

10 QUEST

Evelyn Cornwell, Calvary Funeral Home manager

Evelyn Cornwell may not have fully known she'd end up in the death care industry at the time, but singing at funeral Masses in grade school gave her the idea.

"If there was a funeral that was to take place at our parish's church, the children had to go to Mass and sing for whoever passed away," Cornwell said. "I'd watch the funeral directors push the casket up to the front of the church and just leave and come back after the service. There was an intrigue there."

She started as an apprentice embalmer at Forest Lawn in Hollywood Hills, Calif., in 1981 and has been in the industry ever since.

Cornwell is the original manager of Calvary Mortuary, which opened in 1999 as the first Catholic Mortuaries funeral home built as part of the Company's relationship with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Cornwell started working as facility manager even before the building was constructed.

"My job was to set up Calvary so that when the doors opened we'd be ready to go," she said. "But if a death occurred and they had a preneed contract already (with us),

it was my job to make the services happen."

One example of "making do" had Cornwell arranging a service at an Elks Lodge in a different city for a family that wanted a two-day vigil service.

Cornwell, who lives in Altadena, Calif., has been married to her husband, Chris, for 26 years and has two daughters — Marina, 24, and Cozy, 21.

What aspect of your job is most rewarding?

Most importantly, the people I work with and the families we serve. I also appreciate feeling like I've done the best I can every day.

Which element of CARING do you feel you excel at the most?

Respect. I feel everyone who walks through the door ... deserves respect and I feel it's important we make them feel as though we're treating their loved ones as our own. It seems as though society is spiraling downward without acknowledging others, and I like that the Company has included that in our Company standards.

What five things are necessary to do your job well?

1. You have to start and end each day with energy. 2. Patience. 3. Be empathetic and never lose sight of why you are here. 4. Have a good sense of humor in a subtle way. 5. Hope.

How do you best overcome challenges?

I just meet them head on – at work and in life. You can't allow something that could possibly be a hurdle to stifle what has to occur; otherwise it perpetuates and you lose control of the situation.

What's on your bucket list?

I would love to go camping across the United States, probably over three months, in a camper and stay in some of the best national parks.

Describe a day in your life using only one word.

Fast-paced.

If you could spend a day in another position with the Company, which position would it be?

I haven't embalmed in years, so I'd enjoy going back to that. Embalming is an almost thankless position, but the challenge embalmers face is amazing. There's such a rewarding feeling, and it's a feeling you share within yourself.

What advice would you give a new co-worker coming into the industry?

I'd encourage them to understand what they're getting into and embrace it because it will reflect who they are personally and professionally.

Who has had the greatest impact on your career?

My dad said to me when I was a teenager, "Whatever you do in life, love it."

Why Stewart?

I had decided to stop working and be a stay-at-home mom when Randy Stricklin, who was with Stewart at the time, asked me if I'd be interested in working with Catholic Mortuaries. It's been great to work with Stewart, and I've always been impressed with how they treat their employees. That feeling was reinforced when Hurricane Katrina hit and I saw what they did for the people who were affected.

