



Laura Sussman who along with her partner Wendy Kraft, operate the only Jewish-owned and operated funeral home in Las Vegas. The tagline for Kraft-Sussman Funeral Services says it all – “Who Better To Care ... Than Two Jewish Mothers?”

“It just seemed appropriate,” said Sussman. “Jewish mothers are nurturing, kind, caring, compassionate ... everything you want a funeral director to be.”

When the first-generation funeral directors opened their business three years ago, they knew they wanted to offer a different approach to funeral service than what was found in their community.

“We don’t want to be like everyone else,” Sussman said. Recently, the funeral home handled the arrangements for a stillborn birth. The family wanted to see the infant one last time, a request Sussman was more than willing to grant. “Someone asked why we were letting the mother come in to see the child,” Sussman said. “How could we tell someone they couldn’t? Emotionally, this is what the mother needed.”

Sussman and Kraft have three children, who range in age from 18 to 23. It’s the lessons learned on the playground that have allowed them to look at situations from a mother’s perspective. “Mothers look at things differently,” Sussman said. “We think with our heads – and with our hearts.”

Kraft, who has been licensed as a funeral director for six years, previ-

ously worked at a corporate firm. Families would often come in and ask if the funeral home had a female funeral director or a funeral director who was a mother. “Mothers, by their very nature, are nurturing,” Sussman said. “Many families feel more comfortable with a woman because they feel that they will get the time, compassion and sensitivity they need to make choices without feeling pressured.”

Sussman, who came to funeral service after 30 years of leadership in Jewish nonprofit organizations, said her prior career has helped hone her skills in her new career. “I might not be the best businessperson, but I understand the emotional toll illness and death can take on a family,” she said. “That’s why, when we designed our funeral home, we made the decision to make it not look like a funeral home. And it might be a mother thing, but we’re also really big into continuing education, especially for nurses.”

It is Kraft’s and Sussman’s goal to help medical professionals to understand the importance of the continuity of care from illness of death. “Our goal is to respect what is best for the family,” Sussman said. “They should never be alone or feel that someone

AT A GLANCE

Funeral Home: Kraft-Sussman Funeral Services, Las Vegas

Years of Service: 3 years

Children: Elyse, 22; Leah, 20; Emma, 18

Favorite “Mom” Moment: Our last vacation, which was 10 days of bliss. After getting through the teenage years, it is wonderful to see our girls getting along so well, and loving to be together as a family.

isn’t listening or doesn’t care.”

Although the hours required being an owner and funeral director may be unpredictable, they have provided a more meaningful experience for Sussman. “When I was working in the nonprofit, I did have moments that I regretted not being able to be there for my family because I was at work,” she said. “So I try to make myself as available for my funeral families as I can, whether that means meeting during off-hours or going to a family’s home.”

And now that her own family is grown, Sussman and Kraft go out together for those middle-of-the-night calls. “It’s nice to have someone with you; we get to spend time together and that’s important,” Sussman said.

While none of their children have yet to show an interest in funeral service, they’re more than willing to lend a hand. “They’re really adapted well,” Sussman said. “They support our choices, and they support us. They understand that we have to prioritize and sometimes meet the needs of another family first. At the same time, they know we are always there for them.”

Staying connected with family, Sussman said, “helps you get your priorities straight and appreciate the moments you have together. Sometimes in the rush of daily life, we forget that.”