

BEYOND

Issue 1 - June 2021

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario magazine

p4 | The Underground Railroad's legacy in Ontario's cemeteries

p14 | Green burials are growing in popularity



p11 | How the BAO's stringent COVID-19 directives are protecting Ontarians

Issue 1 – June 2021

About Beyond

Beyond is an all-digital, family-focused magazine providing useful and interesting stories about the bereavement care industry and why it matters to you.

It is the magazine of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario, a government delegated administrative authority focused on protecting and informing families. TheBAO.ca
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Providing consumer protection to grieving families

By Carey Smith, CEO/Registrar, BAO

How can grieving families be protected from upselling of services or products and over-spending at a vulnerable time?

The answer is through consumer education, enforcement of regulations, and by supporting caring professionals in the bereavement industry.

Welcome to Beyond, a quarterly magazine for families.

This is a space for useful advice, information, and stories about how the actions of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) protect and educate you in times of grief.

Afterall, we're here for you.

That isn't just a marketing line. It's the reason we exist.

As a provincial government delegated authority, the BAO was created in 2016 to protect and inform consumers about the bereavement sector, which we regulate.

On these pages, you'll learn valuable information for your family, such as planning or pre-planning funeral services.



Smith visits Palermo Cemetery, Town of Oakville.

You'll also read about the actions we take to protect consumers, including suspending or revoking licences of funeral service operations and individual licensees across the province to make sure illegal or unfair business practices are stopped.

These actions also send a message that the BAO takes consumer protection seriously.

Caring professionals

The actions can make it seem we're always bearing down on a bereavement business for wrongdoing.

In fact, suspensions and licence revocations represent less than one per cent of the thousands of caring and trustworthy licensed professionals and businesses that we oversee.

Families have certainly experienced exemplary caring in funeral-related services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since restrictions went into place in mid-March 2020, we've seen bereavement professionals across Ontario overwhelmingly and strictly adhere to the tough safety measures. They have done so consistently for the health of grieving people and bereavement sector staff, all the while knowing this meant decreased incomes for themselves.

Respecting and remembering those buried in Canada's first Black cemeteries

Canadian Black history has a distinct, yet overlooked, past when it comes to burial grounds in Ontario.

The Underground Railroad, a nineteenth-century secret network that more than 30,000 Black Americans used to escape slavery and find refuge in Canada, has an inimitable connection to multiple cemeteries across the province.

For Janie Cooper-Wilson, Wasaga Beach director of the Ontario Historical Society, these cemeteries are archives that represent her family history.

"I found more information here by researching the people resting for eternity in these burial grounds," says Cooper-Wilson, a direct



Discovering the truth about these burial grounds, such as the Streets-Barnes cemetery, is imperative

- Ontario Historical Society's Janie Cooper-Wilson

descendant of those buried in cemeteries of the Underground Railroad. "I've learned more from them than I've ever learned from an actual history book. It all comes together when you take a deeper look."

Licensing makes the cemeteries official

Bereavement Authority of Ontario inspector Andrew Reynolds



explains that one site first came to the attention of the regulator through a local resident who found a cemetery with potential historical significance in Haldimand County, a municipality on the Niagara

“Small cemeteries were dotted all over Ontario, some of which were hidden. But we must go through the same process in licensing them as we would with any of the other 5,300 cemeteries across the province.”



Ontario Historical Society's Janie Cooper-Wilson at the Streets-Barnes cemetery

Peninsula. The authority is there to determine ownership in order to license the cemetery ensuring that it will be maintained for current and future generations.

It is crucial, Reynolds says, to make sure all regulations are followed to ensure a safe cemetery site and respect for the deceased.

The Streets-Barnes cemetery located in Canfield, a small community in Haldimand County, was one such burial ground of Black individuals fleeing slavery using the Underground Railroad. Stewart Memorial Church Administrator, Aileen Duncan, holds a special connection to the cemetery as her great-great-grandparents were laid to rest there.

