



COVER STORY

Kathleen Sanvidge

Servicing Her Community with Heart

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
— GANDHI

Be generous, honest, compassionate. Do the right thing. Do good in the world. Follow through. Be accountable. Keep faith. These are all phrases that Kathleen Sanvidge lives by. Instilled in her from day one by her parents, Kathleen strives every day to live up to these words and to pass them on to her own children.

Raised in Clifton Park, Kathleen has been a part of this community all her life. Always a caring person, she knew she wanted to somehow give back to the world. She loved gardening, cooking and participating in 4H club, but it wasn't until she participated in Shen's Unique Placement Program before she realized her destiny. Assigned as an assistant to Ellis Hospital's Head Pathologist in the morgue, she assisted with autopsies, lab work and investigations. In the process, she met area funeral directors as they came in to pick up the bodies and wondered what happened after they left the hospital. After a 10-hour shadowing position at Emerick Funeral Home in Clifton Park, she realized her calling. Inspired to help people, Kathleen believed in her heart this was the right thing to do and it has been her passion ever since.

After her internship, she completed two years at Hudson Valley Community College, a residency in Clifton Park, then passed the State and National Board exams to become a licensed funeral director before eventually buying Townley & Wheeler Funeral Home in Ballston Lake three years ago. In addition to reinvigorating the Townley name, she has also established herself as



the person to go to for challenging cases. Specializing in reconstructive techniques, Kathleen is known for taking on difficult cases that others think are impossible. Families of accident victims and cancer patients are now given a chance to say goodbye to their loved one face to face because Kathleen takes the extra steps necessary to be sure each detail is right, even going so far as to make

eyelashes if needed. She uses her own cosmetic technique to ensure that every body looks natural for the family's final goodbye. "Preparation of the body is so important," she says. "I promised myself I am going to always do my best and give back to this community."

She is an advocate for her families, and despite her kind and gentle demeanor, pulls off seemingly impossible tasks behind the scenes. "I take my job very seriously. It is a huge responsibility. You don't meet me, walk out the door, and then I forget you. I'm with your family 24/7. I'm constantly thinking about you round the clock, when you don't even realize, taking care of all the details behind the scenes."

The "behind the scenes" is quite complicated. There are a lot of tasks that need to be completed in a very short amount of time and Kathleen acts like an orchestra conductor – bringing together many separate parts, doing what she needs to in order to make it all meld together into the resulting symphony without interrupting the family's grieving time. She is their advocate at one of the hardest times in their lives and strives to make the process as easy as possible.

She also provides her families as many options as she can, always figuring out a way to fulfill the family's wishes. Whether if it is having a violinist from the Albany Symphony Orchestra, a live web-stream of the services for family members that could not be there, a keepsake DVD or a green burial – she'll make it happen.

Stepping into the funeral parlor feels like stepping into her home, which is exactly what she wants since it is her home. She wants it to have that old-fashioned family feeling and families know that their loved one is receiving the best care as they are shepherded from one life to the

next. At the same time, Kathleen presents the latest modern conveniences. Each family receives their own page on the website as a memorial. She has video services, options for all types and denominations of burials and services, educational seminars and info for support programs are available, as well as stone choices directly through Kathleen. Through Valient Monument Design, Kathleen's other business, she is able to offer her families a low-cost monument option as an extension of her services. Each family can sit down with her to create an original stone as a perfect memorial for their loved one.

She also offers free pre-arrangement services to plan as many of your arrangements as you would like. If you choose to also pre-fund your arrangements, the prices are guaranteed. Even if fees go up through the years, your family will never have to make up the difference.

Kathleen is clearly passionate about what she does. It's not just a job to her; it's a lifestyle, one that her family is very understanding of. She has three daughters – Madeline (14), Natalie (11) and Aisling (8). They know that they can be out at the movies, or about to pull out of the driveway and if mom gets a call, it's back in the car to take care of it. It can be hard, but they realize they're able to help people because of it. It's demanding, but rewarding. "It affects my whole family but my kids are learning compassion and humanity and works of mercy. They have lived this business with me," Kathleen says. "I love I can be a mom and still do this." She also has help in all aspects of her life from her partner, Zoltan. "He is a patient, hardworking and loving man. He's a very important role model and caregiver in this house and is adored by all."

Kathleen loves her community and gives back whenever she can. She's proud of what she has built for the business and her standing in the community. Everyone knows that she is real, approachable and always available. She's gratified with her reputation as always providing the same Kathleen, regardless of cost, and that nothing is limited. Every family receives the same attention, options, care and open heart. She has a wonderful staff to help her achieve these goals. "I have to applaud my staff. They are top notch, sharp people of all ages that are dedicated and caring. I'm really proud of the people I choose to work with. I'm grateful to them."

She's also grateful to not only be able to serve her community as the protector of their loved ones, but to have also been taken into their hearts. "I have been able to develop close friendships with families and I become a part of their family as they become a part of mine. I recognize that and am grateful for that." ■

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