

A Modern Approach to an Old Prep Room

Greg Jones has been a funeral professional for more than four decades.

So, when the manager of The Wood Mortuary in Greer, South Carolina, decided to redesign his funeral home's preparation room, he knew what he wanted.

"The room has served us well, but we were finding it harder and harder to keep up with (Occupational Safety and Health Administration air quality) standards in the room, so we decided to make changes," Jones said. "I just felt we could do better than we were doing and provide better working conditions for our employees."

With his extensive experience, Jones thought he'd be able to design the room he wanted. But the more he researched what it would take to improve air quality in the room, the more he came to believe he was out of his depth.

"I realized I needed someone who specialized in this," he said.

Jones turned to Duncan Stuart Todd Ltd., an architectural design firm based in Boulder, Colorado, that specializes in the design of funeral home preparation rooms.

The firm redid the room for Jones, providing a modern, high-capacity air flow system and an ergonomic design

intended to make the 20-foot by 20-foot room a pleasing, safe and efficient place to work.

"My staff loves it," Jones said. "They are proud of it, and they never dreamed we would have such a nice room to work in."

The Wood Mortuary has been serving Greer since 1902, when John D. Wood established a funeral home on the second floor of his grocery store in this southern mill town.

The funeral home moved into its present location, which is actually two houses that were joined together, in 1938, Jones said.

Wood Mortuary employs 11 funeral directors and serves about 600 families per year at its single location, he said. Nine of the funeral directors are responsible for embalming, and they worked at a two-station room located behind the chapel on the funeral home's first floor.

The room was last renovated about 25 years ago and had a tiled floor, walls and counter space. While air quality still met OSHA standards, performing any renovations on the room was difficult, since all four walls

were made of brick, Jones said.

When planning the project, Jones worked with Duncan Todd, a principal of the design firm, and Cunningham-Waters Construction Co. Inc., a local building firm.

Cunningham-Waters had worked with Wood in the past and also does medical construction. The company understood what goes into prep room construction, Jones said.

The project was slated to start in November 2016 and, because work was expected to take several months, the first order of business was building a temporary preparation room in the funeral home's warehouse before beginning demolition of the existing room.

The prep room's proximity to the chapel raised the possibility of the project interfering with the funeral home's responsibility to families. To avoid this, Cunningham-Waters agreed to stop work at least an hour before any scheduled services. While this agreement extended the construction period longer than anticipated, it was important the project not interfere with services, Jones said.



Greg Jones, manager of The Wood Mortuary in Greer, South Carolina, stands in the funeral home's renovated prep room. The prep room has two embalming stations that are fitted with PrepArm localized exhaust systems and three exhausts at the foot end of the room. The room was designed to provide a better work environment than the old prep room, right. (Photos courtesy of Duncan Stuart Todd)



The construction crew stripped the room down to the bare brick walls and then began following Duncan Stuart Todd's design to reconfigure the space.

In addition to designing the renovation, as part of its Premier Source service, Todd's company also provided all the equipment and materials called for in the renovation.

"They plan so well and everything is so exact that they know, down to the last quart of paint, exactly what you are going to need," Jones said.

A key part of the renovation was installation of a new PrepAir G2 HVAC system, with three exhausts on the foot-end wall at each embalming station. The system was designed by Todd's father, J. Stuart Todd, in the 1990s, and is the only exhaust system on the market designed exclusively for prep rooms, according to Todd. The exhaust system feeds fresh air into the room from the head-end and ensures there is "100 percent fresh air coming into the room and 100 percent of the air then being evacuated," Todd said.

Each preparation station is also

Left: The renovated prep room includes new Dodge embalming machines at each station and (below) decedent lockers.
(Photos courtesy of Duncan Stuart Todd)



equipped with PrepArm localized exhaust ventilation systems. The PrepArms, which resemble the movable lights found in dental offices, are fitted with see-through splatter hoods and high-intensity LED lights. Embalmers can move the hood as they work, further ensuring complete ventilation while also providing a bright, safe space.

The room originally had table drains enclosed in large, tiled pedestals rising from the center of the room. Todd removed them and relocated the drains to the counter at the foot-end of the room, clearing space and improving work flow in the area.

He removed the tiled countertops and cabinets and replaced them with nonporous cabinets and countertops built to withstand repeated washing. Each station has a Dodge embalming machine with automatic pressure control. Each also has a 30-foot hose stored in an overhead hanging reel for use during body washings and for cleaning the room.

"The owners elected to put in extra conveniences to give the staff all the tools they need to do the best job they can," Todd said. This includes a Mortuary Lift Ultimate 1000 Lift mounted on the ceiling that can be positioned over either of the stainless-steel preparation tables.

Bodies are dressed in the prep room, so Todd's design includes three open decedent lockers for storing the shoes, clothes and jewelry families provide for their loved ones.

An OSHA-required deluge shower and emergency eye-wash station were also installed.

The floor has a center drain and is covered with seamless hospital flooring that continues up to the foot of the raised cabinets. This creates a bathtub effect and allows for thorough cleaning and disinfecting of the room, Todd said.

The walls are painted with nonporous paint. An exterior window was closed up and Todd's design called for installation of a hollow steel door

and airtight frame with keyless entry pad for security. Selection of the materials was based on OSHA requirements.

"It actually cost a good bit more than I initially thought it would. But when I had the initial plan in my head, I didn't realize what products would be needed in flooring, in countertops, cabinet surfaces – even nonporous paint," Jones said. "They send the total package, they handle every single item and then they work closely with the contractor on installing it."

Todd said working with Cunningham-Waters ensured the project went smoothly.

"Dealing with a very old building posed some unique challenges. We were fortunate to have a builder who was very familiar with the existing construction," Todd said.

Jones said he and his staff were pleased with the finished project. He thinks a modern, well-equipped preparation room will help retain staff and attract new employees. •