

by Gail Rubin



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ICCFA Magazine author spotlight

► A veteran public relations professional, Rubin is a member of the ICCFA, Association for

Death Education and Counseling, the cemetery committee for her synagogue and the *Chevre Kaddisha*, volunteers who prepare Jews for burial. She recently became a certified celebrant.

► She speaks regularly to groups on starting funeral planning conversations. Her award-winning book, "A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die," was a finalist in the Family & Relationships category of the 2010 Book of the Year Awards.

www.AGoodGoodbye.com

More about this subject

► Rubin will be undertaking the "30 Funerals in 30 Days Challenge" for the second consecutive year starting September 30 and ending October 30, and will blog about her experience at:

<http://TheFamilyPlot.wordpress.com/category/30-day-challenge>

► For help with writing an op-ed piece for your local newspaper, go to <http://AGoodGoodbye.com/op-ed/>

► For help with planning a "The Newly Dead Game" event, go to <http://AGoodGoodbye.com/newly-dead-game/>

More from this author



"A Good Goodbye" addresses the Baby Boomer generation with gentle humor on the vital information about funeral arrangements that most people don't learn about until faced with a death in the family.

■ About "Create a Great Funeral Day"

October 30 was registered as Create a Great Funeral Day in 2000 by Stephanie West Allen, an attorney with an interest in end-of-life rituals whose book "Creating Your Own Funeral or Memorial Service: A Workbook," was published in 1998.

www.createyourownfuneral.com

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

October 30 is Create a Great Funeral Day.

What can you do to leverage this promotional opportunity?



A young participant in one of Larry Anspach's pumpkin hunt and decorating contests at Cedar Park Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois, a good pre-Halloween and Create a Great Funeral Day event.

Using Create a Great Funeral Day to reach out to your community

October 30 is the 12th annual Create a Great Funeral Day. While this observance offers the profession promotional opportunities, most funeral directors and cemeterians I've spoken to haven't even heard of it.

Many little-known, nontraditional observance days pepper the calendar year-round, and some of them provide an opportunity for us to try to educate our communities about what we do. The ultimate goal of Create a Great Funeral Day is to remove the taboos surrounding the discussion of mortality in order to make dealing with end-of-life issues easier on everyone.

Stephanie West Allen, an attorney and speaker who wrote "Creating Your Own Funeral or Memorial Service: A Workbook," officially registered the "holiday" in 1999. She wanted Create a Great Funeral Day to remind people of the many benefits of planning your own end-of-life event.

"I began writing the book when I saw someone I cared about struggling, after his mother's death, with both grief and trying to guess what his mother would

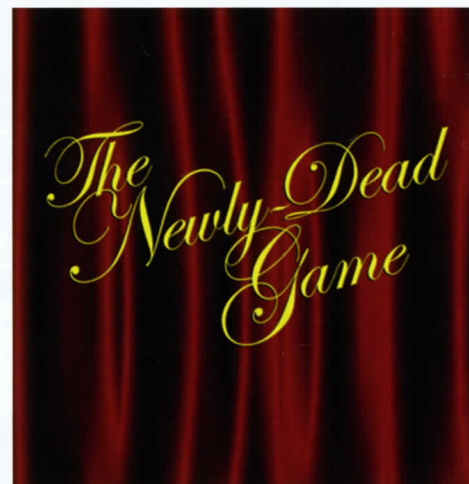
have wanted for her service," said Allen. "I thought it would be wonderful if people could easily leave behind their wishes for their memorial or funeral, so family and friends would not need to guess. Seeing how much that planning could benefit families, I created the holiday to remind more people—not only those who read my book—to do it."

Allen had the holiday all to herself until 2009. That's when the online funeral planning website Funeralwise.com encouraged people to act on Create a Great Funeral Day. They invited people to register the most important elements of their funeral preferences by completing a Quick Plan on their website.

In 2010, Funeralwise held a sweepstakes in association with the 11th annual event. A total of 1,643 respondents participated in a survey and even more joined the company's email list.

The survey revealed an important finding for the funeral industry. Almost half of those surveyed would like a "celebration of life" ceremony versus only 11 percent who preferred a traditional funeral. Also, a startling fact came to light—over 30

If you're open to trying something different and attention-getting, consider hosting "The Newly-Dead Game" the weekend before Halloween



Left, another photo from one of Cedar Park Cemetery's pumpkin hunts and decorating contests. Above, the sign for the inaugural game show Rubin hosted to bring attention to end-of-life planning.

percent said they do NOT want a funeral.

"This survey shows attitudes are changing and that the funeral doesn't have to stay rooted in tradition," said Rick Paskin, company co-founder. "Funeral directors need to be keenly aware of these attitudes."

What can observing and promoting Create a Great Funeral Day do for you and your business? It presents your funeral home or cemetery an opportunity to stretch beyond your usual marketing venues with events and news outreach.

