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Funeral Service Trailblazer Katey Houston Named 2025 NFDA Inspiration Award Winner

Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) is proud to announce that Katey Houston of Return Home in Auburn, Washington, has been selected as the recipient of the [2025 NFDA Inspiration Award](#). Sponsored by National Guardian Life Insurance Company (NGL), this prestigious award honors an exceptional woman who has made significant contributions to the funeral service profession and beyond. Houston will be presented with the award during the [NFDA Professional Women's Conference](#), taking place May 15-18, 2025, in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico.

With a career defined by innovation, compassion and leadership, Houston has been instrumental in shaping the evolving landscape of funeral service. As a funeral director and care team manager at Return Home, she has played a key role in advancing Natural Organic Reduction (NOR) – a sustainable end-of-life option that transforms human remains into nutrient-rich soil. Through her dedication to educating families, mentoring professionals and advocating for meaningful memorialization, she has set a remarkable example for her peers.

“Katey Houston embodies the very essence of this award,” said NFDA CEO Christine Pepper, MBA, CAE. “Her passion, leadership and commitment to serving families with care and dignity are unparalleled. She is also a driving force in educating both funeral professionals and consumers about a greener way to say goodbye. Katey’s work is shaping the future of funeral service, and we are proud to honor her contributions.”

Houston’s peers and colleagues have praised her integrity, leadership and vision. One letter of support noted, “Katey embodies the very essence of inspiration in the field of funeral service, pioneering innovative practices, fostering global education on death care and serving as a compassionate mentor to colleagues and grieving families alike. Her remarkable contributions and dedication redefine what it means to provide true care to grieving individuals and families.”

Another supporter wrote, “Words fail me in truly expressing all that Katey has done and accomplished during her career in funeral service, but I have seen firsthand the transformational effect she has had. Her leadership, creativity and passion have not only left an indelible mark on everyone affiliated with Return Home but also with client families and funeral professionals throughout our state and on a national level. I have worked with hundreds of funeral professionals throughout my 39-year career in our sacred profession, but there is no one that is more deserving of this recognition than Katey Houston.”

Emphasizing the significance of Houston’s achievements, Jennifer Kaset, Vice President, Sales and Business Development at NGL, said, “Katey’s dedication to supporting others during their most difficult time has transformed the way funeral services are provided and inspired a legacy of care, respect and innovative progress. This well-deserved award is a testament to her tireless commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those she serves. NGL is honored to sponsor the NFDA Inspiration Award and recognize all the inspiring women in the funeral profession.”

About Katey Houston

Katey Houston is a licensed funeral director and embalmer who has devoted her career to transforming the way families experience end-of-life care. Currently serving as funeral director and care team manager at Return Home, she has been instrumental in promoting natural and sustainable disposition methods while ensuring that grieving families receive compassionate and personalized support.

Houston's journey into funeral service was fueled by a deep desire to support grieving families with both compassion and education. She has been recognized for her ability to blend traditional funeral practices with innovative approaches that align with modern values.

Beyond her daily work, Houston is a passionate advocate for funeral service education and mentorship. She actively supports the professional development of emerging funeral directors, sharing her knowledge and experiences to help shape the future of the industry. Her efforts extend to community outreach, where she works to increase awareness about alternative disposition methods and the value of personalization in end-of-life rituals.

Throughout her career, Houston has been known for her unwavering dedication to the profession and her ability to inspire others. Whether she is guiding a grieving family through their most difficult moments or mentoring the next generation of funeral service professionals, her impact is profound and far-reaching.

About the Inspiration Award

The NFDA Inspiration Award was established to recognize women who take the initiative to mentor, lead, and inspire their colleagues. Honorees are distinguished by their commitment to professional excellence and their significant contributions to funeral service at the local, state, national or international level.

The 2025 winner was selected by a distinguished panel of judges:

- Christopher Costello, Mothe Funeral Homes Inc., New Orleans, Louisiana
- Tawanna Johnson, Saunders Funeral Home, Jacksonville, North Carolina
- David Bryant, Bryant Funeral Homes & Crematory, Berlin, New Hampshire
- Melissa Cyfers, West Virginia Funeral Directors and Crematory Operators Association, Charleston, West Virginia
- Jolena Grande, Cypress College - Mortuary Science Department, Cypress, California
- Virginia "Jenni" Bryant, Smith Funeral & Cremation Service, Maryville, Tennessee
- Jasmine Berrios, Hollywood Forever Funeral Home, Los Angeles, California
- Deirdra Flavin, National Alliance for Children's Grief, Lubbock, Texas

As more women take on leadership roles in funeral service, the NFDA Inspiration Award continues to highlight those who are shaping the profession's future through mentorship, education and innovation.

NFDA congratulates Katey Houston on this well-deserved recognition and looks forward to celebrating her achievements at the 2025 NFDA Professional Women's Conference.

For more information about the NFDA Inspiration Award, visit [NFDA.org/InspirationAward](https://www.nfda.org/InspirationAward).

About NFDA

NFDA is the world's leading and largest funeral service association, serving 20,000 individual members who represent nearly 11,000 funeral homes in the United States and 49 countries around the world. NFDA is the trusted leader, beacon for ethics and the strongest advocate for the profession. NFDA is the association of choice because it offers funeral professionals comprehensive

educational resources, tools to manage successful businesses, guidance to become pillars in their communities and the expertise to foster future generations of funeral professionals. NFDA is headquartered in Brookfield, Wis., and has an office in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit NFDA.org.

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