Duncan says that while it's critical to know about Canada's historic exploits, it's also vital to know why Black history was seldom present in mainstream discourse. Discovering the truth about these burial grounds, such as the Streets-Barnes cemetery, is imperative she says, so that all descendants, and their families, can find the answers they're seeking.

Cemeteries tell history

"We want to know the truth," Duncan says. "The more digging we do, the more we want our history told, so that our kids, grandchildren, and great grandchildren can learn more about their history, instead of having them left in the dark and asking themselves why it isn't being taught in school."

Many of these hidden burial grounds were rarely commemorated and often left derelict, says Paul Racher, principal of Archaeological Research Associates Principal. However, he says nuanced discussions can now be had about Canada's role in their treatment.

"We're rapidly entering a time where we can be critical about the role Canada played in its treatment of freedom seekers," Racher says. "The descendants of this community are encouraging all of us to explore this side of our shared history."

Cooper-Wilson says their lives can't be forgotten, and every move must be made to ensure these cemeteries are preserved.

Her father, whose paternal great-grandfather passed down personal letters to be inherited, taught her to always honour those who came before.

"Everything is preordained," Cooper-Wilson says. "My dad used to say, 'If you honour our ancestors, they'll send you blessings.'"

Acting as a mentor to younger generations, Cooper-Wilson says it's essential to educate Canadians on how systemic racism affected cemeteries connected to a such a pivotal, historical event. All sites, no matter where situated, are sanctified ground deserving of respect she says, as the departed have a remarkable saga to tell.

"Does their legacy stop the minute they go in the ground? They were put here for a reason, and their lives have to be recognized for our society to move forward together."



Photo by MDR Public Affairs Ltd.



The BAO: protecting consumers' money and interests

Recent media coverage of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario provides an interesting snapshot of its consumer protection and educational actions for grieving families.

Where can I scatter dad's ashes?

If your mom, dad, or other loved one asked you to scatter their ashes in a river or along a favourite hiking trail, could you legally do it?

Yes. There are many legal ways to spread cremated ashes. To learn more, read pages 11, 12, and 14 of the BAO's free [Consumer Information Guide](#) available at your local funeral home, cemetery, crematorium or at TheBAO.ca. You could also listen to this April [radio interview with BAO CEO/Registrar Carey Smith](#) on [The Mike Farwell Show](#), 570 News Kitchener.

Closed for consumer protection

Earlier this spring, the BAO revoked the licenses of a funeral director and funeral homes in eastern Ontario for failing to:

- comply with their conditions of licensure;
- properly maintain embalming and holding rooms as required by law;
- comply with directives from public health and the BAO concerning COVID-19 safety restrictions.

The revocations closed the businesses preventing further infractions. [Toronto Star - April 14, 2021](#)

Funeral home suspended for breaking COVID-19 safety

The BAO suspended a funeral home in the Greater Toronto Area for allowing more than six times the number of people permitted at a funeral this winter during the pandemic. The funeral home was forced to close for business for two weeks for having more than 60 people attend a visitation when the maximum was 10. It was the first and only such suspension that has been needed during the pandemic.

[Global News - March 10, 2021](#)

Planned for capacity

The BAO developed an Expedited Death Response plan, with the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, to ensure there'd be no stockpiling of bodies during the pandemic — as occurred in Italy, Spain, the United States, and most recently in India. The BAO Directive required funeral transfer staff to pick up bodies quickly from hospitals and long-term care facilities.

