

THE JOHN A. GUPTON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESENTS:

# THE LIGATURE

“THE TIE THAT BINDS”

## IN THIS EDITION:



WINTER  
EDITION 2023

- ◆ Graduation
- ◆ Obituaries
- ◆ Top 10% Fall
- ◆ The Gupton
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- ◆ Alumni Spotlight

## WEBSITE LINK

Visit our college website to  
access the Alumni Link:  
[www.guptoncollege.edu](http://www.guptoncollege.edu)



## LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

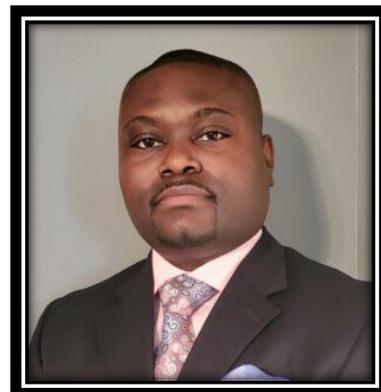
Greetings fellow Gupton alumni,

I hope you all had a good holiday season and a Happy New year. Watching the news, **Punxsutawney Phil** predicted six more weeks of winter weather. So, this means those overcoats will have to be used a bit longer. I had the opportunity to represent the alumni during the 2022 graduation banquet and ceremony. It was held on Thursday, December 8, 2022, at the **Lowes Vanderbilt hotel**. Our guest commencement speaker was **William Sidney Fogle** executive director of funeral Service Education of Kentucky. We thank him for his welcoming words and encouragement to our graduating class. I must say, this is one of the largest graduating ceremonies I have attended. The family and friend support for the class was amazing this year. To all who had the opportunity to attend thank you for your support. A special thanks to Batesville, Matthews Aurora, and Wilbert Vaults for their continued support of the Alumni Association. Over the past few weeks, you should have received your pledge cards for the endowment fund. If you have not sent in your pledge, please let me encourage you to complete the card and donate to the **John A. Gupton Endowment Fund**.

Also, those who need continuing education hours. Our goal is to provide at least one in-person education seminar each business quarter. In the coming weeks, the alumni officers will be meeting to discuss plans for the **Alumni Reunion** which is set for August 4 & 5, 2023. For the latest news and information regarding the reunion, please visit our website at <https://guptoncollege.edu/alumni/>

Sincerely,

**Christopher  
Jefferson**



# GRADUATION – CLASS OF 2022

**VALEDICTORIAN**  
Jack Partlow

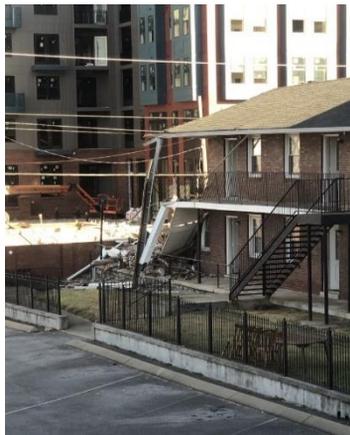


**MOST IMPROVED EMBALMER AWARD**  
Cameron Westbrook  
Awarded by Yarbrough Mortuary Services

# THE GUPTON



John A. Gupton College entered into a business deal with Chartwell Residential several months ago to sale the property that currently is used for parking at JAGC and the dorm apartment building. **The College will REMAIN on site.** On site they will construct a building called, "The Gupton", that will offer luxury rental units along with a parking garage. The Gupton will feature 14 stories of luxury rental units and amenities for residents. The heart of this residential project is to create a "garden in the sky". You will notice heavier materials at the base of the building, including brick, with materials transitioning to a lighter aesthetic and feel as the building opens up to the sky. Different building heights and creative massing allows for multiple rooftop terraces and decks, including a rooftop pool deck and a "green roof". Not only will the green roof be a prime amenity space, but it is also anticipated to aid in water quality management. The series of outdoor spaces are a fundamental amenity aimed at engaging residents in this up-and-coming neighborhood in Nashville. In addition to the plentiful outdoor amenity spaces, there are several interior amenity areas as well. These spaces will be further defined as the project progresses. The top three levels will be built out as premium penthouse units. The Gupton building will be built in the property formally occupied by the JAGC Student housing building and the parking lot behind the college. To accommodate future parking needs, JAGC Staff, Faculty, Students, Alumni Members, and Guests have access to the parking facility located below the new structure. In order to make room for the full footprint of the new building, the old JAGC student housing building was demolished in October of 2022. Photos below show the progression before, during, and after demolition. The last photo shows the empty lot, but the tree in the right side of the picture has also since been removed. As of the printing of this newsletter, construction has not yet begun, and parking is still available.



