

## Shell follows dream of becoming funeral director, looks to pay it forward

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

Anyone who has found their passion more than likely can tell you the exact moment they realized they had found something they love to do. For Winston-Salem native Damien Shell, that moment came when he was only nine years old, about a month after attending his grandfather's funeral. "When they told me my grandfather had died, I didn't really understand at first," said Shell when discussing the passing of his grandfather.

"Until we got to the visitation at the funeral home and I just started asking a lot of questions ... 'What is granddaddy doing up there laying in a box? Why does he have on makeup?' I asked a whole bunch of questions and a month after that I told my grandmother that's what I wanted to be ... at the time she told me it was called an undertaker and I didn't budge since I was nine, I knew that was what I wanted to do."

Today, Shell is the director of Damien C. Shell Funeral Service Practitioner.

Shell said after he told his grandmother, he started to do more research and his passion and willing-

ness to learn more about the profession continued to grow. history. And I'm not lying, I'm there and to this day I haven't went anywhere," Shell laughed.

"That's how I got on there and I've been there ever since. They're the reason I am who I am today ... they gave me the foundation and taught me how to be a dedicated servant to the people."

Shell continued to work at Russell's throughout high school and during undergrad at Winston-Salem State University, where he majored in business management. After graduating in 2013, he continued to work at Russell Funeral Home and began working with Perry J. Brown Funeral Home under the direction of Charles E. Coote, Jr. in Greensboro. In 2018 he finished his studies to become a licensed funeral director. That same year Shell also earned his masters in adult education from N.C. A&T State University.

Damian C. Shell Funeral Practitioner held its first service last September. In addition to offering all the services offered by funeral homes, Shell Funeral Practitioners also offers tribute videos, online memorials, and grief support at a reasonable cost. Shell said although he offers all the services of

care professional. Choate said she was excited to join the team after sitting down with Shell a few months ago.

"My husband and I came and met with Damien and after he gave us the synopsis of what he was trying to do, we believed it was a good match and I was excited to join the team," Choate said

Joyner, who is the co-owner of Joyner Removal Service, has known Shell for more than 20 years. She said it has been an honor to be able to witness Shell's journey and to be able to work with him.

"It's an honor to be able to work with him in this capacity," Joyner continued. "It's just a blessing to see how he has grown

as a young man in this profession."

Shell said ultimately his goal is to turn the business over to his team and start a facility for training up-and-coming funeral directors.

"My goal is to start doing more education and possibly create an academy for educating young up-and-coming funeral

directors," Shell said. "So that way they can learn just like I did and I'm giving back just like it was given to me."

For more information about Damien C. Shell Funeral Service Practitioner, visit <https://www.damien-shellfsp.com> or call 336-331-9024.



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Damien Shell

ness to learn more about the profession continued to grow.

"As I got older I realized I have a knack for caring for people and showing people I care and that's something you have to have in funeral service," he continued. "You have to have a caring heart because if you're not a people person or you don't have that in you, then it's hard to really do what you're called to do."

Shell's dream started becoming more of a reality when he was 16 years old and was presented with an opportunity to join the staff at Russell's Funeral Home. He said his grandmother, who was good friends with Charlene Russell Brown and Cedric Russell, put in a good word for him. "She called and asked if they needed help and Cedric said yes and the rest is

a normal funeral home, he doesn't own the physical building or facility, in essence keeping costs down.

"We can do everything that a funeral home does except it's all contracted, so my overhead is very low, meaning families that don't have \$10,000 to \$20,000 sitting on the side, I can help them and that's the key, being able to help," Shell said. "The business is set to where I'm considered an unaffiliated funeral service practitioner - meaning I have the business license to be able to conduct funerals, memorial services, and do everything a normal funeral home would, but I don't own the building and all that stuff," Shell said.

Rounding out Shell's team is Lisette Choate, funeral service professional and Spanish translator, and Rochelle Joyner, funeral



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