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Trailblazers in Funeral Service: Meet the 2025 NFDA Innovation Award Finalists

Brookfield, Wis. – The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) proudly announces the finalists for the prestigious 2025 NFDA Innovation Award: Afterword, Healing Path Cemetery and Passare. These groundbreaking products and services exemplify forward-thinking solutions that are shaping the future of funeral service. The winner will be revealed on October 27 during the Opening General Session of the 2025 NFDA International Convention & Expo in Chicago, Illinois. The Innovation Award is sponsored by ASD – Answering Service for Directors.

Since its inception in 2009, the NFDA Innovation Award has recognized funeral service suppliers and vendors whose creativity, ingenuity and excellence drive meaningful change in the profession. This year's finalists continue that tradition, offering practical, compassionate and tech-enabled solutions that enhance both the funeral professional and family experience.

The finalists for the 2025 NFDA Innovation Award (in alphabetical order) are:

Afterword – Grace, The First AI Assistant for Funeral Homes
Grace is the first AI assistant purpose-built for funeral professionals, designed to ease the administrative burden and allow directors to focus on caring for families. Integrated within Afterword's software platform, Grace automates routine tasks such as building case files, sending reminders and managing family communications. From converting a photo of a handwritten worksheet into a complete digital case file, to generating personalized follow-up emails, task lists and memorial date reminders, Grace works behind the scenes to ensure a seamless experience for both staff and families. What sets Grace apart is her ability to adapt to each funeral home's unique processes, having been trained directly from the workflows of real directors. She's not a generic chatbot; she's a customized, intuitive assistant who brings compassion, consistency and efficiency to every case.

Healing Path Cemetery, a Grief-Focused Engagement System for Cemeteries
Healing Path Cemetery is an innovative, multi-dimensional solution helping cemeteries remain relevant in a changing cultural landscape. With permanent memorialization on the decline, Healing Path Cemetery reconnects local families to cemeteries by blending grief support, interactive rituals and lead generation. The system includes on-site healing stations designed around nine evidence-based grief rituals; a cemetery-branded mobile app offering videos, virtual rituals like "Letters to Heaven" and digital candle lighting; and a library of coordinated social media content that promotes healing and education. With features like narrated blessings from Peabody Award-winner Bill Kurtis and seamless integration of grief psychology with cemetery marketing, Healing Path is a pioneering platform that transforms cemeteries into places of ongoing remembrance, relevance and emotional connection.

Passare – AI Scanner
Passare's AI Scanner revolutionizes the way funeral professionals handle handwritten documents by eliminating the need for manual data entry. This powerful, mobile-first tool uses advanced handwriting recognition technology to scan handwritten vitals forms and automatically populate the corresponding digital fields in Passare's case management system. Designed to accommodate directors who prefer pen and paper during family meetings, the feature reduces the risk of transcription errors and saves valuable time. Built and trained using hundreds of handwriting samples, the scanner delivers high accuracy and requires no training — just scan, sync and send. As the first of its kind in funeral service, the AI Scanner sets a new standard for

efficiency and innovation, enabling funeral professionals to spend less time on paperwork and more time supporting families.

Funeral service suppliers were invited to submit products or services that became commercially available on or after January 1, 2024, for consideration in this year's competition. A distinguished panel of judges evaluated each submission on originality, quality and design, ultimately selecting the finalists that exemplify innovation and impact in funeral service.

Finalists, along with more than 20 additional entrants, will be showcased in the Expo Hall during the 2025 NFDA International Convention & Expo, taking place October 26–29 in Chicago. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore these trailblazing products and meet the companies behind them. More information is available at NFDA.org/InnovationAwards and NFDA.org/Convention, respectively.

NFDA thanks ASD – Answering Service for Directors for its continued support of the Innovation Award. The association also extends its appreciation to the 2025 Innovation Award judges:

- Matthew Bailey, Bailey Family Funeral Homes, Wallingford, Connecticut
- Christopher Costello, Mothe Funeral Homes, New Orleans, Louisiana
- David Hernandez, Jersey Memorial Group, Old Bridge, New Jersey
- Leili McMurrough, Worsham College of Mortuary Science, Libertyville, Illinois
- Michael Burns, Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Timothy McLoone, William R. May Funeral Home Inc., New Hope, Pennsylvania
- Welton Hong, Ring Ring Marketing, Las Vegas, Nevada

NFDA is the world's leading and largest funeral service association representing 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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