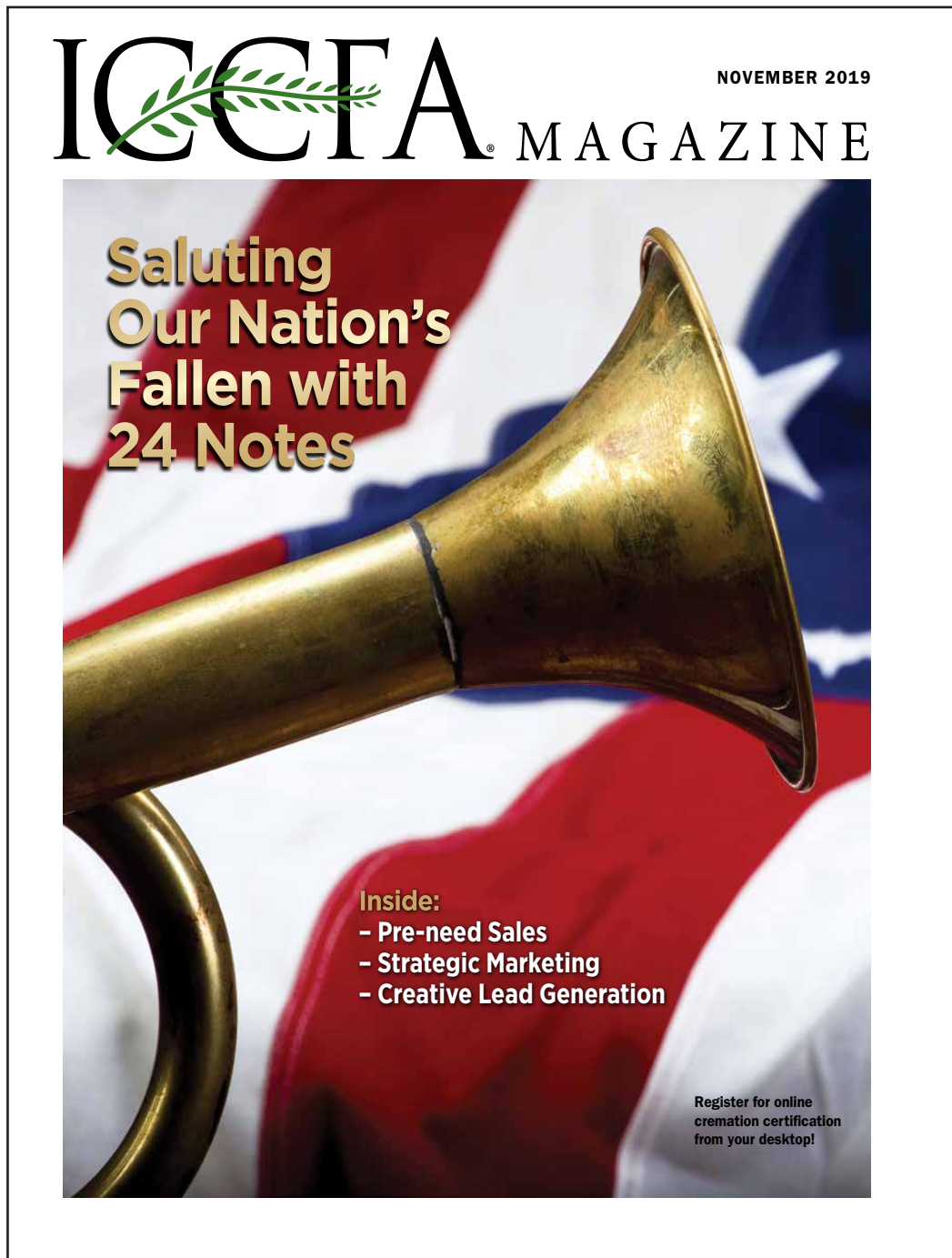


# Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Pre-need: A Necessary Evil for the Survival of the  
Deathcare Industry?

as seen in:



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by Ann Marie St. George



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**Ann Marie St. George, CPC**, a first-generation funeral director, has worked for the past 20 years as a regional manager for Cooperative Funeral Fund, a pre-need and cemetery care fund management company. Thriving in the industry for over 35 years as a funeral director/embalmer, Ann Marie was pulled into the world of national disasters on 9/11; she lived only 11 blocks north of the World Trade Center. She is a Mortuary Officer for both DMORT Region II and Kenyon International Emergency Services. The devastation and grief Ann Marie has witnessed has contributed to her unique sense of humor. Topic suggestions are encouraged.

## Pre-need: A Necessary Evil for the Survival of the Deathcare Industry?

What I am hearing from both funeral directors and cemeterians is that there doesn't seem to be a rhyme or reason for what is happening out in the world of deathcare. Everyone is trying to hold on to their piece of the pie, finding new ways to stay in business. What will magically make things go back to the way they once were?

Remember the days when cremation was the exception to the rule and three-day wakes were the norm? Those also used to be the days my pager went off and I had to find a payphone to call the office. Funnily enough, those also were the days where pre-arranging one's funeral was not common; frankly, the only pre-arrangements we made were for those spending down to qualify for Medicaid.

Let's establish a correlation between working with families before a death occurs—whether it be in the pre-arrangement conference or in a public out-reach program to help the public better understand the importance of remembering those who die—and helping them through their grieving process. As professionals, we need to gain insight into what may help us create some new traditions; because, sadly, the old ones don't seem to fit our ever-changing social media obsessed society.

### Preplanning: The Value

Planning a wedding on average takes one to two years, so how can we expect someone to plan a funeral during an already difficult time within 60 to 90 minutes? In order to truly honor the life lived, we need more time. Pre-arranging one's funeral gives us that opportunity. How can we as death professionals help "Joe Public" to understand the value of this opportunity?

One of my favorite quotes is, "Don't Leave Your Funeral to Fate"; use this quote in your pre-arrangement initiatives. We have a unique opportunity to educate the families and community we serve.

What used to be considered taboo—talking about death—has become more common place. Just go to Facebook, or listen in on conversations that are taking place at your local grocery stores.

It is still obviously a delicate topic; however, it is now fair game.

Do you have an aftercare program? After the casket is lowered into the grave or the cremains are handed over to the families, what do you offer those who are left behind? Do you meet with them after? If you do meet with them, what kind of help do you offer? Are you bringing up the topic of pre-arranging their funerals?

If you are not doing these things, you are missing out on an educational opportunity. Families who have just experienced a non-pre-arranged funeral will understand the importance of prearranging. Here is your perfect opportunity to serve your families to the best of your ability. We are doing them a disservice when we avoid entering into these discussions.

### Conversation Starters

As professionals, we realize the importance of pre-arranging and we are in constant search of finding a way to tap everyone on the head with a magic wand that will enlighten them.

Um, I hate to break it to you, but Glenda the Good Witch from the Wizard of Oz is not in cahoots with the local munchkin undertaker; it is up to us. Use your Facebook page with a special section for people to share how they see their own funerals. Maybe share your own thoughts and your employees' thoughts on funeral planning just to start the conversation.

This sounds a little outside the box; however, as I mentioned earlier, the age of social media has opened a whole new world. The caveat to this is making sure you let people know there is a way to ensure their wishes can be followed.

As I mentioned before, a wedding is a huge celebration that takes a year or more to plan. Shouldn't a funeral that celebrates someone's "entire" life take more time than what we give it? Letting people know the importance of starting the conversation with their families and getting their input encourages further discussions about what their families might need in order to grieve their death.

We are the true conduits of the future of funeral service and pre-need can be its lifeline. □