



# THE LIGATURE

"The Tie That Binds"

Official Publication of the  
John A. Gupton College  
Alumni Association  
Spring/Summer Edition - 2020



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**JOHN A. GUPTON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

Tag photos, leave comments and find old friends.

## New Link

Our College website now has a new Alumni Link: [www.guptoncollege.edu](http://www.guptoncollege.edu)

Email us:



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## Letter from the President

Greetings Alumni,

My hope is that this newsletter finds all of you safe, healthy and transitioning from the old traditions to the "new norm".

In 1995, a former marketing professor who formed his own company called the Doody Group, wrote a book named, "**Reinventing Funeral Service**". In my humble opinion, Alton Doody changed the way Funeral Directors would think about merchandising going forward and based all his ideas by direct consumer feedback. Why is this important now? Well the title of that book is what comes to mind immediately, but it's also the details that go along with it on how we continue to serve our profession and families in a noble, yet changing way. When Covid19 regulations muscled much of the profession to shift overnight, the way we merchandised, made arrangements and celebrated lives for most part had to be "reinvented". For some who had already embraced technology solutions, the migration was less technical but more creative. For others, it was a total re-design of their business and traditions. Most of what Alton Doody wrote in his book, still rings true today but what's most important is his quote used in his marketing class. "**We must be careful to improve upon those things we shouldn't be improving at all**".

I believe this is exactly how we should be looking towards the "new norm" of funeral service. It's extremely important that we all evolve from the recent challenges by making ourselves and our businesses better than ever. We must know and recognize that with every difficult situation or challenging time comes **OPPORTUNITY!** The opportunity is to "reinvent" our priorities, practices and operations. A time to understand and become the best of the new expectations of the consumer. It's a fact that old traditions fade away and those who work tirelessly to keep them alive will always be challenged to show value of something that no longer meets the consumers' needs or expectations....hence Alton's quote. One example is certainly the use of technology from beginning to end and how the consumers for the most part felt comfortable with virtual arrangements and online streaming. Innovation and Progress are achieved only by those who venture to think outside the norm. I've always believed that you have to think Imaginatively but Realistically about what lies ahead and be prepared to meet it head on! You absolutely have to find new ways to handle old tasks and traditions and change your mindset to have a fresh approach to new problems.

My friends and colleagues, now is the time to gather your brain trusts and start sharing ideas of the new way to exceed consumer expectations and deliver meaningful events utilizing all the solutions available to our profession today.

In closing, **I'm sad to report that we have decided to cancel the reunion this year due to the uncertainties with travel and hotel restrictions.** However, next year is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John A Gupton College and we plan to focus on an incredible experience to celebrate the colleges' remarkable past and even brighter future.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

**Bill Hudson**  
Class of 1991



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- 25 & 50 year pin recipients
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*And More!*

# 2020 Alumni Reunion Canceled

It is with heavy hearts that we are announcing that we have decided to cancel the **John A. Gupton** Reunion this year amid uncertainty regarding the nationwide efforts to handle everyone's safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is always a great deal of thought, planning, and work that goes into the reunion each year, and with so many things regarding venues and hotels being restricted it would have been impossible to safely coordinate a reunion that we would have been proud of and comfortable with.

## Alumni Reunion Memories From Years Past:



# More Alumni Reunion Memories From Years Past:



Class of 1995 – 25 year pin recipients

Marla R. Belyew  
Scotty J. Brewer  
Steve Brown  
Freeman Burnett  
Bartly Carr  
Timiki Davidson  
Travis J. Dugger  
Larry Fitts  
Thomas J. Fluehr  
Damon W. Gibson  
Brian Gilstrap  
Stacie L. Green  
Brandon H. Hamilton  
Samuel L. Jackson  
Felicia Lashley