[Standard Freeholder - Jan. 21, 2021](#)

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***Beyond* magazine is a publication of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO).**

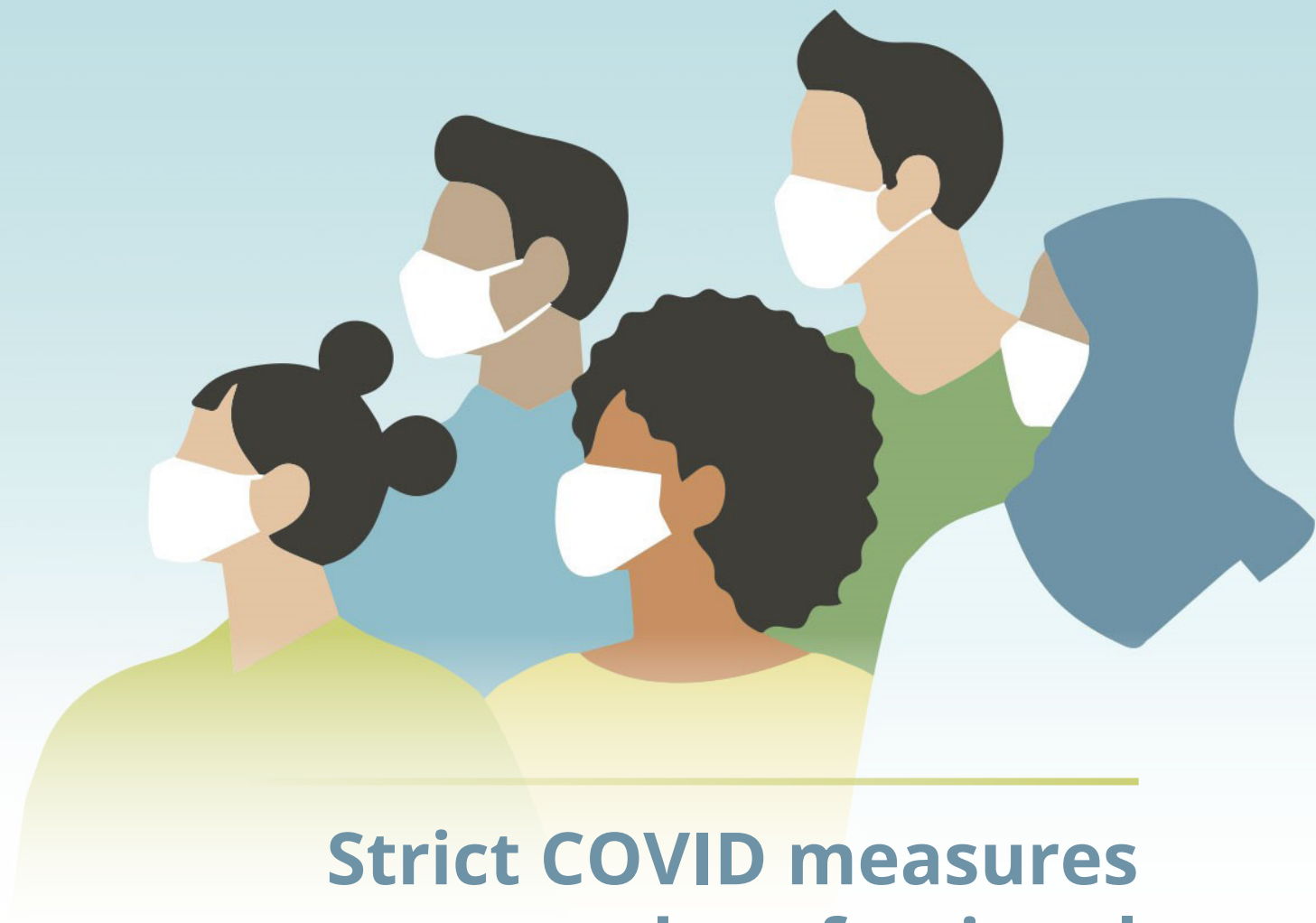
The BAO is a government delegated authority administering provisions of the *Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002 (FBCSA)* on behalf of the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. Responsible for protection of the public interest, the BAO regulates and supports licensed: funeral establishment operators, directors and preplanners; cemetery, crematorium and alternative disposition operators; transfer service operators; and bereavement sector sales representatives across Ontario. The BAO is wholly funded by licensee fees (not tax dollars).

