



# funeral service **insider**

independent news & guidance for funeral home owners and operators

## SCI Touts Benefits of Working in Death Care, Hopes More Firms Will Start Conversations

These are tough days for business owners.

The labor market continues to strengthen and national unemployment is at a historic low, which seems great ... until you realize that there are more jobs than we have qualified people.

This is especially true for death care, which needs to get better at promoting the benefits of entering the profession, says Joe Flores, director of talent acquisition at Service Corporation International, which employs about 24,000 full- and part-time associates in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

SCI is seeking to do its part to spread the word with a new video produced by US Careers Online, which creates targeted videos to help recruit individuals into specific professions.

When you visit the US Careers Online website, you'll find SCI's video, "Licensed Funeral Director," as well as a video gallery highlighting numerous other professions.

"We have made plenty of videos over the years ... but one of the reasons we are so proud of this one is it is on a site where people will naturally go to when they are looking for a career," Flores says. "If you go to the US Careers site, you will find 15 plus professions you can work in."

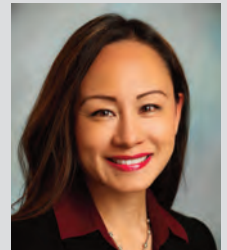
Jim Babson, founder of the site, says while videos highlight various professions, most emphasize "the trades," which can usually be pursued without an expensive, four-year education. "There has been a lack of messaging about these various trades that you can get into," he says. "That is why our videos are so important."

The videos also have a built-in audience as US Careers Online is linked with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, which oversees the state's public school system; and the North Carolina Community College System, a statewide network of 58 public community colleges.

The collaboration with the Department of Instruction reflects "an effort to expand

## Johnson Consulting Group Promotes Lori Salberg

Johnson Consulting Group has announced Lori Salberg as director of business development, with a focus on technology, accounting and business consulting solutions.



Lori Salberg

Salberg joined Johnson Consulting Group in December 2017 as a senior business development consultant.

"We continue to build a sales team with the specific purpose of providing the best tools and services for our growing list of funeral homes and cemeteries," says President and CEO Jake Johnson. "Lori adds to our incredible team with experience in technology, business consulting, and accounting. She has a great entrepreneurial spirit that will help take us to new heights. I am very excited for the future with her in this role."

Salberg has 17 years of experience in various leadership roles including managing large combo funeral home and cemetery operations. She got her start in the profession as a family service counselor for the Catholic Cemeteries in San Jose, California.

To contact Salberg, write her at [lsalberg@johnsonconsulting.com](mailto:lsalberg@johnsonconsulting.com).



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## Watch SCI's Video

There are a variety of career videos at the US Careers Website. Learn more at [www.uscareersonline.com](http://www.uscareersonline.com).

Visit the video gallery at [www.uscareersonline.com/video-gallery](http://www.uscareersonline.com/video-gallery) and click on "licensed funeral director" to view SCI's video.

knowledge to our youth statewide in our public school system for the purpose of expanding information about careers in our workforce" and the collaboration with the community colleges "allows the community college to share the knowledge of the course/subject with viewers to determine if this may be a path of interest in the workforce they want to pursue," Babson says.

"Funding for the videos are 100 percent paid for by the business/industry and organization," Babson explains. "The education facilities reap the benefits for the viewers to learn from the video material being produced."

The collaborations were a built-in selling point for SCI, which would love to have a video like the one it made with US Careers Online in every single state, Flores says. But he adds that SCI is not aware of any other state departments of education that are teaming up with entities like US Careers Online. "I am hoping some of the schools eventually see this video and think, 'Maybe we can advertise differently to tell folks that it is not that difficult to enter this profession,'" Flores says.

The video starts off highlighting Ryan Bumgarner, a general manager for SCI's Dignity Memorial Network in North Carolina, who grew up in the industry before joining SCI and moving up the ranks.

"I think for someone to be successful in our industry, you must be compassionate, you must be organized, and you must be a team player because everything we do day in and day out cannot be done by one person – it takes everyone from the person answering the phone to each level to make everything happen for our families," Bumgarner says.

