



Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes

Serving Downeast Maine Since 1984

Bragdon-Kelley's new funeral home in Machias was designed to impart a more welcoming and natural atmosphere for grieving families. Bragdon-Kelley has encouraged the local community to make use of the conference room and chapel for meetings at no charge.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BRAGDON-KELLEY



Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes: Dignity, Peace and Service for 25 Years

The Bragdon-Kelley story begins in 1984, when the late Willard M. Kelley Jr. of Stouffville purchased the well-established Warren Funeral Home in Millbridge from the previous owner, Roland "Bud" Warren.

The Warren Funeral Home had been around since 1903. Its acquisition by Willard Kelley Jr., a first-generation funeral director, participated in a trend away from inherited ownership that would appear throughout the funeral industry over the next few decades.

It also was the start of one of the most prominent funeral establishments in Downeast Maine. Shortly after purchasing Warren Funeral Home, Willard began a working relationship with Joseph Bragdon, owner of Bragdon Funeral

Home Inc. of Ellsworth and Stouffville.

In 1986, Willard and Joe became partners, and Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes Inc. was born. In 1991, Joe sold his share of the business, including Bragdon Monuments, to Willard, making him the sole proprietor of the company with a growing collection of funeral chapels located in Stouffville, Ellsworth, Millbridge and Harrison. That sale included the monument business, Bragdon-Kelley Monuments. Joe Bragdon remained on staff as an integral part of the management team and an active funeral director until his untimely death in 1994.

In 1993, Willard purchased Campbell Funeral Home of Cherryfield, and the "Camp-

bell" name was added to the growing family of funeral homes, making the venture Bragdon-Kelley-Campbell, the name under which the business operated until 2009, when it went back to Bragdon-Kelley. Upon the purchase of his Cherryfield business, the late Douglas Campbell (1925-2007), joined the staff as a part-time funeral director and remained until December of 2005, when he retired.

Finally, the Gardner-Hill Funeral Home was purchased by Willard in 2001 and brought under the umbrella of Bragdon-Kelley-Campbell Funeral Homes, an entity whose territory now spans the 130 miles from Stouffville to eastern parts of Washington County beyond East Machias.

October 2004 brought to a close an era of rapid growth and expansion with the devastating and tragic death of the man who had a vision for funeral service in Downeast Maine, Willard M. Kelley Jr. He died October 11, 2004, after battling leukemia for one and a half years. At the age of 42, he had committed more than two decades to funeral service and more than half his life to a variety of public service groups.

Today, the leadership and staff at Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes and Bragdon-Kelley Monuments charts a new course while being ever vigilant to uphold the principles of professional, courteous and respectful service that were instilled by their dedicated leader.

"It's Their Service, Not Ours"

Wakes, funerals and memorial services can be traditional affairs, or they can be a more contemporary celebration of the deceased's life, from a unique setting for the service, to the music played, to the method of burial.

Cindy Scally, general manager of Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes in Ellsworth, Stouffville, Millbridge and Machias, said her funeral directors are open to holding services anywhere and any way anyone wants so long as it is legal and safe.



Cindy Scally, general manager of Bragdon-Kelley Funeral Homes

In fact, one of her funeral directors arranged a memorial service in a hockey rink before leaving Bragdon-Kelley. The crowd was large and the deceased was young and loved hockey.

"We want the family to love it their way," said Scally. "It's their service, not ours. The whole purpose is to remember and celebrate the existence of the person."

Although the trend has not fully blossomed in Maine, services in other parts of the country have included using a covered wagon instead of a hearse with a bander following the service.

In Massachusetts, an ice cream vendor's funeral procession was led by his ice cream truck and Popicles were handed out at the cemetery.

One funeral home in St. Louis has themed viewing rooms, among them "Big Momma's Kitchen" with fried chicken on the stove.

A Canadian funeral home offers free coffee at a drive-through window at the home, Scally said that in Maine it

is now more common for services to be held in locations other than a church, such as at the funeral home itself, a community building, or at someone's home.

And she said people today tend to bury their loved ones in less formal clothing.

"If someone never wore a suit our suggestion is not to go out and buy a suit," she said. "One man always wore flannel shirts. He was dressed in one and his whole family wore flannel shirts at the service."

It also is now customary for families to have a slide show or video showing photos of the person with his or her family and friends over the years. The family can pre-

pare the video, or the funeral home can assist.

Another growing trend is for families to bring in items that define something the deceased was passionate about, such as fishing rods, a musical instrument or sports.

The family of Clair Whitten of Winter Harbor, who passed away recently, had the stool he sat in every day at Chase's restaurant on display at his memorial service.

And although Bragdon-Kelley has not yet been asked to conduct a "green" funeral with a biodegradable coffin, Scally said they would be willing to look into it.

She said the deceased sometimes have pre-arranged for a unique burial arrange-

ment. One man, for instance, wanted to be buried with his Harley-Davidson.

"The hole was dug deeper and the motorcycle went under the vault," she said.

Bragdon-Kelley breaks the mold in other ways as well. The 22 full-time employees and 12 part-time employees are overseen by a general manager — Scally — not a funeral director, which is the more typical arrangement.

The three funeral directors include two women — Wendy Keating-Seekins and Denise Merrill — in addition to Ben Hausman. And they are all relatively young.

"Our staff is all 45 and under, which is unique in the industry," said Scally.

She prides herself on staying current. Bragdon-Kelley is now on the social networking site Facebook and has an informative Web site, including prices for everything and a long list of questions families might have, such as: What is the purpose of embalming? What is the mark on the coffin? What does one do if someone dies in the middle of the night or on the weekend?

And when Scally designed the new Bragdon-Kelley home in Machias she tried to do everything the opposite from the traditional funeral home. The ceilings are higher, there are more windows, and there is a coffee bar.

As to her arrangements for her own funeral, Scally has not yet set anything down in writing, but she has often said, "I want to be wrapped in a sheet and dropped in a hole. I'm a simple person."

— *Journalist Waver*

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