

AMERICAN CEMETERY & CREMATION

# INNOVATORS

2026

## The Faces of Deathcare



# The Face of **Alkaline Hydrolysis**

**Deon Strommer**  
*Business Development*

## **Bio-Response Solutions**

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<http://www.aquamationinfo.com>

Deon Strommer didn't stumble into Aquamation®. After more than a decade of research, the 40-year deathcare veteran made a deliberate decision: in 2018 he purchased one of the first alkaline hydrolysis systems west of the Mississippi from Bio-Response Solutions. He named it "The Green Machine" for Iris Green, a former science teacher and the first person in Portland to choose it. The memorial plaque reads, "A science teacher in life and death."

At Portland's First Call Mortuary Services, a business handling more than 6,000 calls annually, Deon personally oversaw more than 1,400 Aquamation services. At one partner funeral home, 90% of pre-planning families selected Aquamation once it became available.

After building one of the Pacific Northwest's most respected deathcare operations, Deon sold First Call and joined Bio-Response Solutions. Today, he continues his passion for Aquamation by helping funeral homes evaluate, launch, and grow successful programs. He doesn't describe this technology from a brochure. He describes it from the floor of a facility he ran.



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# The Face of Environmental Services & Grounds Maintenance

**Marilyn Brandt**  
*Strategic  
Partnerships —  
Cemeteries*

**The Davey Tree  
Expert Company**

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Marilyn Brandt is a long-time veteran with over 35 years in the cemetery industry. Based in Ohio, she started at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland as a horticulturist. Her dedication to cemetery care and management allowed her to advance to grounds manager and Chief Operations Officer, where she oversaw daily operations. In 2024, Marilyn joined Davey Tree as a business developer specializing in cemetery landscape maintenance and management.

In her role, she gives back to the industry she has been dedicated to for decades by working with cemetery clients to help meet

their property's landscape goals, including tree care, grounds maintenance, water management, environmental consulting, storm response, and much more. The knowledge, heart, and passion she brings to the cemetery industry is unmatched.

Marilyn is a member of the ICCFA and the Greater Cleveland Cemetery Association. She is also the current director and past president of the Ohio Cemetery Association.



# The Face of Water Management

**Paul Kovacik**  
*Senior Managing  
Consultant, National  
Water Management  
Team*

**Davey Resource  
Group, Inc.**

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**[www.davey.com/  
about/davey-  
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management/](http://www.davey.com/about/davey-institute/water-management/)**

Paul Kovacik has spent the last 20 years in the green industry, including 17 with The Davey Tree Expert Company, building a reputation for helping cemeteries solve their most complex water and landscape infrastructure challenges. As the leader of water management within Davey Resource Group's Environmental Consulting team, Paul has worked across 40+ cemeteries in the U.S., on a wide variety of projects alongside a talented team of irrigation designers and consultants, researchers, arborists, environmental consultants, civil engineers, landscape architects, and agronomy experts.

Paul is passionate about helping cemeteries preserve the beauty, sustainability, and long-term legacy of their grounds through innovative, practical solutions built for the cemetery industry's evolving challenges. He and his team received the ASIC Awards in 2025 and 2026 for Westminster Memorial Park and Mortuary in California and West Resthaven in Arizona.



# The Face of **Recycling**

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**Don Winsett**  
*Crematory Sales Executive*

## **Garfield Refining**

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As someone passionate about serving death care professionals, I'm proud to help Garfield Refining provide crematories with ethical recycling solutions for precious metals. With a background in green services and the environmental sector, I understand the importance of sustainability, operational support, and building meaningful relationships.

As a Crematory Sales Executive, I work closely with crematory partners to improve metal recovery and provide insights that help optimize program performance. Our focus is on education, transparency, and helping partners maximize the value of recycling so they can reinvest in their communities and the families they serve.

Garfield is a family-run business that has been operating since 1892, and that legacy means a great deal to me. Our mission is to preserve what's precious, both in the materials we recycle and in the relationships we build. I'm proud to support an industry rooted in compassion and care while helping crematories strengthen their recycling programs.



# The Face of Cemetery eCommerce

**George Owens**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

## **Guidant**

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Guidant began with a simple question that had bothered founder George Owens throughout his 20-plus years in the profession: “I can buy almost anything online – why can’t I buy cemetery property?”

That question led to the development and patenting of Guidant, the profession’s first technology platform enabling cemeteries to sell property and related products online, directly from their own websites.

The platform combines interactive mapping, inventory management, and e-commerce functionality, allowing families to browse available property, make selections, and complete purchases from the comfort of home.

For cemetery operators, Guidant modernizes the sales process, expands market reach, and helps capture the estimated 35% of consumers who say they would purchase cemetery property online if given the opportunity.

“Guidant empowers cemetery operators to grow their business in a digital-first world while delivering the transparency and convenience today’s consumers expect,” said Owens. “We believed this solution had to protect cemeteries’ control – created by people who understand the unique needs of cemetery operators and the families they serve.”



# The Face of Memorialization

**Melanie Turner**  
*President*

**Kyber Columbarium  
and Construction**

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<http://www.kybercc.com>

I was born into the bereavement industry as part of a second-generation family business specializing in burial vaults. My husband and I purchased the business in 2006 to become third-generation bereavement sector suppliers. With a combined 50 years of industry experience, I decided to take the leap and open Kyber Columbarium in 2020. Over the years, I've learned that when you provide quality products and truly listen to customers, innovation follows. While working with glass front and indoor columbarium units, I began thinking about how we could create a more personalized tribute.