Bumgarner notes that someone might spend six months planning a wedding, but when planning a celebration of life, you typically only have a few days to get everything in order.

Alexandra Kozak, a North Carolina funeral director with the Dignity Memorial Network, explains that she first became interested in funeral service as a freshman in college majoring in business when her grandfather died. The reason she joined the profession is to help people move forward with their lives, she says.

Hall Edwards, another North Carolina funeral director with the Dignity Memorial Network, shares that he was touched when he had a death in his family and the funeral director – who had served several generations of his family – returned home from vacation so he could handle the arrangements. “It really just showed me the true compassion and sacrifices that funeral directors make, and it really inspired me with how good he was to us. I felt like if I could help someone even half as much as he helped us, then I’d be doing something really nice,” he says.

John Hernandez, a sales manager with the Dignity Memorial Network in North Carolina, got his start in the profession in high school when he needed extra money and began working at a friend’s funeral home on a part-time basis. He liked it, went to mortuary school, and has served in a variety of roles as he’s moved up the ranks. “As a sales manager, I have the opportunity to help people that I am responsible for to make them successful to reach their final goals that they would like to have to make a living,” he says.

Kelly Osborne, a funeral director and preneed family counselor with the Dignity Memorial Network in North Carolina, shares that she was a second-grade teacher for a year before realizing it was not for her. She ended up living with friends above a funeral home and became fascinated with its day-to-day activities. From there, it was off to mortuary school.

Osborne explains that because of SCI’s size, it has staff that specialize in certain areas: “Front of the house” staff meet families and oversee funerals, “back of the house” staff do preparation work and removals and preplanning staff help families prior to the time of need.

Laura Osborne, a cemetery and family service counselor with the Dignity Memorial Network in North Carolina, notes she is enrolled at Fayetteville Technical Community College in Fayetteville, North Carolina. “I am able to take all of my classes online,” she says. “I do not have to physically travel to Fayetteville, even though it is not far away, which is a big bonus. I am still able to have a full-time job, go to school and have a life.”

Asked how he got into death care, Flores says his story is similar to some of those featured in the video, “I stumbled into it,” he says. “I was very happy with my previous company and thought I would retire there, but someone made me aware of SCI – and I submitted my application. I spoke to the individuals involved in the profession, and I was hooked.”

He adds, “My story is no different than most. If you talk to the majority of people in the profession, whether they work at SCI or any other company ... as I network with them, I always ask, ‘What brought you here?’ And a lot of them say they were at a service and so moved and comforted by that process that they wanted to do



Joe Flores, director of talent acquisition at SCI, is confident that once more people know how they can serve others in death care, more will decide to join the profession.

the same for others. That is a very common story. And sometimes, they were referred to this industry and thought it was scary, but the more they got into it, they realized it was not scary at all and that it is very fulfilling.”

### The Employment Problem

In some ways, it is a good problem to have: The unemployment rate has fallen to 4 percent as of January 2019, according to data from the National Conference of State Legislatures. The last time there has been such a sustained period of low unemployment was in the 1960s, Flores says.

“This is true not just in our industry but in the general economy. As our baby boomers retire, and our economy continues to demand labor, there are simply not enough workers entering the workforce to replace those workers exiting the labor market,” he says.

As a result, businesses are

competing for scarce labor, which means death care needs to do a better job promoting itself as a possible profession, Flores says.

“I have seen with folks that are in this industry – not necessarily at SCI but when it comes to licensed professionals – that they typically have five to eight applicants per position. The reason that is relevant is because in most other industries, there is an average application flow of 20 to 25 applicants per position. So, we probably have a third of the number of applicants as we should – and I imagine this is true for anyone in the funeral industry.”

Recruiting in the cemetery profession and in funeral service are equally difficult, Flores says. “Our approach is this: We advertise and sometimes reach out to people in a position as caretaker – whether they are a teacher or in health care or in an industry that lends itself to serving others ... that is who we target,” he says.

