



MARCH 2016

My Homesteaders

SAGEL
BLOOMFIELD
DANZANSKY GOLDBERG
FUNERAL CARE INC



(L to R): Edward Sagel
and Albert Bloomfield

Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care, Inc., offers a fresh approach to serving families in Rockville, MD. In just a few years, co-owners Albert Bloomfield and

Edward Sagel purchased two firms from a corporation, merged them into one successful and profitable business and consolidated their services into a smaller, more modern space. Today, their funeral home serves about 500 families each year out of a 6,300-square-foot storefront location just north of Washington, D.C.

Sagel, a first-generation funeral director, decided to pursue the profession in college after working at a funeral home near campus. After graduation, he moved to Georgia where he attended the Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Service before returning to Maryland and joining the staff at Danzansky-Goldberg Memorial Chapels. A short time later, the Goldberg family sold the business to a company that would eventually merge with a corporate funeral provider. In 1994, Sagel decided to start his own funeral home – Edward Sagel Funeral Direction. The storefront

firm featured a new approach to the profession and catered to the specific needs of the Jewish community.

At the same time, Bloomfield was completing his degree program at the University of Maryland and working part time at his family's New Jersey funeral home. "I realized midway through my sophomore year that I wanted to go into the family business," he reflected. "I saw the entrepreneurial possibilities and the stability, and I wanted to be a part of it."

Sagel and Bloomfield met a few years later while they were both attending a meeting with the Jewish Funeral Directors of America. Bloomfield noted that the two of them immediately connected. "We were both about the same age and had similar experiences working for funeral homes after they were purchased by a corporation."

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Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care, Inc. (continued)

In the 1990s, Danzansky-Goldberg Memorial Chapel, Edward Sagel Funeral Direction and Bloomfield Jewish Chapel were purchased by a corporation. Following these sales, both Sagel and Bloomfield remained on staff at their respective firms for another 18 years. In 2014, Bloomfield relocated to Maryland with his family and partnered with Sagel to purchase Danzansky-Goldberg Memorial Chapel and Sagel Funeral Direction.

"When we started talking about merging the businesses, we knew we'd face some challenges," Bloomfield recalled. "We were at two different price points and had a lot of overhead. We needed to figure out what our customers really wanted before we could move forward."

After assessing the preferences of their client families, Sagel and Bloomfield made a bold decision: they chose not to renew the lease on the 21,000-square-foot, standalone location in favor of renovating and remodeling their 6,300-square-foot storefront space. "When we looked at the needs of our client families and compared that to the overhead at our previous location, it made sense to downsize," Bloomfield explained. "Less overhead for us means more affordable options for our customers."

"In a metro area like ours, land creates a considerable amount of overhead. In our new space, we can offer even more variety to our families, including a lot of different family-friendly gathering spaces," Bloomfield affirmed. "Now, our customers can pay for the services they truly want and need."

Since the move, Bloomfield and Sagel have found they are able to set prices that are lower and more manageable for their clients. "We served a family recently who used our services three years ago. They were shocked when they purchased the same funeral package today for \$3,000 less than they paid then," Bloomfield explained, noting that they continue to maintain their commitment to families before profits.

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Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg (continued)

The business – which caters predominately to the needs of Jewish families – is designed to respond to the unique rituals and preferences of its clientele. Most Jewish families follow the rite of *k'vod hamet*, the tradition-rich practice of honoring the deceased through cleansing and shrouding prior to burial.

Because of the unique needs of the families they serve, Sagel Bloomfield Danzansky Goldberg Funeral Care doesn't look like many traditional funeral homes. In their previous location, less than 10% of their services utilized the on-site chapel space – most of their client families preferred to hold services at their local places of worship. So, rather than constructing a new chapel at their remodeled location, they've partnered with a dozen nearby synagogues to host their services. "We're able to support our community through these partnerships," Bloomfield observed. "Plus, we're always top-of-mind when members ask for recommendations."

Sagel and Bloomfield spend a great deal of time training their employees and working alongside them to ensure every family receives the highest level of care. "We make sure our staff understands how to serve the unique needs of the Jewish families in our community. Because of how quickly burial follows death, we've found that attention to detail and efficiency is critical for our staff," Bloomfield explained. "We only have one day – one shot – to get it right. There's not enough time to resolve issues, so we have to get it right the first time."



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Because of the quick turnaround between death and burial, preplanning and prefunding is especially beneficial for their client families. "We believe in pre-need because it gives these families peace of mind during a really difficult time," Bloomfield reflected. He and Sagel have found that many families in their community are willing to plan ahead. In fact, several of the families who come in without a funeral plan have already purchased a burial plot. "There's a lot of room to educate families on what is available to them. When we serve a family at the time of need, we always make sure to let them know about our pre-need offerings."

In addition to their educational efforts with their at-need families, Sagel and Bloomfield are active in the community, raising awareness about their pre-need offerings. "We send out direct mail and host community presentations," Bloomfield explained. "We also sponsor a monthly networking event for other end-of-life professionals. Building relationships with estate lawyers and hospice care professionals helps build a continuum of care that is beneficial to everyone in our community."

Partnering with Homesteaders and an affiliated marketing organization has helped the staff implement and manage an active pre-need program. Bloomfield noted that sometimes their client families are suspicious of pre-need, but Homesteaders' long history of paying claims helps address those concerns. "Partnering with Homesteaders gives our client families peace of mind. They know the money is safe at Homesteaders and will be there when they need it."

As they settle into their new location, Sagel and Bloomfield are optimistic about the future of their pre-need program. "We're in a big market, but there aren't a lot of active pre-need programs," Bloomfield observed. "There are some great opportunities here to grow our business. If we take care of families and treat them well, they're going to come back and they're going to recommend us to others."

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