

RAY'S EMBALMING COLLEGIATE

VDT. Verband Dienstleistender Thanatologene.V.



Geoff Taylor, of GT Embalming, has been associated with embalming education in Germany for 16 years. Geoff was therefore the obvious choice for conference organisers Heiko Shonsee (VDT President) and Joerg Vieweg, to join the VDT membership in celebrating their recent anniversary, which took place on June 5th and 6th in Hamburg Germany.

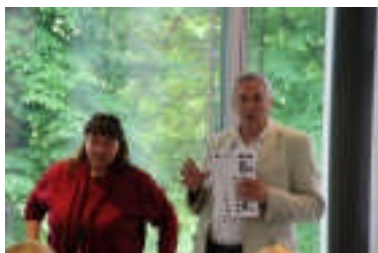
The theme of the 2 day conference was education. Specifically restoration and reconstruction.

Having two days of educational material to produce and deliver, Geoff asked Ray Hood to accompany him, since Ray has been a post mortem reconstructive specialist for some years, and is currently a 'Goodwill Ambassador' for the 'Fountain National Academy of Professional Embalming Skills' in Springfield Missouri. An academy specialising in the teaching of 'Reconstructive Surgery'.



Geoff and Ray were to be the only invited speakers on both days. They addressed around fifty embalmers who had flown in for the conference from not only Germany, but also Lithuania and Austria.

The core of Geoff's sessions focused on embalming prior to reconstruction, and aftercare. This was a vast subject which prompted many questions.



Assisting on both days were two translators. Pictured here during one questioning session is Anja Schlange owner of a funeral home in

Bremerhaven and volunteer interpreter, who very kindly stepped forward on the initial day, speedily becoming an invaluable helper.

Geoff also covered embalming fluids and chemicals available in both Britain, and on the continent. He compared and contrasted items available from different European manufacturers product ranges, demonstrating a vast product knowledge.



Ray talked about advanced post mortem reconstructive surgery following varying degrees of trauma, giving power point presentations on both days. He described alternative techniques to overcome the most common, and the not so common problems, that might be encountered during reconstruction. Together with Geoff he debated not only alternative fluids and chemicals, but also waxing and cosmetology, to the delight of all present.

There was a little time for relaxation however. The first day was rounded off by a visit to a beach area on the river Elbe, which runs through Hamburg. It was great, and following some liquid refreshments, in the region of 60 VDT members and guests decamped to a local restaurant until around midnight.

On the final day, Geoff explained that he and Ray had worked together on other occasions. After being asked what the nature of the work was, Geoff proceeded to show slides of both he and Ray working in Comoros in the Indian Ocean, and in the Philippines, when they were part of the 'Global Partnership DVI' team.

This was well received, putting a different dimension to the subject of reconstruction and massive trauma resulting from catastrophe, opening up yet another avenue for further discussion.

Ray was then prompted to present a slideshow of his time in Thailand following the Tsunami. 'Ray was there thanks to Kenyon International Emergency Services' working under the authority of the Australian Government and DFAT.

The German DVI team, some of whom were DVT members currently present, were also in Thailand, and Ray had captured one of them on camera in Khaolak, which housed one of the first disaster victim reception centres.



Ray was able to explain in some detail what amazing work the German team, alongside all the other nationalities involved in helping with the mass fatality recovery operations, had carried out in the wake of the Tsunami. Following which the DVT members present gave their compatriots a resounding standing ovation.

During his closing speech, VDT President Heiko Schonsee thanked Geoff and Ray for their contributions in helping the weekend conference achieve success.

Time seemed to pass all too quickly not only for those DVT members present, but for Geoff and Ray, not least because the German hospitality was absolutely second to none!



The photograph shows most of the conference delegates following the closing ceremony. Geoff Taylor, quite rightly, takes pride of place, seated like royalty in front of his subjects. Pictured on the extreme left is Heiko Schonsee (VDT President), alongside Joerg Vieweg, who jointly organised the weekend. Pictured far right is Bea, joint interpreter during the weekend.

The Loss of a loved one

The death of a family member is one of the most traumatic, life altering experiences a family will ever be confronted with. Whether it is your father, mother, brother, sister, or a parent's worst nightmare, their child; this day will change your family forever.