William Lawson  
Phillippe Lumpkin  
Sean Maier  
Lynn D. McClain  
Leslie McGee  
Phyllis C. Odom  
Jacqueline Page  
Ezra Plemons  
John A. Robbins  
William T. Roberts  
Robert M. Shelton, Jr.  
Mary K. Smith  
William Washington  
Haskell T. Wells

Class of 1970 – 50 year pin recipients

William J. Arnold, III  
Kenneth Bates  
James M. Churchville  
Donald C. Creech  
Joseph A. Dickerson  
Stewart W. Essex  
Thomas R. Evans  
Frank Foggie, Jr.  
Herman D. Folsom  
Rex T. Grizzle  
Major T. Hamilton  
Van D. Hamilton  
Milton A. Hollifield  
William A. Holman



Paul S. Hutchens  
Timothy W. Jones  
Thomas M. Kimbro  
Ulysses G. Mullen  
James B. Murphy  
Harold C. Nance  
Paul Parham  
Stanley H. Powell  
Clavin G. Rinehart  
Michael D. Robinson  
Jim T. Shiver  
Marshall T. Swift  
Bruce G. Thomas  
James A. Webb, Jr.

**Helen Marie McDonald**, 75, of Ringgold, Georgia passed away Wednesday, February 26, 2020. She was the daughter of the late Amos and Nellie Davis and was preceded in death by three brothers, Raymond, Willard and Thurman Davis and two sisters, Louise Summey and Arlene Rymer. Helen retired from Shaw Industries and enjoyed traveling and reading. Her greatest love was her family. She was a member of Parkway Baptist Church in Ft. Oglethorpe, GA. Survivors include her husband, Joel McDonald (JAGC Alumni class of 1961), daughter, Angela Cruse (Tim), all of Ringgold, GA, two grandchildren, Kimberly McNeese (Bobby), T. J. Cruse (Jessica), two great grandchildren, Kayleigh and Addison, three sisters, Juanita Parker, Geneva Smith, Linda Loughridge, brother, Hubert Davis, all of Chatsworth, GA, brother-in-law, Morris McDonald, of Cleveland, TN, sister-in-law, Mildred White, of Colorado and several nieces and nephews. Funeral services were held 2:00 p.m., Monday, March 2, 2020, in the chapel of Shawn Chapman Funeral Home, 2362 Highway 76, Chatsworth, GA 30705, with Rev. Crafton Dover officiating. Burial will follow in Murray Memorial Gardens. The family received friends from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m., Sunday, March 1, 2020, at Shawn Chapman Funeral Home.



## **Brenton Dean “Brent” Warner**

46, of Kingsport went to be with the Lord on May, 16, 2020. He was a 1991 graduate of Sullivan North High School and a graduate of John A. Gupton Mortuary College. Brent dedicated his life to serving families at Carter-Trent Funeral Home for 28 years. He was a highly regarded TSSAA high school official as well as a college official. Brent was an avid runner and had completed the New York City Marathon along with many half-marathons. He proudly supported his community in many ways by serving on the board of the Little Ironman and Princess Delilah Foundation as well as donating his time and efforts to many other events and charities. Brent was a member of First Baptist Church of Kingsport and also attended Temple Baptist Church for many years. He was a loving husband, father, son, brother and friend to many. Brent was preceded in death by his paternal grandparents, Paul and Beulah Warner; maternal grandparents, Rex and Hazel Trent; aunt, Ruth Ferguson; sister-in-law, Laura Surgenor Puckett. Survivors include his loving wife, Carrie Elizabeth Warner; son, Blain Warner (9); daughter, Blair Warner (6); parents, Roger and Shirley Warner; brother, Brad Warner and wife Ammie; nieces, Aubree Puckett and Bradlie Warner; nephew, Alex Warner; father and mother-in-law, Michael and Frankie Surgenor; special uncle and aunt, Dean and Martha Trent; along with a host of special cousins, extended family, and friends. A funeral service was conducted at 7pm on Tuesday, May, 19, 2020 at Higher Ground Baptist Church with Pastor Phil Whittemore and Dr. Marvin Cameron officiating. A private entombment service was conducted on Wednesday, May 20, 2020 at East Lawn Memorial Park. The staff of Carter-Trent Funeral Home served as pallbearers.



