



Education

By Patti Martin Bartsche

2018 to **Ones** Watch

Ready to Make a Difference

It was in 2012 that American Funeral Director first reached out to mortuary directors and instructors throughout the country and asked them to nominate their best students to be featured in our “Ones to Watch,” which recognizes students who more than make the grade in school, in their jobs and in their communities.

In the years since, we’ve had the privilege of profiling individuals who we expect will make their mark on funeral service. This year is no exception.

Meet eight students who are poised to make an impact on the funeral profession. We’re keeping an eye on them – and so should you.

Christopher “Topher” Crosby

Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science

Christopher “Topher” Crosby arrived on the campus of Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science in the fall of 2017 full of enthusiasm. That enthusiasm has not waned; rather, Crosby has grown more passionate about the profession and the opportunities awaiting him after his December graduation, faculty members say.

“Topher has already secured his apprenticeship after seizing interview opportunities with several employers,” according to the nomination letter signed by faculty members, including CCMS President Jack E. Lechtner Jr. “He’s made it a practice to meet as many funeral service professionals as possible, understanding that there is something to learn from all the encounters.”

Faculty members describe Crosby as a conscientious student with nearly perfect attendance and an excellent academic record. He regularly participates in class discussions and initiates conversations outside of the classroom, revealing a genuine interest in death-care topics.

“His commitment to this profession seems to be unwavering. Topher believes that by genuinely listening to families in his care, he can truly meet their needs – even if those needs are met by less traditional options,” the nomination letter said. “For him, funeral service is a true calling, and we have no doubt that Topher will minister to the bereaved as if caring for his own family.”

Crosby’s decision to become a funeral director was, he says, a direct result of his previous career.

“I was working with Life Connection of Ohio, teaching about organ, eye and tissue donation,” Crosby explained. “Being on that end of death care sparked my interest to look into other careers related to death care,” the 26-year-old explained. “Knowing what families went through, I felt that I was being called to funeral service.”

Crosby was 11 when his brother died, and in recent years, experienced



the deaths of his grandparents, a beloved aunt and a high school friend. Each death, he said, left an indelible mark.

As a funeral director, Crosby believes that his experiences will help him better relate to families. “It may not be the same circumstances, but I know from experience what it’s like to lose someone you love,” he said. “Death has really matured me, and I think when I can talk about my experiences, it makes people a little more comfortable, because they understand that I am speaking from knowledge.”

Highly motivated by nature, Crosby has been able to successfully balance his academic work, employment at Dalbert, Woodruff & Isenogle Funeral Home in Cincinnati, and leadership obligations as vice president of his graduating class.

Having had the opportunity to work at an area funeral home while pursuing his bachelor’s degree in mortuary science, has given him a greater appreciation for his career choice.

The opportunity to be a student intern has given Crosby a new perspective. “It’s been very eye opening about how much there is to learn about death care,” he said. “I think a lot of people assume that when they see their loved one that it just happens. But that person has been embalmed, dressed and placed in the casket in very particular ways ... and that’s what I’m learning – the ins and outs of making the decedent look his or her best for loved ones.”

CCMS faculty also note that Crosby is progressive in his thinking when it comes to meeting the needs of families, and he has genuine interest in green burials, home funerals and other options.

For example, Crosby loves the idea of green burials and being able to return the body back to earth. “I believe that I, myself have taken so much, in the end I just want to give back ... and that’s an option that should be offered and discussed with families,” he said.

Crosby, who will be starting his career as an apprentice at Cromes-Edwards Funeral Home & Crematory in Sidney, Ohio, in January, believes that death needs to be an experience ... that families should be offered the opportunity to participate in the preparation and dressing of their loved one. “This is where we need to be headed,” Crosby said. “Let’s go back 150 years and get rid of the idea that death is scary. Let’s instead find ways to help people work with their deceased loved ones instead of on their deceased loved one. It’s a big difference.”