When a death occurs in a family there is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty what needs to be done to honour the life of loved one. Family and friends, business associates, and neighbours, will all begin to grieve this death in their own way. Despite everyone else this is your time, for you and your family to not only grieve, but to make very difficult decisions regarding what needs to be done involving your local funeral home. These decisions will not only be very difficult but will also assist you in making it through your grief. Accepting the reality of the loss of your loved one is often assisted by visualizing your family member at a funeral home or church.

Whether you choose burial or cremation as a final disposition, it is the decision on viewing your loved one that is often the most difficult. When death has occurred from illness that has been prolonged by medical intervention often your loved one has gone through drastic physical changes sometimes to the degree that they no longer resemble their past self. Should the death be a tragic death due to a motor vehicle or other force often families feel viewing may not be possible. Families often fear the unknown. The unknown is what can be clarified by the funeral professional employed at your local funeral home.

Viewing your family member is the most important aspect of a funeral ritual. Often you hear people who have attended past closed casket funerals make comments stating "I can't believe they died, it doesn't seem real" often this is due to uncertainty in their own minds. They are uncertain because they have not had the opportunity to visualize. They know the death has occurred but something inside their mind doesn't want to believe it. When a child goes missing or a tragic disaster occurs recovery of the human body is always the first priority, whether alive or dead. This is because the reality of a death is often achieved by seeing the human remains. It is comforting and necessary to have this time with a loved one who has died. We need this time to say our good-byes face to face.

For many families this will be their first time arranging a funeral for a family member. What they may not know is that even following a lengthy illness or a traumatic death an open casket or private family viewing is often possible. In such cases a professional embalmer may need to restore lost or damaged features through reconstructive techniques. In severe cases a procedure referred to as post mortem surgical reconstruction may be necessary. In some situations this may exceed the skill set of your local embalmer. In situations like this you may request your local funeral home to contact an outside embalmer that specializes in these skills.

You have chosen your local funeral home in most cases because of one reason...TRUST....you trust the establishment to handle and care for your loved one in the most professional manner possible. You know they will do everything they can to assist you in honouring your family member's life. Ask your funeral director during your funeral arrangements about viewing your loved one before cremation or burial.

Karl D. Wenzel, CFSP

Embalmer, Certified Funeral Service Practitioner

Post Mortem Reconstructive Specialist

FNA Canadian Ambassador

Board of Director American Society of Embalmers

The Arranging Director

The tasks and objectives of our professional services as a funeral director/embalmer are multifaceted. Our main focus is to please the family we serve by providing an excellent dignified service to commemorate the life of a lost family member. It is also our job to educate these families that are making the funeral arrangements unfortunately however we do not always achieve this effectively. Often family members can become upset and disgruntled due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of what we do.

It is our job not only to educate the families we are currently serving, but also the wider community. Educating everyone (including ourselves) is often the best way to create a trouble free work environment. One of the best ways to do this is just by general conversation. Often when we meet people outside of our place of work they will ask us what we do for a living. When we tell them we are a funeral director/embalmer usually the interest is sparked and they tend to ask a lot more questions. This is a great opportunity to explain what we do and the value of it. We not only explain to them that we arrange and direct the service, we order the casket, flowers and cemetery set up, but it is also an opportunity to take the time to explain to them the embalming process and the value of that open casket.

We often hear funeral home personnel complain that “everything” is going to cremation and the market for a better casket is down. This is true for the most part depending on the geographical and social-economical region in which you live. There is no doubt that cremation is on the rise. Perhaps it is due to the cost of a funeral having tripled over the past decade, or perhaps it could also be our negligence for not educating our families.

Do you think if we took the time out to explain to families the value of viewing their loved one we might be able to turn things around? We may not change the final disposition of cremation; but, perhaps we will have that open casket visitation that would lead to a better selection of casket. From a business stand point the boss will love you for it, and on a personal side the family will often thank you as well. We need to take the time to explain that by viewing their loved one they will receive a psychological value that will help them deal with their grief. We all went through mortuary school somewhere and we all learned about grief and the grieving process. Whether it is Worfelt or Kubler-Ross we all understand one thing. By viewing the decedent after death, it assists us in working through the grief process. We, as funeral directors arranging a service need to take the time to explain to families about the forthcoming grief process. Do not counsel them; however point them in the direction that would best assist them with their questions and uncertainties.

