

ABFSE Holds 55th Annual Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC

American Board of Funeral Service Education President Karl Kann (Worsham College, Wheeling, IL) presided over the ABFSE Annual Meeting during the organization's 55th Annual Conference in Myrtle Beach, SC.

Piedmont Technical College, Greenwood, SC was the host school during the conference which ran from April 18-22, 2017. David Martin and Dedrick Gantt represented Piedmont Technical College throughout the conference.

Fifty of the 59 accredited programs of Funeral Service/Mortuary Science in the US attended the Annual Conference along with representatives of the three association members, National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association (NFDMA) and International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCFA).

ABFSE Committee on Accreditation (COA) reviewed specific accreditation activities of 14 programs along with assessment plans, graduation rates, NBE pass rates and job placement rates of all accredited programs. COA Chairperson Venus Riley Smith (Jefferson State Community College, Birmingham, AL) thanked Billie Watson Hughes (District of Columbia Funeral Director and NFDMA representative) for her six years of service to COA and welcomed Elois Saucer (NFDMA representative) as a newly elected member of the COA.

Enrollment and graduation statistics for 2016 were reviewed by the COA and the summary data will be shared with the programs and the public following the annual conference. Fifty-nine accredited schools and programs operated during 2016. Three programs plan to close by the end of 2017 and two new programs were admitted to Candidacy status. In 2016, 1638 graduated from accredited programs across the country and 2511 new students enrolled. Females were 63%+ of the graduates and less than 10% of all graduates had parents in funeral service.

Updated curriculum outlines for Ethics and Communication Skills were approved and plans were made to initiate review of the chemistry, merchandising and business law teaching outlines during summer 2017. ABFSE reviews teaching outlines on an annual basis with input from the association members.

The scholarship committee recommended 8 undergraduate awards and 1 graduate scholarship. Names of recipients will be reported on the ABFSE website upon confirmation with the recipients.

The program committee discussed plans for the 2018 annual conference in California while the Constitution and By-laws committee initiated discussion of adequate representation on all ABFSE Committees.

The annual conference opened with a review of the ABFSE Strategic Plan and also included meetings of the NBE Liaison Committee and COA Liaison Committee.

The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (ICFSEB) provided an update of their activities, NFDA presented their 'Arranger Training' program which is available to the schools. Each of the association members, NFDA, NFDMA and ICCFA, provided a summary of their education related activities.

Attendees participated in sessions for Best Practices for teaching, chemistry, ethics and merchandising, received a status report on the 6th edition of the *Embalming* textbook and were treated to a reception courtesy of Service Corporation International during which the results of the SCI scholarship program were presented.

Twenty-two exhibitors participated in a mini-trade show which included banking, answering services and grief related resources, embalming chemical and restorative art companies, providers of death care products, potential employers and scholarship providers, textbook providers, ID and cremation-oriented companies along with the association members.

During the business session, Cremation Association of North America (CANA) was accepted as a new association member of ABFSE. Orientation for new members was included in the conference agenda and Martha Thayer (Arapahoe Community College, Littleton, CO) led a mentoring session designed to connect new program directors with experienced colleagues.

On the final day of the Conference, 18 program representatives attended a Self Study workshop to review the requirements for writing an accreditation report. At least every 7 years, every program undergoes a comprehensive review of its activities. The review is conducted by a team consisting of two educators and one funeral service practitioner.

Formally established in 1962, ABFSE grew out of the efforts of NFDA, ICFSEB and the associations of funeral service schools and colleges. Today, ABFSE is recognized by the US Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the accrediting agency for the colleges and universities teaching funeral service/mortuary science education in the US. ABFSE strives to cooperate with all groups and agencies having an interest in the advancement of the principles and standards of funeral service education.

ABFSE meets annually in April. A Directory of accredited programs is available at www.abfse.org.