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Authority of
Ontario



Strict COVID measures and professional compliance are preventing major outbreaks at Ontario funeral homes

The last 15 months have been hard on grieving families, funeral homes and the entire bereavement sector.

But that diligence by Ontario's licensed funeral homes, transfer

services, cemeteries, crematoriums and hydrolysis facilities has prevented major outbreaks among mourners and bereavement staff.

Such outbreaks can happen in Canada as well as anywhere.



In fact, Ontario has seen no super spreader COVID-19 outbreaks at funeral establishments.

People may recall the March 2020 Caul's Funeral Home service in St. John's, Newfoundland, that saw 143 COVID-19 cases and one death. It accounted for 75 per cent of the province's total cases at the time. The Caul's outbreak started with

one person attending the service who had COVID-19.

Being strict has made a difference since the start of the pandemic.

Nearly a year later in Ontario, when a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) funeral home allowed 60 people, more than six times the maximum number of guests permitted at a visitation, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) took immediate corrective action by imposing a two-week suspension of its licence to operate.

"It was no small matter," says Carey

Smith, CEO/registrar, BAO. “This incident shows we cannot let our guard down, even as the vaccine rolls out.”

Nevertheless, over the course of a year, it was the only time the BAO had to suspend operation of a funeral home for breaking COVID safety rules.

In fact, Ontario has seen no super spreader COVID-19 outbreaks at funeral establishments.

Credit to licensees

“That is absolutely to the credit of our licensees, the measures they have taken, and their adherence to the restrictions that have been put in place,” says Paul LeRoy, an inspector and acting manager at the BAO. “We’ve found a very high level of compliance from our licensees overall throughout the pandemic.”

Because of the intense emotional nature of funerals, where crying and close consoling often occur, the BAO introduced new restrictions in alignment with evolving Government of Ontario regulations and ensured implementation of the new safety measures at funeral services starting in March 2020.

In partnership with the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, the BAO developed COVID-safe

transfer procedures of deceased residents from long-term care facilities and deceased patients from hospitals. The procedures ensured that there were no funeral capacity issues and no stockpiling of bodies in Ontario, as occurred in other countries during the pandemic.

The authority has also kept families and professionals informed across multiple media platforms, including a central place to find everything about the pandemic in the bereavement sector – the [BAO’s COVID-19: Ready...together](#) web index.

The index has the latest pandemic directives, notices, safety posters and an FAQ answering frequently asked questions of families and professionals.





Green burials are an environmental option

Environmentalism and being in tune with the planet needn't end with your death.

Green burials offer people another way to consider in planning their final dispositions, different from more traditional practices.

But what is a green burial?

Green burials fit many descriptions. Generally, the basic definition is that they can consist of an unembalmed deceased human body, buried in a biodegradable

The BAO reviews and approves cemetery bylaws to ensure consumers aren't being misled and that they understand what a green burial may be.

*-BAO Deputy Registrar
Michael D'Mello*

casket, container or shroud, without a vault or grave liner.

In some cemeteries, there may be a designated section for green burials where monuments are not used, and the ground is covered with native species of plants such as wildflowers instead of grass. On such cemetery grounds the land may also be restored to its more natural state with gravesites identified by ground markers, rather than headstones.

