

Magner Funeral Home turns 100

By CAROLINE
SADOWSKA
SPECIAL TO THE HOUR

NORWALK — This spring, the Magner family marks the 100th anniversary of Magner Funeral Home, located at 12 Mott Ave. in Norwalk.

Brothers Michael Magner and Jay Magner currently operate Magner Funeral Home, with sister Maribeth Magner Hemingway serving as their office manager.

Their great-grandfather, James H. Magner, founded Magner Funeral Home in 1912 and turned it over to his sons — J. Cletus Magner and Paul F. Magner — in 1934.

"I think he'd be pretty happy to know that something he started out of a livery business has been going on for so long," Michael Magner said. "We didn't know him, of course, and our grandfather died when we were young, but we knew our father and I'm sure those ideals were passed down. We can assume we're doing things the way he would have wanted."

"People tell us we're doing things the same way," Hemingway added. "We have families that have been coming to us for years, through their generations and through our generations."

While they were growing up, their father, James P. Magner was running Magner Funeral Home and the family lived upstairs until after Hemingway was born. Over the years, both

Michael Magner and his wife, and Hemingway and her husband, also rotated through the upstairs apartment.

"It's a business where you can't plan too far ahead," Michael Magner said. "Our father couldn't always be there when we were growing up, and it was the same way for our children."

Early on, none of the three siblings planned to go into the family business, but all came to it in their own time.

"I was halfway through college and didn't know what I wanted to do. The best job I ever had was lifeguarding at Calf Pasture. I worked here between my junior and senior year, but it was the last thing I thought I wanted to do, you catch a lot of abuse for it," Michael Magner said. "When our father died, it was only then I realized what people are going through and that you can help them."

For Jay Magner, too, his father's death provided a turning point. Going to school in Florida at the time, he came back to Connecticut and began working with his brother.

Working with family is rarely simple and when coupled with a high-stress environment, the three siblings have worked to navigate their own family dynamics — with Hemingway often keeping the peace.

"I love it, I'm in the middle," Hemingway said. "I figure out how they can work together."



Hour photo / Erik Trautmann

The three Magner siblings, Maribeth Hemingway, Michael Magner and Jay Magner, are the fourth generation to operate Norwalk's Magner Funeral Home.

"She's the glue," Jay Magner said.

And while difficult funerals like the death of a child can be a tough thing for the staff to witness, it's the simple "thank you" they receive afterwards that keeps them going year after year.

"I hear from the families," Hemingway said. "It's a good feeling knowing my brothers are helping people get through a tough time."

While large funeral companies have approached them over the years, the Magner family has chosen to remain independent and family-owned.

"It takes all the personalization out of it — you're working 9-5, it becomes your job instead of your life," Hemingway said. "When someone walks through the door here, they become part of our family."

"We open the doors and this becomes their home," Jay Mag-

ner echoed.

The Magners pride themselves on a solid reputation that is 100 years and counting, a record of trust and hard work to ensure that everything is handled with professionalism and care.

"Who knows, maybe our grandkids will keep it going. We didn't think we were going to go into it," Jay Magner said. "Maybe we'll be here in another 100 years."