# Alumni Spotlight

IN THIS EDITION, THE LIGATURE SPOTLIGHTS ALUMNI MEMBER, **KIMBERLY SEAMAN**



I remember my first day as a student at **John A. Gupton** College very fondly. I was extremely nervous as I had no clue as to what I was walking into, but I was also thrilled to embark on yet another scholastic journey. I had completed several other educational programs prior, and none of them really satisfied me. I was looking to find a profession to participate in that was challenging and also rewarding, and that most importantly allowed me to help others in a way that I felt was actually useful. Like so many others before me, I had zero experience or background in death care but was fascinated by it and hoped that it would end up being everything I hoped it would. Thankfully, I had it right this time, and working as a funeral professional proved to indeed be very mentally and emotionally fulfilling. It has also been frustrating, draining, difficult, and extremely intense, as we all know. But most importantly, working in death care allowed for that gratifying ability of supporting others in a way that only we can to really be put to use. I graduated from Gupton in 2012 and was very fortunate to find employment at a local funeral home. I completed my apprenticeship there and was able to stay on in a more permanent fashion for years

afterwards. I was able to learn so much during my time there, my education was top-notch, but the real-world experience garnered while working at a very busy funeral home was invaluable. I had never worked so hard or poured myself into my work as much as I did during my time there, and I loved it. I could go on and on about the lessons I learned while I was there, but we all have those stories, we all know what it's like. Sometimes it's awful and it seems as if it's too challenging for us to see a way to succeed within it. But it's the other times, the times we know assuredly that we made a difference to a grieving family or client, the times that we are able to reach through the fog of loss and truly help people as only we are suited to, that outshine the hard stuff. It was those moments of emotional success that kept me wanting more during my years as a funeral professional. When it was time to take my leave from the funeral home, I did so hoping that it wasn't a goodbye to the funeral profession forever. I did not want to close the door on being able to support and assist those in need, especially those who were in mourning. I had never considered a future in funeral service education, but when the opportunity arose to become an adjunct professor at Gupton for the on-line learning program, it seemed like the perfect opportunity. In January of 2020, I started a new chapter of my career in the death profession as an educator. I surprised myself, I enjoyed my new role much more than I thought I would. I wasn't directly helping grieving families, but I was helping to prepare people to do so! August of 2022 brought another change; the chance to become a full-time faculty member at Gupton presented itself, and I took it! Not only do I have on-line students who are able to complete classes from all over under my wing, I have students here on campus in class as well. Again, this was not a role I had never envisioned for myself at all, but I was drawn to the challenge, as well as to the opportunity to help educate those who also want to help people. I really missed so many aspects of working for a funeral home and this educational role helped to fill that void. Teaching, like funeral service, is never easy. Though rewarding, it too can be aggravating, stressful, and tiresome. But the chance to help students and to pass on hard-earned knowledge and experience is absolutely worth any moments of frustration. The possibility that you will be the one to provide the information that allows a student to really make a connection between what they're staring at on a page and what being a funeral professional is really all about overrides it all. It's very amusing to walk down the hall of the bottom floor of Gupton and pass by the composite photo of my graduating class and see that tiny image of myself taken so many years ago, grinning from ear to ear and having no idea what lay ahead. I would not have believed that I would find myself back in that same hallway, still worrying about dress code, but this time providing the information during class instead of furiously scribbling it down.