## **Thomas Matthew Sullenger**,

age 45 of Fayetteville, TN. Mr. Sullenger was born on September 12, 1974, in Tullahoma, TN to Thomas and Debra Sullenger. Matthew passed away on May 26, 2020 at Lincoln Medical Center. Matthew was a funeral director at Higgins Funeral Home having graduated from John A. Gupton College in 2004. He was of the Baptist faith. He loved his boys, his family, and his baseball boys very much. He enjoyed coaching baseball, spending time with family and friends, bass fishing, as well as, making everyone smile. Matthew graduated from Moore County High School. After graduation, he attended Faulkner University, Slidell Baptist Seminary, and graduated from John A. Gupton College of Mortuary Science. In addition to his parents, survivors include his children, Gavin and Breyer Sullenger, of Huntsville, AL and Joey Hobbs of Fayetteville; brother, Mark Sullenger of Tullahoma; nephew, Miles Sullenger of Winchester; and niece, Courtney Sullenger of Winchester; along with several aunts and uncles. Graveside services were conducted at 2PM on Friday, May 29 at Lynchburg Cemetery with Michael Reeves officiating.

## Spring Semester 2019 - Top 10%



Holden Ayers	Christiana, Tennessee
Dalton Bandy	Portland, Tennessee
Christopher Boggs	Baltimore, Maryland
Benjamin Cain	Harrison, Tennessee
William Blake Cobb	Blue Ridge, Georgia
Carson Correll	Kingsport, Tennessee
Emily Grace Crowe	Oliver Springs, Tennessee
Brianna Gesler	Springfield, Tennessee
Foster Halcomb	Clinton, Tennessee
Travis Howell	Nashville, Tennessee
Landon Hunter	Huntsville, Alabama
Alyssa Hyden	Somerset, Kentucky
Donmeka Martin-Mercer	Jackson, Tennessee
Jason McCord	Bruseton, Tennessee
Alexis Nelson	Nashville, Tennessee
Emily Phillips	Briceville, Tennessee
Sophia Rodriguez	Clarksville, Tennessee

## NBE Pass Rates

The American Board of Funeral Service Education serves as the national academic accreditation agency for college and university programs in Funeral Service and Mortuary Science Education. The National Board pass rates, graduation rates, and employment rates for **John A. Gupton College** programs are shown below.

### Associate of Arts Degree Program

Year	Complete Course of Study	Position in Funeral Service	NBE ARTS Pass Rate	NBE SCIENCE Pass Rate
2011	48%	87%	86%	94%
2012	45%	78%	81%	100%
2013	47%	90%	88%	97%
2014	45%	77%	92%	88%
2015	80%	77%	86%	89%
2016	70%	75%	79%	79%
2017	83%	91%	83%	96%
2018	76%	84%	97%	94%
2019	58%	79%	83%	89%

### Funeral Director Certificate Program

Year	Complete Course of Study	Position in Funeral Service	State Board Pass Rate
2011	65%	100%	100%
2012	80%	100%	88%
2013	38%	100%	82%
2014	53%	86%	75%
2015	42%	88%	86%
2016	50%	94%	71%
2017	44%	92%	69%
2018	50%	100%	89%
2019	50%	100%	86%

## Obituaries Continued



**Mr. Larry W. "Jake" Hamm** said goodbye to his earthly life on Tuesday, February 18, 2020. As a child he earned the nickname, Jake. As it was told, he called himself that after his friends turned him over in a puddle while pulling him in a wagon. Why he got up and said "I be darn Jake" we will never know because he didn't know himself.

Growing up in Flatwoods provided him access to all his hobbies. He loved swimming, fishing, deer hunting and coon hunting. The community of Flatwoods is small but fierce and he never wavered from home.

