

CALLED to Serve

There are few people who encounter death more frequently than those called to work and serve in a funeral home. Their ability to minister and be present to families mourning the loss of a loved one at such a vulnerable time is neither easy nor predictable. The responsibility and challenge these funeral home workers face every day is to honor each person and each story in a meaningful and authentic way. In April, Pope Francis offered prayers at daily Mass for funeral home workers, acknowledging that, "What they do is so heavy and sad."

And yet, thanks to funeral home workers, we have the opportunity to grieve and show others support during difficult times. Because of their careful preparations, we are able to offer our prayers and act in a way that shows our respect for life and our concern for those who mourn.

For over a century, the National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia has worked closely with various funeral homes in and around South Philadelphia.

In fact, one of our closest neighbors on Broad Street is The Pennsylvania Burial Company & Baldi Funeral Home. By inviting Mr. Peter Jacovini and Mr. Victor Baldi, III, cousins and the directors of this funeral home, to share a snapshot of their lives, we begin to appreciate their commitment to our deceased loved ones, and to how Saint Rita inspires them to embrace their vocation each and every day.

Q The Baldi and Jacovini families have served the South Philadelphia community for many generations. While you are a business, you also provide a service or ministry to people who are grieving. How did your family get into this type of work and why have you decided to continue to this day?

A **Victor Baldi III (VB):** My great-grandfather's older brother CCA Baldi started the Baldi Funeral Home sometime before the last century (1900). South Philadelphia was predominantly Irish and there was not any funeral home for the Italian immigrants, so he started the CCA Baldi Bros. Funeral Home in the Italian market area at 8th and Montrose Streets. In 1943 my great-grandfather and grandfather carried on the trade partnering with our cousins, the Jacovini family. We became Pennsylvania Burial Co., Inc / Baldi Funeral Home, and moved to a more bustling thoroughfare on South Broad Street where we currently reside today.

Peter Jacovini (PJ): 2021 will be our 100-year anniversary. It is with great pride that we continue our family's legacy of funeral directing; four generations of caring for every family as if they were our own.

VB: Watching our fathers and grandfathers service families in times of need is all we've ever known and we're proud to carry on the tradition.



From Left: Victor Baldi, III and Peter Jacovini

Q Are there any particular challenges that come with being a funeral director? How about misconceptions?

A **VB:** The challenges of funeral service are constant. Death does not take a holiday or a weekend off – it's 24/7. We are taught in funeral school that no two funerals are the same as every human life is not the same. Every funeral must be planned to fit each individual's or family's needs.

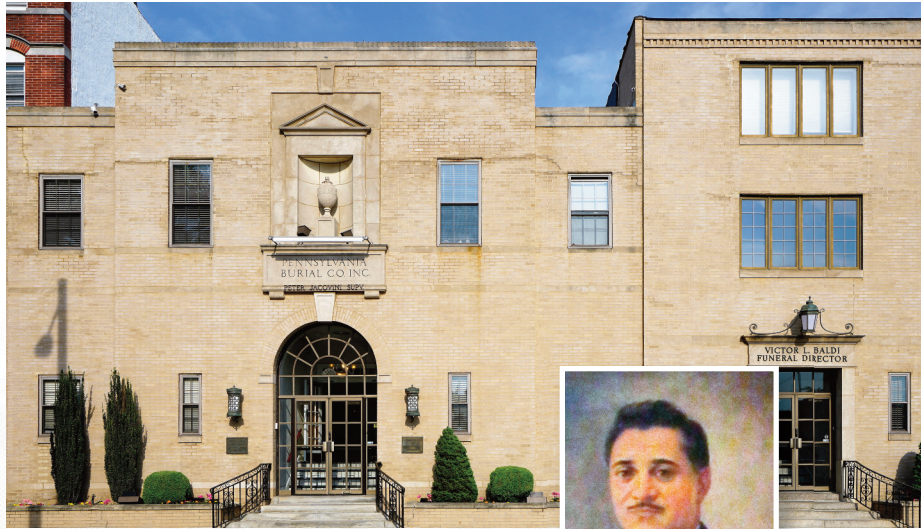
PJ: The schedule of a funeral director is the biggest challenge. It's certainly not a 9 to 5 occupation. You never know what is around the corner. Some days you don't have much to do, and others you don't know how you will get it all done. You also need to be available on weekends, holidays, and all hours of the day.