“We advertise quite a bit, so folks come in through our SCIjobs career website, but our approach has always been, ‘Let me tell you about the positions we think might be good for you ... where would you like to go?’ We like to position it as, ‘Here are the opportunities you have to serve. Where do you feel most comfortable?’ Or, ‘Here are our job descriptions. Which one speaks to you the most?’” Flores says. “We try to make it a conversation about their career aspirations.”

### Licensure Laws and Recruiting

While there are a multitude of factors that make recruiting in the death-care profession difficult, the licensing laws – and how they vary – do not help, says Joe Flores, director of talent acquisition at SCI.

“Each state and their board have a right to make their own rules around the qualifications for positions, and we respect that – but from a recruiting standpoint, it does make it difficult because it narrows the candidate field significantly,” Flores says. “Some require multiple designations just to hire people.”

He adds, “As an industry – not as SCI – I just feel we have to come together and seek a balance between compliance and the shortage of licensed professionals.”

Flores emphasizes that he realizes regulations and compliance are important, but the profession also needs to encourage new entrants. “The bigger picture is can we get more folks engaged and at least thinking about the profession and increasing our numbers?” he says.

He adds, “If we can get our message out, I believe the number of candidates will increase significantly. I believe if we tell people that this is a wonderful profession, most will listen.”

The purpose with the video was to reach individuals who may not consider the funeral industry as a potential career opportunity, Flores says. “We want to educate our communities to let them know about the wonderful benefits at SCI, but more importantly turn them on to our industry and our profession. We want to show them there are jobs out there that they are not thinking about,” Flores says.

Flores adds, “We love serving our communities and helping people in their time of need. We believe it is a very fulfilling profession – much like teaching or being a health care provider.” But the fact remains that the profession needs to do a better

job spreading the word about how people can serve their communities while also enjoying a rewarding career, he says.

Asked why recruiting people to enter the death-care profession is so tough, Flores says, “I don’t think there is any one thing. The primary reason is I am not sure folks know this profession exists. What I mean by that is ... think of a teacher: Everyone goes to school. And although everyone faces the hardship of losing a loved one at some point, they generally don’t think about the profession in that moment.”

Going to the dentist, visiting a

doctor's office or meeting with an attorney lends itself to thinking about those careers, but most people do not give death care a thought unless they have just lost a loved one – and even then, they are usually focused on helping their family through a difficult time, Flores says.

“Speaking for myself, I know when I have gone to funerals that I am not thinking of anything except my family in that moment – and I imagine that is the same for all of us. But when I was in school, I thought, ‘How great would it be to be a teacher’ or if I was in front of a doctor, I would think, ‘How great would it be to be a doctor,’ ” Flores says.

“Part of this is education and putting the word out,” Flores says. “The second factor is we have an aging demographic in this industry.

And the third factor is that every state has its own regulations and requirements, and folks do not always know what is required to do what we do,” Flores says.

One of the video's primary messages is that anyone can enter death care – as long as they have a passion for helping families and serving the community, Flores says. “Whether it is a student or a person thinking about a second career, our message is anyone can do this,” he says. “It does require a little schooling and education, but if you have a drive, there are opportunities in the profession.” He adds, “Of course, the video is branded SCI, but we want folks in the profession. It doesn't have to be with SCI.”

Asked how SCI chose who would be featured in the video, Flores says he just reached out to the location leader closest to US Careers Online

and made sure it was OK for them to visit. “This allowed us to get a random sampling of whoever was in the building,” Flores says.

Flores is pleased with the end result. “For me, the video exceeded expectations. It is seven minutes, which is very long for this kind of video – but it's very hard to tell our story in two minutes,” he says.

He adds, “The reality is that the industry is hurting for people, and it is not the easiest profession to advertise. There is not an easy way to tell our story. I would encourage other organizations dedicated to funeral service – whether they are one or two locations or a larger company – to get the message out.”

*Visit [www.sci.jobs](http://www.sci.jobs) to learn more about working at SCI.*