

# The Prep Room: A **+** or **-** in Your Funeral Home?

by Duncan Todd

*It can be said that when your preparation room is equal to the other rooms in your facility, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*

Photographs courtesy of Holloway Funeral Home, Salisbury, Maryland





**Y**ou and your funeral home have an image in the community. Often a result of several generations of funeral service, that image has been created from personal involvement with the community, the care provided by staff, the drive-by appeal of the facility and the building's interior spaces and amenities.

Historically, however, it was not common practice for funeral home owners to include the preparation room in the equation. In fact, the room was often hidden away, seldom mentioned and deliberately omitted from discussions with families. As a consequence, embalming rooms had the potential to be neglected, underfunded and somehow lost in the big picture.



*First and foremost, think of the health, well-being and safety of your staff. Pair that with a professionally designed workplace that meets OSHA standards and ergonomic considerations that put equipment, instruments and supplies at the ready. Tie it together with coordinated finishes for cabinets, countertops, walls, floors and lighting for a pleasing environment.*

This situation was consistent with the prevailing attitudes of the day, wherein the grieving family was largely distanced from the details of the embalming arts process. Families seldom asked or were offered the opportunity to view that area of the facility where their loved ones would receive final preparation before interment.

In some ways, these attitudes contributed to the tendency of owners to underestimate the value that a modern operat-

ing room can contribute to the business image and, consequently, the bottom line. One client commented that some funeral home owners kill the proverbial goose. "The preparation room," he said, "is where the money is."

Times, though, are changing. In the new norm, with more direct family involvement in the final arrangements, there is ample evidence that the image of the embalming room is coming into greater focus. Consider social media



and the comments posted on the various sites. Not to be overlooked in the public perception are the images of mortuary environments that appear on television's nightly crime shows.

We anticipate that the prep room's new place in the public consciousness will continue to expand given the projected rise in death rates associated with the aging baby boomer generation. Adult children are asking questions from a new and more informed perspective. They are looking at more providers and more options. They are walking more facilities, both physically and virtually.

When grief is overwhelming, families will often reach out to a third person for help with final decisions. I personally have played supporting roles on two occasions in 2011. For the family, having a third party asking the tough questions and getting complete answers can be helpful.

How does the preparation room in your funeral home measure up in the 21st century and how can it contribute to



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the overall reputation and success of your business?

The August 2011 issue of *The Director* featured articles dealing with the question of whether to build new or renovate. Whatever your decision, you will be seeking ideas on how best to grow your business, how best to gain return on investment and how best to make the embalming room a key part of your total image.

First and foremost, you'll be thinking of the health, well-being and safety of your staff. Pair that with a professionally designed workplace that meets OSHA standards and ergonomic considerations that put equipment, instruments and supplies at the ready. Tie it together with coordinated finishes for cabinets, countertops, walls, floors and lighting for a pleasing environment. A separate dressing room with soft lighting and comfortable furnishings in a non-sterile environment can create soothing surroundings.

**With more direct family involvement in the final arrangements, there is ample evidence that the image of the embalming room is coming into greater focus.**

To the question of whether your prep room is a plus or minus to your business, we might further ask:

- Does the prep room contribute to the overall image and success of your business?
- Where does your business stand relative to the prep room environment?
- Is showing your preparation and dressing rooms not only an option but indeed an asset in securing a family's trust?

The answer to this last question is becoming more of a determining factor in selection decisions today. Many funeral directors nationwide are ahead of the curve – planning, completing and occupying new prep rooms. For example, one client has said that he always includes his preparation room in tours. He is confi-

dent that when families see the attention given to the welfare of his employees, they have confidence in entrusting their loved ones into his care.

An added benefit of modernizing your facility is the ability to attract new talent. Studies show that more and more graduates of funeral service colleges enter the profession from outside the family structure. Many new graduates make comments such as, "The first thing I want is a state-of-the-art prep room. The rest will follow." The next generation of embalmers will work in and present to their com-

munity a prep room image far removed from that of past generations.

When the time is right, it will pay to make your preparation room a plus. If it already is, we – and the public – applaud you. ★

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*For more information, visit [www.duncanstuarttodd.com](http://www.duncanstuarttodd.com), email [info@duncanstuarttodd.com](mailto:info@duncanstuarttodd.com) or call 877-832-6898 (+1-720-583-1886).*



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