

Local Lincoln control is re-established by Roper & Sons purchase of Metcalf

by Tom Johnson

In a reversal of an earlier trend, Roper & Sons Funeral Services has acquired Metcalf Funeral and Memorial Services from Prime Succession, a national funeral home chain. Metcalf had been controlled by out-of-state companies for more than a decade.

"It was a good opportunity for us to purchase Metcalf," said Tom Roper, owner of Roper &

Sons. "The great thing about this is we've had great endorsement by the Metcalf family."

The purchase unites two of the oldest and most familiar names in Lincoln funeral services. Roper & Sons was founded in 1901 by Tom Roper's great-grandfather and moved from a downtown location to 4300 O St. in 1960. Today the company employs 40 people, eight

Continued on page 16.



Olson and Roper with Bob Metcalf portrait ...

Roper & Sons

Continued from page 1.

of them licensed morticians, and provides 700 funerals a year.

Metcalf was formed in 1962 when Bob Metcalf, then a Roper employee, purchased the former Helmsdorfer Funeral Home. In addition to its colonial-style building at 27th and P streets, Metcalf operates satellite facilities in Firth and Ceresco. Together they conduct 150 funerals each year.

In 1992 Bob Metcalf, nearing retirement, decided to sell the funeral home to Service Corporation International. It was later spun off from SCI with other mortuaries to form Prime Succession.

"That was the period of time when consolidators were coming in and purchasing properties right and left, and giving pretty good money for them," Roper said.

In mid-2003, Roper learned that Prime Succession was going into bankruptcy and moved to acquire Metcalf. The purchase was finalized on Jan. 28.

Roper released Metcalf's Prime Succession management and retained a staff of three employees who had worked with Bob Metcalf — manager, Steve Olson, and associates, Sue Vlcek and Scott Edstrom. Their work will be supplemented by Roper staff as needed.

Tom Roper, 42, grew up with the family funeral home business and started working part time in 1981. He attended the University of Nebraska, then finished his schooling at the Dallas Institute of Funeral Services and became a licensed funeral director in 1986. Roper and his wife, Jan, have two daughters, Liz, 14, and Alexa, 11. He said his experience in the industry has made his family a top priority.

"In our business you see a lot of different family dynamics and learn valuable lessons about the importance of family relationships," he said. "Family is very

important to me."

Roper makes a point of attending events such as Liz and Alexa's athletic meets and dance recitals, but also finds time for hunting and golf.

"I found out the office is going to run fine whether I'm there or not," he said.

Roper runs a company in an industry that is challenged by occasional bad press and rising costs.

"The perception is out there that funerals are extremely expensive," he said, "so you try not to raise your prices and still provide an honest and dignified service. It's hard to keep costs down."

He said the typical funeral today costs about \$5,700, plus cemetery expenses. Roper is working to add value for families.

"One of the things we're doing here is to try to educate people before tragedy strikes about what they're going to experience and feel," Roper said. "We also have a person who does grief counseling."

Another trend is more personalization of funeral services.

"We try to incorporate some kind of pictorial tribute," Roper said. "We scan photographs and put them together with music to create a brief video history of the individual's life. We encourage people to bring in items that were important to them and put them around the visitation room."

Roper is still identifying improvements to be made in the Metcalf properties. For now, they will be getting equipment for the video tributes, as well as painting and other updating. The facility in Ceresco may eventually be demolished and replaced with a new structure.

But one thing won't be changing.

"We will keep the Metcalf name," Roper said. "Bob was a great man in this community and a good community leader. We're proud to have his name associated with us."