For cemeterians

Larry Anspach, a two-term ICCFA board member and Funeralwise.com co-founder, is legendary for his promotional activities during the '70s and '80s at Cedar Park Cemetery near Chicago. His colorful events landed him a front-page story in *The Wall Street Journal*. He suggests that cemeterians leverage Create a Great Funeral Day's proximity to Halloween.

October 30 is a Sunday this year. Consider holding a Halloween pumpkin hunt and decorating contest at the cemetery. Offer refreshments and raffle prizes—asking people to fill out contact information to enter—in order to collect contact information from parents and grandparents.

Use crayons for the decorating contest, avoiding knives and carving for safety reasons. Invite the children to come in costume, which will make it even more

attractive as a photo or filming opportunity for the local news media. Take adorable pictures of the children during the day's activities and send them to the family in a follow-up mailing.

"At Cedar Park, this approach was very successful, with 3,000 kids and their families attending one year," said Anspach. "The follow-up to parents and grandparents yielded many sales and preneed arrangements, very appropriate for Create a Great Funeral Day."

Newspaper op-eds

Your local newspaper offers a page where you can express your opinion as a column rather than a letter to the editor—the Op-Ed page. This is literally opposite the editorial page, where the newspaper expresses its own opinions, and it is prime real estate for readers' attention.

Use Create a Great Funeral Day as a reason to send in a 250- to 700-word piece (check the newspaper's guidelines) on the benefits of planning ahead for your funeral and disposition. For an example of an op-ed you can tailor for your own use, go to <http://AGoodGoodbye.com/op-ed/>.

The 'Newly-Dead Game'

If you're open to trying something different and attention-getting, consider hosting "The Newly-Dead Game" the weekend before Halloween (or as part of your community

outreach at any time of the year).

I introduced The Newly-Dead Game at the wild and wacky Frozen Dead Guy Days Festival in Nederland, Colorado. The game is like television's "The Newlywed Game," but the questions probe how well couples know their partner's final wishes. The possibilities are endless. You can do them as open-ended questions or as multiple choice (giving a choice of three songs, for example):

- What disposition does your spouse prefer: earth (burial), air (donation to science), fire (cremation) or water (burial at sea or alkaline hydrolysis)?
- What would your spouse like as an epitaph on her memorial?
- What one item does your spouse most treasure and who would he/she want to inherit this item?
- What song would your spouse like sung or played at his/her service?
- What favorite or meaningful food or drinks would your spouse like served at the reception after the service?

You get the idea. It should be easy for you and your staff to brainstorm and come up with some questions that would work well and would serve to educate people about the service and merchandise options available today.

This might be an event you want to hold away from the cemetery or funeral home, but be sure to bring materials and displays



to show people some of those options they may not know are available today.

With advance publicity for this new addition to the Frozen Dead Guy Days festival, we had to start a waiting list because so many couples wanted to play. One of the players was a journalist who opened his news story about the festival with his experience playing “The Newly-Dead Game.”

You could invite local celebrity couples to participate, such as your market’s television or radio personalities—a great way to ensure publicity.

Offer fun prizes such as a bottle of champagne and/or a dinner at a nice restaurant for the couple that gets the most answers right.

If you’d like to find out more about “The Newly-Dead Game” and how it can be used to start funeral planning conversations in a fun, non-threatening way, visit <http://AGoodGoodbye.com/newly-dead-game/>.

Funny films to start serious conversations

Funeral homes can use their chapels and audiovisual systems—primarily used to play video tributes—to hold screenings of funny film clips related to funerals.

My film presentations at senior centers and other venues have attracted people to watch scenes from comedy films such as “Undertaking Betty,” “Waking Ned Devine” and “The Six Wives of Henry Lefay.” After we watch and laugh, it’s



Above, Rubin moderates as couples play “The Newly Dead Game,” trying to guess their partners’ end-of-life preferences. **Left,** Rubin at the Frozen Dead Guys Days festival, where she debuted the game, designed to show people why pre-planning is a good idea.

easier to talk about funeral planning issues.

To put your own film clip presentation together, you’ll need the following:

- A license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (www.MPLC.org) to show films as part of a presentation, with a base charge of \$625 for five presentations a year.

You must get this license! All DVDs start with a warning from the FBI that unauthorized use is subject to a \$250,000 fine and five years in prison. The MPLC license covers your use.

- Software to capture video clips: Snapz Pro X from Ambrosia Software for Macs or Camtasia Studio for PCs.

- DVDs of movies to clip scenes or a streaming video feed.

- Software to edit clips: iMovie for Macs and Sony Vegas Movie Studio or Adobe Photoshop Elements 9 are two

options for PCs.

It may seem like a lot of trouble, but these film presentations bring light to the dark subject of death and funerals. They can be used for community outreach throughout the year to engage families in preneed conversations.

If the thought of putting together a presentation truly overwhelms you, you could simply show one of these films in its entirety at each movie night. You still need the MPLC license and cannot charge for the event.

As Mary Poppins sang, “Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down—in a most delightful way.” Use the observance of Create a Great Funeral Day to entice people to engage in service and disposition planning conversations. The public will certainly take notice of the funeral homes and cemeteries that do.