

**NICHOLSON-RICKE** Funeral Home



**BRYANT** Funeral Home

C E L E B R A T I N G L I F E

## Helping Others Celebrate Life for More than 100 Years...

Mike Nicholson refers to his career as a lifestyle – not a job. As president of Bryant Funeral Home in Great Bend and Nicholson-Ricke Funeral Home in Hoisington, he and his staff are ready to serve families at a moment's notice - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He and his dad, Bill Nicholson, own and operate both facilities.

"This is a business like no other; it is more of a way of life," Nicholson said. "The people on our staff may be sitting down for Christmas dinner and their day can change immediately. We have to be prepared every minute of the day and stop whatever we are doing. "But this is what we want to do," he continued. "The families we care for are more important than anything else we have going on at the moment. They are going through one of the worst times of their lives and we want to support them."

The president of the businesses readily acknowledged that his staff is the backbone of both funeral homes. "Our facilities don't operate because of me," Nicholson said. "It takes all of us. We are gratified to help families, while building trust and friendships throughout the community." Staff members are: both Nicholsons, Chad Jerke and Larry Klusener, all funeral directors and embalmers; Stacey Czarnek and Dale Dawson, both funeral directors; Justin Engleman, office manager; and Marilyn Dyke, and John and Julie Hein, receptionists. "These people and my family are the ones who make it a pleasure to own a business," Nicholson said. "I couldn't do it without them."



Nicholson and his wife, Tammy, have four children; Ryan is 15, Drew, 13, Addy, 10, and Ben, 9. Nicholson joined both funeral homes in 1995, a few years after graduating from Kansas State University with a business marketing degree. "I started out by washing the cars and mowing the grass," Nicholson recalled. "Now I am a funeral director, embalmer and bookkeeper, and am licensed to sell pre-need insurance. I still do some of everything. "But one thing remains constant," he added. "We enjoy the relationships we build throughout the community. Barton County is a great place to own a business and raise a family."

While services are varied according to families' wishes, the funeral homes offer traditional and cremation choices. "The family is also encouraged to itemize services that are right for them," Nicholson said. "You can provide personal touches specific to your loved one. "Funeral services are much more personalized today," he continued. "Ministers and families are sharing more information and talking about things that connect them to their loved one."

A funeral is not a cookie-cutter service anymore." In many cases, pictures of the loved one living life are displayed, which Nicholson said helps make people more comfortable. "People say things such as 'I remember this picture. He really did love to fish.' It helps break the ice among the mourners."

There are endless possibilities for the memorial folder that the funeral homes provide at services. "We can do pretty much anything they want with photos, favorite quotes, full color, different fonts and text," Nicholson said. "This all used to be fairly standard but we honor family requests and can customize these materials."

The funeral homes' staff members understand that these decisions are difficult to make when a family member or friend has just passed. Because of this, pre-planning is encouraged whenever possible. "The family can learn about a person's wishes in advance," Nicholson explained. "This relieves the stress on the family later on because they know what mom wanted."

Nicholson also noted that care and concern at Bryant and Nicholson-Ricke don't stop when the service concludes. The company provides guidance about grief support, as well as markers through Central Kansas Monuments. "Our clientele know that we care and we are there for them even after the services," Nicholson said. "We will do anything we can to guide them through a difficult time."



The history of Bryant Funeral Home, 1425 Patton, began when Lester Cox opened a furniture store and funeral parlor in 1899 at Main and Broadway in Great Bend. He later moved his business to the 1400 block of Main. In 1932, he closed the furniture business to concentrate on funeral services.

Bill Cook and Frank Weber bought the business when Cox retired; it became Cook and Weber Funeral Home. Ray Cornett joined the firm in 1939; he and Cook ran the funeral home for more than 30 years. Earl Bram bought it in 1972.

Gordon Brantley, Bill Nicholson and Ted Ricke purchased Cook and Weber in 1975. Larry Bryant joined Brantley a year later and the name changed to Brantley-Bryant Funeral Home, and later Bryant-Christians Funeral Home when Alan Christians became involved. In 2000, it became Bryant Funeral Home.