Deputy Registrar of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) Michael D'Mello says green burials are allowed under the law and are seeing more interest from people each year. He says other aspects that may make a burial 'green' in the eyes of those interested may include:

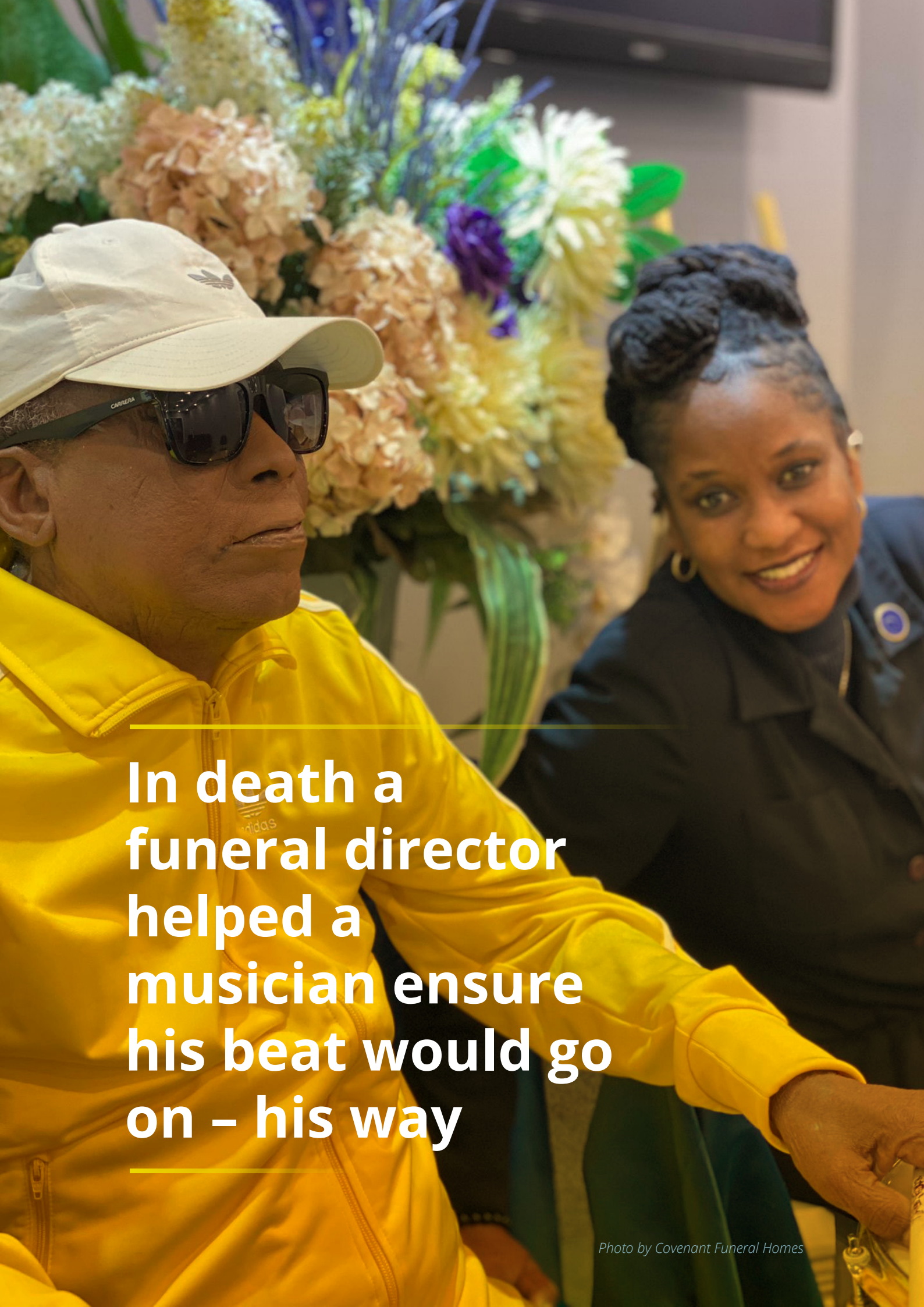
- The grave being dug by hand, as opposed to using equipment fueled by gasoline etc., and refilled by hand.
- The grave may be re-sodded or covered with indigenous vegetation, which will not require chemical pesticides or nutrition.
- The grave may be marked by a naturally occurring material, such as a rock with a name or number that is hand chiseled.

Given that it's a more recent practice in Ontario many cemeteries may not yet have a separate section for green burials.

