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Wilbert Commits to Customer Service, Education in 2012

While Wilbert Funeral Services plans to introduce several new products in 2012, Mark Klingenberger, Wilbert's vice president of sales and marketing, is more excited to talk about how the company will approach business in the new year. "What you're going to see is a focus on two things – service and education," Klingenberger said.

A year or so ago, Klingenberger said, Wilbert hired an outside company to do a research survey. The results, he said, were an eye opener. "For example, 91 percent of funeral professionals surveyed said they would choose a lined concrete vault for themselves, but when consumer families were surveyed, only 60 percent would choose lined burial vaults," Klingenberger said. "What we began to explore was why we had such a gap in purchasing behavior."

One of the first places to start is at the grave, Klingenberger believes. "We want to focus on one family at a time, one service at a time, one vault at a time," he said. "Many funeral directors are now using picture boards and video tributes in their funeral homes, but we want to pull the pictures into the committal service. We want to get the public to understand that it is an option."

Providing funeral directors with the tools to show families what is possible at the graveside service is important, Klingenberger said. "Do many families know they can have photos on the cover of the vault?" he added. "To watch a child put his hand over a picture or trace that picture with a finger, that's powerful. We have people sign a cast when we break an arm, why not a vault cover?"

Based on the survey results, Wilbert decided on a bold plan: Build a tool that families could use prior to



Wilbert Funeral Services is providing new ways for family and friends to stay involved at the gravesite.

coming in for the arrangement – a basic concept to commemorate a life. "We felt that a video was the greatest opportunity to engage a family, to tell them what we offer," Klingenberger said. "Video plays a vital role in grabbing people; just look at the explosion of YouTube. You can tell people something, but it is so much better to show them."

It's time, Klingenberger said, to return service to the gravesite. "How many people have been to a graveside service in the last year? In the last five years?" he asked. "If families are having committal services at the chapel instead of the grave, then we are not doing something right."

The goal now, Klingenberger said, is to "help the family get to that 10,000 foot level, let them know what their

possibilities might be." Allowing a funeral director to engage the family in the otherwise static environment of the selection room with the "display animation," as Klingenberger refers to it, allows for information to be given in a nonassertive and nonaggressive way, he said.

Families have nothing but praise for being guided to a service they otherwise may have never known was possible. "When you see a child making a handprint on a burial vault, see a family member running a hand over a photo collage, and then someone takes out a cell phone and takes a picture, then we know we have connected with a family," Klingenberger said. "We've been able to tie everything together to create a memorable experience." ❖