Larry said goodbye to his sister, Joyce Hankins and his brother Delton Hamm in recent years and months. He was the baby of the family. His parents Ezra and Sue Grinder Hamm apparently spoiled him a little bit.

He believed in a good recliner or a good couch to lay on as long as he could see the TV clearly, if he couldn't see it, then someone, other than him, was going to move! As a young adult, he enjoyed taxidermy. His kids didn't ever think too much of deer skins being in the freezer to much later in life.

It has been stated that Larry had opinions and sometimes he was right and sometimes it resulted in his stating "Garth Brooks would be a one-hit wonder". Oh my, how he missed that one!

And, finally his favorite hobby other than hunting (deer or raccoons) was fishing, trot line fishing was his favorite. He enjoyed the fishing and he enjoyed the eating too! He loved to have cookouts and loved attending them!

In his last days, he enjoyed torturing his children with Gunsmoke, Andy Griffith and Bonanza. They offered to purchase him a computer for more options and he laughed and said he wasn't willing to learn!

So, we have no idea how many first cousins he left behind, but we do know he left many friends and family that enjoyed time and conversations with him.

Survivors include his children Tracy (Brandon) Allen of Spring Hill, Tn, Gina (James) Duncan of Linden and Bart (Anna Moyers) Hamm of Linden, grandchildren Talon and Izzy Duncan. He was excited to meet his new granddaughter-Everleigh that should be arriving any day now. Larry was a competitive person that could creatively cuss and make you feel as big or small as he intended. He loved Perry County. He was also good at giving everyone he knew a nickname; we assume because he gave himself his own!  
Since Larry didn't want a funeral; he got this obituary!!!!

GIBBLEGUTS.COM

By Dan Gibson

At Random Comics by Ryan Mason



The poor dear only had one more student loan payment left.

### Alumni, Stay in Touch!

Moved? Changed your name? Different email address? Let us know so we can keep you informed about local events and JAG news that matters to you.

### THE SPOTLIGHT

Anyone interested in being featured in the "Alumni Spotlight" section of a future newsletter, please contact Bobby Cook at [cook@guptoncollege.edu](mailto:cook@guptoncollege.edu)

### class notes

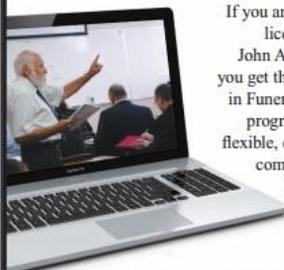
Do you have anything you would like to share with your fellow Alumni? Send all submissions to Bobby Cook at [cook@guptoncollege.edu](mailto:cook@guptoncollege.edu)



## JOHN A. GUPTON COLLEGE

A Professional Tradition Since 1946

### ON-LINE ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN FUNERAL SERVICE



If you are interested in becoming a licensed funeral professional, John A. Gupton College can help you get there. The Associate Degree in Funeral Service is an accredited program. Our online program is flexible, career-focused and may be completed in 12 or 16 months. Financial Aid is available.

For information concerning cost and program call 615-327-3927, go to our website at [guptoncollege.edu](http://guptoncollege.edu) or email [admissions@guptoncollege.edu](mailto:admissions@guptoncollege.edu).



JOHN A. GUPTON COLLEGE

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### CONTINUING EDUCATION ON-LINE

John A. Gupton College has developed online continuing education courses. These courses have been approved for CEU hours by both Tennessee and Kentucky Boards. The online subjects range from funeral service history, embalming techniques, funeral home management, grief psychology and bereavement counseling. For information concerning cost and program call 615-327-3927, go to our website at [guptoncollege.edu](http://guptoncollege.edu) or email [admissions@guptoncollege.edu](mailto:admissions@guptoncollege.edu).



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## John A. Gupton Alumni Association

[www.guptoncollege.edu](http://www.guptoncollege.edu)

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