D'Mello says the BAO reviews and approves cemetery bylaws to ensure consumers aren't being misled and that they understand what a green burial may be. He said the BAO makes sure consumers aren't being charged for green burials that don't meet the definition.

"The most important thing is the current legislation is very up to date," D'Mello says. "Green burials can easily comply with current legislation."

The BAO's free [Consumer Information Guide](#) includes a section on green burials. The guide is available on the BAO's website and at funeral homes and bereavement businesses.

A photograph featuring two individuals in the foreground. On the left, a man is shown in profile, wearing a white baseball cap, dark sunglasses, and a bright yellow zip-up jacket. He is looking towards the right. On the right, a woman with dark hair styled in a bun is smiling at the camera. She is wearing a dark blue uniform with a circular badge on the lapel. Behind them is a large, vibrant floral arrangement with white, yellow, and purple flowers. The background is slightly blurred, showing an indoor setting with a dark wall and a television screen.

**In death a
funeral director
helped a
musician ensure
his beat would go
on – his way**

Photo by Covenant Funeral Homes

Reflecting a person's life at their funeral can be done in creative, culturally attuned and personalized ways, as one Scarborough funeral director demonstrated recently.

Luann Jones, managing funeral director of Covenant Funeral Homes, paid homage to a client in a way that suited him.

When 68-year-old drummer Brentnol "Bonny Brent" McPherson died in April this year, Jones fulfilled his wishes to be propped up at his drum set for the visitation. The celebrated Guyanese-born musician, who was Canada's reggae drummer of the year in 1986, McPherson had made it clear he wanted to have the last beat.

"He was a really, really nice man," says Jones, a family friend of McPherson. "It was an honour to do that for him," says Jones, who was recently interviewed for a story in the Toronto Star.

Feedback about the artist's celebration of life received mixed reviews, but Jones remains undeterred. While culture is often expressed during life, it seems to stop at death, she explains, herself a Caribbean immigrant to Canada.

While culture is often expressed during life, it seems to stop at death

*- Luann Jones,
managing funeral director*

Preserving the culture of the deceased is important to Jones, who supports families seeking send-offs that remind them of their homeland

and cultures. "As long as it's within legal bounds [and] it's not offending anybody, we'll celebrate that person's life."

Jones, who has been in the industry for more than 25 years, is confident people will become more diverse in their approaches to funerals as the population

ages. Since the story was published by several news organizations, funeral directors from other jurisdictions, some as far away as Kenya, have contacted her seeking input and advice.

"At the end of the day, it's about the families and their wishes to remember their loved one in the way they want the person remembered. Our role is to make it happen."



Photo by Covenant Funeral Homes Inc.

Protecting your prepaid funeral money through the compensation fund

Planning can reduce stress in a time of grief.

Did you know that funeral services can be prearranged and prepaid?

Many people plan and prepay for funeral services so they don't have to when the time comes. For families seeking that peace of mind for themselves or their loved ones prior to a death, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario's Prepaid Funeral Service Compensation Fund has their backs.

The fund compensates a person who has prepaid for funeral services, but consequently suffered a financial loss due to a failure on the part of licensed professionals, who are licensed by the BAO.

When funeral services in Ontario

are prepaid a contract is created with the money being secured. Licensed funeral establishments are legally obligated to choose safe investments for these prepaid trust funds. "Such circumstances are rare, but the law and the BAO are here to make sure consumers are protected, especially in a time of grief," says Carey Smith, CEO/Registrar of the BAO.

Consumers are entitled to ask their licensed provider at least once a year where and how the funds are being invested, in addition to how much money is in the applicable trust account.

Making funeral arrangements needn't be a stressful experience. Under Ontario law, consumer money is protected so families needn't worry. Got a question? Email Info@TheBAO.ca.

The fund compensates a person who has prepaid for funeral services, but consequently suffered a financial loss due to a failure on the part of licensed professionals





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