# 'Being the Smoke': One Man's Choice to Be Cremated Under the Open Sky

PORTIONS OF AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED ON NYTIMES.COM BY RUTH GRAHAM IN MAY 2022.



A small Colorado town maintains the country's only public outdoor funeral pyre. Philip Incao saw it as his own perfect ending. Philip Incao was about 6 years old when he asked his mother if it was true, he would die. Yes, she replied. And what happens afterward? he asked. "Nothing," she said. "You just die, that's all." It was a profoundly unsatisfying answer, and one that Dr. Incao later identified as the starting point for a lifetime of study. He pursued a path that wound through medical school, training in holistic healing and devotion to the early 20th-century esoteric Rudolf Steiner, a polymath who theorized that the spiritual world could be explored through scientific methods. Decades of searching led him all the way to an unconventional decision about what would happen to his body after his death. Before Dr. Incao died of prostate cancer on Feb. 28 at age 81, he arranged for a cremation in his adopted hometown, Crestone, Colo., at the country's only public open-air funeral pyre. "All the old forms, all the old rituals, are being loosened up," he explained in interviews in the months before his death. And through this type of cremation, he planned to be a part of that shift.

He knew his body would be wrapped into a simple shroud, carried on a wooden stretcher into an enclosure, and placed on a platform a few feet from the ground. His sons and his wife would light the fire and watch his body burn for several hours. The next day, they would collect the ashes. He had attended several cremations at the pyre, and he was ready. About 70 people have been cremated at the pyre in Crestone since it opened more than a decade ago. Its services are restricted to residents and landowners in Saguache County, with a population of less than 7,000 people spread across some 3,000 square miles. Set inside a circular wooden fence a few miles out of town, with the Sangre de Cristo range of the Rocky Mountains looming in the background, the pyre itself is a utilitarian structure: two waist-high stuccoed concrete walls lined inside with firebrick and spanned by a plain metal grate.



The simple design represents a defiant upending of American death rituals. Instead of a body being whisked away by a funeral home, it stays on view at home for several days. And rather than being chemically "preserved" and placed in a sealed coffin, it remains on ice, but otherwise in its natural state. At a memorial service a few days before the cremation his wife Jennifer and three sons, their families and others gathered in their backyard art studio for a ceremony and eulogy delivered by a priest from the Christian Community, a small religious movement inspired by Steiner. Dr. Incao's body lay in repose at the front of the room, with wreaths of fresh carnations and other flowers on his body.

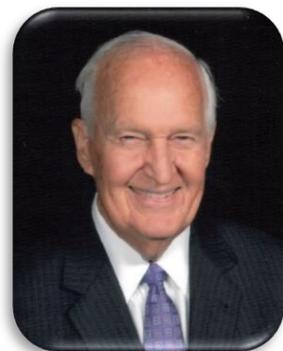
"Into the calm of soul being walks the soul of our dear Philip," the priest said, reading from a hand-transcribed book of sacred texts. "He is now on the other side of the threshold, but his love has not stopped." At the small outdoor reception afterward, deer grazed in the yard. On a cool Saturday, the family gathered at 7 a.m. to accompany Dr. Incao's body from his home to the pyre about four miles west. A volunteer had wrapped the body in a shroud of sheets the night before and covered it in roses. Dr. Incao's ceremony began with family members and friends laying juniper branches and flowers on the body. Incense burned in a terra cotta pot tended by a volunteer, while others added logs until they were piled above the rim of the pyre. Then Jennifer and Dr. Incao's sons lit large sticks in the incense pot and ignited the pyre together. As the fire started to burn, the sons embraced. A harpist played a tune as the flames crackled. They knew, in the end, it was what their father had wanted. "He was looking forward to being the smoke."