That vision inspired Kyber's newest offering: fully customized back panels designed to showcase personal photos and tell a loved one's story within the niche. With the creativity and support of graphic designers Kelsey Meloche and Nicolette Carew, we proudly brought this concept to life in-house, creating a meaningful and lasting way for families to celebrate the lives and memories of their loved ones.



# The Face of **Construction and Project Development**

## **Tim Kolasa**

*Chief Operating Officer*

### **Merendino Cemetery Care**

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After more than 35 years in the cemetery profession, Tim Kolasa has worked in every area of cemetery operations – from groundskeeper to Cemetery Director for two cemeteries in Reading, Pennsylvania, and now COO of Merendino Cemetery Care. His years of hands-on experience gives him a strong understanding of the planning, construction, and property development challenges cemetery leaders face as they respond to the changing needs of today's families.

“Maintaining beautiful grounds will always be essential, but the future of many cemeteries will depend on developing meaningful property memorialization options that families appreciate now and for generations to come.”

Many cemetery executives have a vision on what they want to build but are unsure how to move forward. “That’s where our experience makes a difference. By combining my cemetery management background with Gino and Angelo’s 40+ years of construction and facilities expertise, we help clients see unique opportunities that solve their challenges and allow them to plan confidently for the future.”

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# The Face of Memorial Portrait Innovation

**Scott Neal**  
*General Manager*

**Paradise Pictures,  
LLC**

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For more than 25 years, Scott Neal, General Manager of Paradise Pictures, has helped shape the standards now common throughout the memorial portrait industry.

Paradise Pictures introduced the industry's first steel-cored porcelain memorial portrait in 1991, providing a more durable alternative to traditional materials used in cemeteries, crypts, and niches. The company also helped lead the transition from hand-painted portraits to photographic-quality digital imaging with dramatically improved turnaround times and consistency.

Under Scott's leadership, Paradise continued advancing customer-focused innovations including online ordering and proofing, real-time order tracking, anticipated ship date visibility, custom shapes and sizes, transparent pricing, and unconditional replacement guarantees.

Many of these ideas were initially uncommon in the industry but are now widely adopted. Scott has always believed that innovation at Paradise Pictures should serve one purpose: helping cemeteries create a more dependable, personal and meaningful memorialization experience.



# The Face of Future Grass Technology

**Jackson Madnick**  
*President & CEO*

**Pearl's Premium Ultra Low  
Maintenance Lawn Seed**

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Jackson Madnick is an environmental scientist, educator, and lawn care expert, inventor of Pearl's Premium Ultra Low Maintenance Lawn Seed, now in over 600,000 lawns and 72 cemeteries and 46 funeral homes in all soils and climates. An award-winning, non-GMO, U.S. patented, sustainable grass seed mixture that is People, Pet & Planet Friendly™ for homes, cemeteries, and universities, and most applications to save dramatic time, money, water, and health.

It grows so slow, it needs mowing and weed whacking only once a month rather than weekly. Pearl's Premium reduces 75% of lawn watering and eliminates the need for toxic lawn chemicals, to protect children, animals, and drinking water. With more surface area above the soil and 8-foot roots, it sequesters carbon at 12x that of ordinary shallow-root grass to help protect the environment, lessen climate change, and lessen extreme weather. Winner of 18 national and international awards, Jackson's past environmental work has been commended by two White Houses, The National League of Cities, Vice President Al Gore, astronaut and Senator John Glenn, and the United Nations. Call for a deep discount – 508-653-0800.

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# The Face of Perpetual Care Funds

## **Hayden Burrus**

*FCAS, MAAA*

*President and Principal Actuary*

## **PerpetualCareAdequacy.com**

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25 years ago, Hayden Burrus began studying perpetual care funds and funding issues. He first shared his knowledge through a three-part research series in International Cemetery and Funeral Management magazine in 2001. Hayden is the most recognized expert in cemetery perpetual care funds. An independent analysis from PerpetualCareAdequacy.com will give management support for its long-term plans for the perpetual care fund. For most cemeteries, the time to perform a perpetual care adequacy analysis is now. Hayden builds a customized perpetual care fund balance sheet simulation model for each client. He uses that model to simulate each client's perpetual care fund balance sheet 100 years in the future under thousands of different economic, business, and investment environments. This simulation model allows him to determine the probability that the perpetual care fund will still be solvent 100 years in the future. There are no other firms that can determine the probability that a perpetual care fund's business plan will be successful in the very long term.



# The Face of Technology

**Michael Andersen**  
*President and Founder*  
**Tombstone Jack Inc.**

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Michael Andersen, founder and president, believes cemetery care is grief care, a labor of love that restores dignity, preserves memory, and strengthens community character one precious grave at a time.

Restoring my great-grandparents' monument became a mission to help cemeteries and organizations restore 1M+ neglected monuments since 2011.

The Tombstone Jack Transformation System™ provides tools, training, and recognition for ongoing cemetery care — because cemetery care is grief care — improving communities one precious grave at a time.

Many recover their investment within days while transforming neglect into stewardship and stronger community character.

“Show me your cemetery and I will tell you the character of your community.”

— Benjamin Franklin

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