Confab aims to raise mortuary standards

CEBU, Philippines — At least 300 mortuary owners and embalmers across the country gathered during the 14th Annual PMA Convention on July 24 to 26 at the Cebu Grand Hotel in Cebu City.

With the theme “Focus on Total Customer Service,” attendees discussed the latest trends and issues affecting the industry.

Philippine Mortuary Association, Inc. President and Cosmopolitan Funeral Homes Chairman Renato Dychangco Jr. said they make sure to upgrade their services constantly to uplift the standards of the industry.

The topics discussed included repatriation of cadaver, environment protection and responsibilities, engaging millennials as next generation business leaders, diversifying during lean times, quality service, and creating loyal customers.

Speakers were from the Department of Health and other government agencies, the US Embassy, and international guests such as Craig Cadwell, vice president of American embalming supplier The Dodge Company.

Cadwell talked about the funeral directors’ guide for relevant funerals and gave tips on how not to mess up a good embalming and overcome a bad one.

Dychangco said industry trends include the latest technology and techniques on embalming and the right chemicals to use depending on the cause of death so as to create a life-like appearance for the deceased during the final moments.

“Mao na ang giapas nato karon. At least, during the time of viewing, dili kuyawan ang family motan-aw. Imagine, this would be the last time they would pay respect and see their loved ones. They will remember that for life. If makita nila na rested siya, they will have peace of mind (That’s what we aim to achieve. At least, during the time of viewing, family members won’t feel scared. This would be the last time they can pay their respects and see their loved ones. They will remember that for life. If they see that the deceased is well rested, they will have peace of mind),” he said.

An exhibit was also staged during the three-day convention, showcasing the latest models of caskets, funeral and embalming products, cooperative banks, and a Hong Kong-based company, Sage Funeral Services Ltd, that pioneered the eternity gem services turning the ashes of the deceased into personalized gems.
For Dychangco, the memorial services industry in the Philippines lives up to global practices since players here adopt the Western Way of taking care of the dead. In fact, he said, Asian counterparts such as China try to follow the Philippines’ way of a more sanitized embalming process.

Dychangco said since he became the PMA president in 2005, he initiated the annual convention to serve as avenue among industry players to trade knowledge and experiences.

“Even if we are competing with each other, we share with them, we tell them things that need to be done. If we don’t, it will destroy the industry,” he said.

He said he can understand the apprehensions of some mortuary owners in innovating themselves especially those who are struggling to survive during lean seasons.

This is the reason why he invited cooperative banks to the convention for possible partnerships with funeral directors for financial support.

**Hope**

As they ensure the dead receive the respect they are entitled to, players in the death care services industry also hope that they, too, get the respect they deserve.

For the longest time, Dychangco said, the public saw their job as unsophisticated and unprofessional.

“That’s what happened to me before. When I was studying in USC, if I introduced myself and they asked me what business I am engaged in, moingon gani ko funeral home, imbis mo-lamano, mura hugawan ba because they can see how we were doing things before,” he said.

Dychangco who grew up in the business his father founded in 1948 said being in the profession is not something to be ashamed of.

After college, he went to the United States and saw how highly regarded funeral directors there are. There, he saw how the community has accepted the kind of work that they do.

When he returned to the Philippines, Dychangco made sure to apply what he learned abroad, particularly the standards of the work.

He said the impression on those engaged in caring for the dead is changing gradually but Dychangco believes there is more that needs to be done for the industry to survive and for members of the industry to finally get the treatment they yearn from the public.