Every so often we have families come in and their loved one has died because of a lengthy illness or perhaps a tragic accident, they tell us that they don't wish to have a viewing and they want immediate cremation with a memorial service. Often if we ask that family what their reason is for not allowing some time with their loved one before cremation they respond with "Well mom's had cancer for the past year and she's lost a lot of weight and looks really frail. We do not want to see her like that since she has suffered so much." Perhaps the death was tragic and they have been told by the coroner or hospital staff that it would not be possible to view them. By educating this family about what we may be able to do, we can often change their minds. We need to take the time to explain to them that we have the capability to often restore their mother or family member to a much more peaceful likeness of their past self. We need to tell them that cancer is a brutal disease, and we understand that they went through a lot of suffering; however, it is our profession that can give back to them some peace and dignity that such a disease took away. Explain to them that we have specially trained staff that can assist them, enabling the dignified person they once knew to resemble more of their past self. If the death was a tragic loss due to an accident, often families are told by outside professions or friends that you do not or cannot see them. Remember this, you the director/embalmer are the true death care professionals of your community. Families have come to you because they look at you for the answers, so make sure you give them the right one. Explain to the family that, whether death resulted by way of auto accident, or even a gunshot, we are often capable of restoring their loved one to a viewable condition

Not long ago I was speaking to a funeral director from another funeral home, he explained to me that he had arranged a funeral for a young woman who was killed in a car accident. He went on to explain that it was going to be a closed casket because the family had been told by the local coroner that it was not possible to view her because of the injuries she sustained. When I asked him just how bad the injuries were, he told me he had no idea because the body was still at the Medical Examiners office. The director went on to tell me he would take a look at it later and see what could be done but he did not think they could do much. When I offered my services to him should they not be comfortable handling the preparation and reconstruction of this young woman it was blown off with a quick response of "we'll handle it."

In a situation like this do you think this director gave this family a true professional opinion on the possibilities of what could be done for this family? Do you think he was acting in the best interest of the family he was serving? If that was your family in this circumstance would you want this director? Currently, there are lawsuits in the USA against funeral homes because the family was told that their loved one could not be embalmed and /or restored because the injuries were too severe. If you are uncomfortable handling a difficult case or doing reconstruction because it's beyond your professional capabilities, families have the right to have you hire a specialist in that area to come in and prepare those remains for you. Do not let your ego or pride step between you and what's right for this family should they want to view. I don't know what ever happened in this case with the director I was talking to, but I hope he did the right thing for this family because they deserve that closure.

When someone goes missing or there is a tragic accident we have to think of what is the first objective the rescue team attempts to do. It is to recover the human body. Hopefully, they are alive but even

after all hope of finding survivors they still continue their search. They do this because the significance of this body retrieval is critical not only for investigational purposes but also to allow that family closure. The old saying “seeing is believing” is often true in such cases. Families can continue through their grief process by knowing their loved one has been found and by viewing them. We must not take that opportunity away as directors or embalmers.

Remember, we all started in this profession to help the families we serve. This profession truly is a calling and a gift. That gift is in our own professional knowledge, a gift we can pass on to our families and to our communities. The next time you are with a family and they don’t wish to view or want an immediate cremation, ask them why, and explain all the options, and reasons why we have those option. I guarantee that your family will be delightfully informed and could possibly change their mind.



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**INTERNATIONAL EMBALMING AND RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY
CONFERENCE FOR PROFESSIONAL EMBALMERS.**

'Fountain National Academy of Professional Embalming Skills' (FNA) announces the launch of its 'International Embalming and Reconstructive Surgery Conference for Professional Embalmers'

The ambitious format of the entire four day conference will be dedicated to the philosophy of 'open casket viewing', a concept that all embalmers strive to achieve, whatever their level of skill.

Vernie Fountain, pictured, is the founder of FNA and the mastermind behind the conference. He says he is proud to announce the launch of what he predicts is set to become the most prestigious event of its kind.

Vernie says that he has designed this biennial event specifically for the professional embalmer. He simply wants to offer embalmers the chance to learn new techniques, and acquaint themselves with embalming product capabilities, whilst networking with colleagues from around the world.

It will present the largest amount of technical skill information in one place at one time anywhere in the world.

The conference venue is the Holiday Inn North Hotel & Conference Centre, Springfield, Missouri, USA.

The 4 day Conference dates are 5th – 8th August 2010.

The ambitious format for the conference has been outlined. The fine detail however is still in the planning stage.

Further information will be released by FNA as the event plan unfolds, with firm bookings being taken around October.

News from Ray Hood Associates

Having attended FNA conferences in the past, I can assure you that this is shaping up to be an event 'not to be missed'.

It is certainly in my diary!