# OBITUARIES



**James "Jimmy" Marcus Ragan, Jr.**, 83, of Cuthbert, GA passed away suddenly on Sunday, October 30, 2022, in the Angels for the elderly in Montgomery, AL. Funeral services were conducted at 2:00 PM on Thursday, November 3, 2022, in the chapel of Lunsford Funeral Home with Rev. David Murphy officiating. The family received friends on Thursday from 1:00 PM until funeral time in the chapel. Mr. Ragan was a dedicated Alumni member graduating from JAGC in 1959. Memorials may be made to the Vilulah Baptist Church in care Mrs. Billie Bruner 30340 US Highway 27 S Coleman, GA 39836, Cuthbert First Baptist Church P. O. Box 274, Cuthbert, GA 39840 or your favorite charity.

**Harold W. Childress**, 86 of Kingsport died at home surrounded by his family on November 17, 2022. Harold was employed with Carnation Company prior to joining Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Homes in 1961. He took the helm of Hamlett-Dobson in 1983, assisting thousands of grieving families for over 60 years. Visitation was held at Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Home from 10 am to 4 pm Monday November 21. A funeral service was held 5:30 pm Tuesday November 22 at First Presbyterian Church. A graveside service was held 1 pm Wednesday November 23 at Oak Hill Memorial Park. His son Chad is a 1991 JAGC graduate, and his grandson Carson is a 2021 JAGC graduate.



**Rick Wallace Greene** of Sneedville TN passed away on the morning of December 11th, 2022, at the age of 58. Over a career span of more than 20 years Rick worked at several funeral homes in Nashville as a Funeral Director and Embalmer, with the last one being Marshall-Donnelly-Combs Funeral Home. Family received friends on Wednesday, December 14, 2022, from 5 to 7PM at Sneedville First Baptist Church with a funeral service following at 7PM. Family and friends met at McNeil Funeral Home on Thursday, December 15, 2022, at 10:30AM to go in procession to Trent Family Cemetery for an 11AM graveside service. Rick is a 1990 JAGC graduate.



**Charles Reed Oliver**, age 79, of Lebanon, TN passed away peacefully with family at his bedside on Thursday, October 13, 2022, at the age of 79 after several months of health challenges. Mr. Oliver was a Security Guard at JAGC for a period of time and his brother Al Oliver was JAGC Financial Aid Director for a number of years.

A Celebration of Life was held Sunday, January 15, 2023. The family received visitors at from 1 PM to 3 PM with the Memorial Service at 3 PM



**C. Donald (Don) Gibson**, age 83 of Maryville, passed away peacefully Wednesday, January 4, 2023, at his home. Don was a graduate of John A. Gupton College. Family received friends from 5:00

until 7:00 PM Saturday, January 7, 2023, at Smith Trinity Chapel with the Funeral Service following at 7:00 PM.

TOP 10%

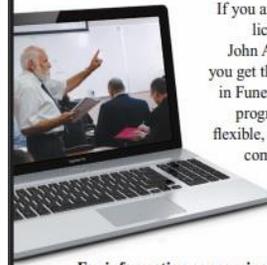
FALL

SEMESTER

Roger Booker  
 Tiffany Bowman  
 Maranda Cawthon  
 Hayden Correll  
 Paisley Eads-Nunley  
 Angie Garcia  
 Nicholas Gardner  
 Jennifer Gasperson  
 Joseph Greenfield  
 William G. Johnson  
 Jasper McClure  
 Hannah Parsley  
 Callia Riden  
 Andrea Snow  
 Joshua Sparks  
 Chelsea Torres  
 Ashley Whitefield  
 Roger Wright

Lindale, Georgia  
 Cleveland, Tennessee  
 Bruceton, Tennessee  
 Kingsport, Tennessee  
 Bristol, Tennessee  
 Mount Juliet, Tennessee  
 Fairfax, Virginia  
 Kingsport, Tennessee  
 Grand Rapids, Michigan  
 Locust Grove, Virginia  
 Dickson, Tennessee  
 Woodbury, Tennessee  
 Old Hickory, Tennessee  
 Portland, Tennessee  
 Grand Rapids, Michigan  
 Sevierville, Tennessee  
 Clarksville, Tennessee  
 Charlotte, Tennessee

## 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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**NEWSLETTER  
EDITOR**

BOBBY COOK



## John A. Gupton Alumni Association



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

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