

Using Technology to Serve Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Paul White, vice president of client development and marketing, Funeral Services Inc.

Death-care professionals are under immense pressure in today's landscape to serve families and communities that are experiencing overwhelming loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the country continues practicing social distancing and limits in-person interaction, firms are challenged with providing families that are uncomfortable visiting a facility with alternative ways to arrange and plan for a service.

For Palms West Funeral Home and Crematory – a good friend and client of Funeral Services, Inc. that is located in Royal Palm Beach, Florida – one of its notable challenges during the pandemic has been the limitation of families' funeral arrangements, especially when services did not allow the gathering of more than 10 people.

Furthermore, this restriction limited available on-site staff to serve families in-person, requiring them to work from home to stay safe. This was especially challenging as it related to helping individuals plan for a service, whether at-need or preneed, especially financially.

“Our staff has always been our most valuable asset,” says John Duemig, prearrangements director at Palms West Funeral Home and Crematory. “We needed to further focus on our digital tools and resources, so they were equipped to serve our community remotely during the pandemic.”

Palms West, which has utilized FSI as its record keeper and servicing agent since it opened for business in 1996, had been utilizing FSI's eContract software well before COVID-19. This software quickly creates and processes compliant, error-free digital contracts that are customized for the needs of any family.

As the pandemic began to impact everyday life, eContract enabled the Palms West team to serve clients from their remote locations simply and efficiently, eliminating the need to mail paper contracts or ask individuals to meet them at the funeral home to sign paperwork.

While eContract was very helpful and effective for staff and families, Duemig and Palms West sought additional ways to enhance and streamline its service from a contract perspective and provide options that make an already difficult situation as easy as possible for the community.

To do this, Palms West worked with our team at FSI to incorporate its eRemote software into its offerings, which helped further digitize the contract process while still allowing families to fill out paper contracts if they prefer to do so. For these clients, eRemote enables a funeral home to scan data from consumers' hard copy contracts directly into FSI's system, a digital database of all contracts.

“Some members of our community are used to the old-fashioned approach and prefer filling out a paper contract,” says Duemig. “As much of the world continues to implement more technology, we felt it was important to ensure the traditional method was still available, while also streamlining the process to complete these transactions.”

“From writing new contracts digitally, to submitting scanned contracts, to being able to look up images of virtually every contract we have ever written, working and serving families remotely has almost been seamless in relation to our trusts,” Duemig notes.

As a company that specializes in the administration, recordkeeping and support of preneed and perpetual care trusts and death-care sales programs, FSI has been investing in technology since the early 2000s when it began to see a small percentage of death-care firms looking for ways to digitize some of their offerings. Today, the company offers software for a multitude of death-care-specific needs, with nearly a dozen IT professionals on staff.



John Duemig



Bill Williams

“We have invested millions of dollars in our technology to make it easier for our clients to serve their families,” says Bill Williams, president and CEO of FSI. “That investment helped us shift to an online and remote workflow immediately and without any hiccups when social distancing went into effect. I am very proud of our entire team as they continued to demonstrate their determination and commitment to finding solutions and serving the profession seamlessly despite the challenges of the pandemic.”

Duemig notes that the FSI team played a crucial role in helping adjust and enhance Palms West’s service to its community – modifications that will benefit and support families both during and after COVID-19.

“Anything we can do to make our families comfortable is our No. 1 priority,” Duemig says. “From monthly state report filings and remittance, to annual reports, to preneed application processing, I cannot imagine our workload without FSI’s support. Between their technology and the personal touch of their staff, they have helped us provide options to families financially as we all navigate this time.”

Digital Bonus: Get to Know the Publisher of Kates-Boylston Publications

As an added bonus to subscribers, Funeral Service Insider is now sharing videos with thought leaders on a dedicated page.

Our first interview features Allison Sullivan, the longtime publisher of Kates-Boylston Publications, who shares how she found her way to the company, how her team is faring during the pandemic, future offerings and more.

She also reveals what she wanted to do before going into publishing – and it is a surprise.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/yblgcwoc> to watch the video with Sullivan, and bookmark the page to view future videos, too.