VB: Times change and we have to change with it. Today video tributes are popular as well as memory or picture boards. Recently, during the pandemic, we began live-streaming viewings and funeral masses in order to abide by city, state and federal guidelines of no more than 10 people in the same space. It was a terrible time to lose a loved one. I'm sure there are misconceptions and stereotypes in our industry as in any other. I try not to feed into the negative and concern myself with servicing and being there for the family that I have that day.

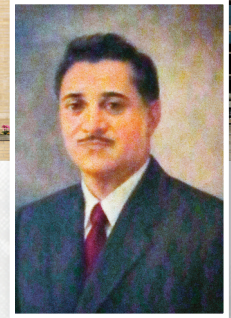
Q What are your favorite parts of working as a funeral director?

A **PJ:** My favorite part is when I can see that the family that has entrusted me to take care of their loved one starts speaking to me in a way that I know they trust me and feel comfortable with me. It is sincerely my goal for them to feel like I am a trusted family friend.

VB: My favorite part of working as a funeral director would have to be the day to day interaction with people, whether it be the family itself, the people attending the viewing and/or the clergy.



*2020, The Pennsylvania Burial Company
& Baldi Funeral Home, South Broad Street*



Victor L. Baldi, Sr.



Top hats for funerals at 9th and Hall Streets in 1922

Background: Horse-drawn hearses at Baldi's first funeral home 1906

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Q Does your belief in God impact the way you care for and comfort families and tend to the deceased? In what ways?

A VB: As a Roman Catholic, our belief is to serve others as Jesus taught us to do. So that being said, I feel as though I do my part serving others when they come to me at the worst times of their lives. My faith in God helps me to deal with grief and death on a day to day basis; we are all born to eventually die. Every funeral teaches me something new and engrains me with more knowledge about people and Christ; it makes me a better funeral director.



From Left: Victor E. Baldi, Victor Baldi, III, Funeral Director of Baldi Funeral, Linda Baldi, Louis Baldi, Lea Jacovini, P. Zachary Jacovini, Peter J. Jacovini, Funeral Director of Pennsylvania Burial Home, Alessia Jacovini, Eva Jacovini, Lilah Jacovini

PJ: I have a strong Christian faith so when I get a chance to share that with families in their time of need, it is extremely rewarding. My favorite psalm from the Bible is Psalm 23 which can bring much comfort as well. My prayer and hope is that my belief in God impacts every step I take in every aspect of my life.

Q When was the first time you remember learning about Saint Rita of Cascia? How does the life, virtues, and faith of Saint Rita impact your life and funeral ministry?

A VB: My grandparents were parishioners of Saint Rita of Cascia Church. I remember attending Sunday Mass with my grandparents, who both had their Funeral Masses celebrated there. Saint Rita is a perfect role model of faith. Her faith was beyond the wisdom or understanding of mankind. I also enjoy attending the annual Feast Day Mass with my wife, who has a deep devotion to Saint Rita.



Saint Rita side altar, Upper Shrine

PJ: I was a Saint Rita parishioner like my father and his father. I married the love of my life there in 1999, Lea Strizzi. For my family, all roads lead to the National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia. Funerals have been there and we baptized our first born there in 2002.

VB: The National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia is like home. It sits two blocks from the funeral home and shares so much history. As I watched the Shrine being built, it was so beautiful to see people from all over the country come to visit. There is a diverse congregation and the Augustinian priests just add to the warmth you feel when you enter through the doors. Their devotion to service is second to none.

Q Is there anything else that we should know, either about your connection to Saint Rita, your important work, and/or your personal journey?

A VB: I plan to continue to support the Shrine and look forward to watching it flourish and grow for generations to come. God bless!

PJ: I'm sure I fall short most days, but my goal each morning is to be a blessing in somebody's life. It is more rewarding to be that blessing rather than to look for blessings.