

## The Embrace of Dying: How We Deal with the End of Life Documentary Series to feature a Day in the Life of Mortuary Students at Wayne State University



Professor Sharon Gee-Mascarello



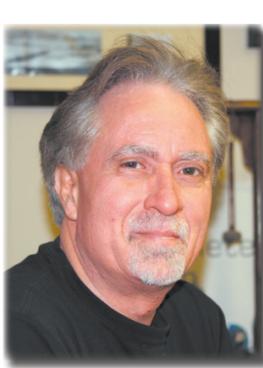
(L to R) Lauren Shumaker, Jillian Rutherford, Professor Matt Smith, and Gabriele Ducharme



Student Mechaela Pelton modeling while Keith Famie films



Professor Matt Smith and Student Conor Schwehofer



Keith Famie



Student Conor Schwehofer showcasing his art modeling project of fellow student and friend Scott Young.



Jillian Rutherford

**WIXOM, MI**— The students from the Mortuary Science Program at *Wayne State University* will appear in an upcoming PBS documentary series production that will illuminate how individuals and cultures handle end of life. *The Embrace of Dying: How we deal with the end of life* series was developed by 10-time Michigan Emmy award director/producer *Keith Famie* with *Visionalist Entertainment Productions*.



Matt Smith discussing hair restoration and modeling techniques.

Famie and his team, working closely with **Mark T. Evely**, Wayne State Mortuary Program Director and funeral director, will document a day-in-the-life of the training, education and emotion of becoming a funeral director. "I'm confident this episode of the 13-part series will shed light on the value funeral directors have in their communities," said Famie. The filming took place during the 2015 winter semester.

In his interview Evely shared his own path to entering this profession. Like so many, he was inspired by a moment in time. As a young teenager working at his local funeral home in a small town, a fellow high school student was killed in a car accident. She was transferred to the funeral home where Evely worked. He would be a part of preparing for her final good bye with the family and friends from the close-knit community. "I knew at that moment this is what I was called to do."

While shadowing mortuary science student and future funeral director **Jillian Rutherford** through her classes, Famie spent an afternoon in **Matt Smith's** Restorative Arts class. Matt Smith embalmed over 13,000 cases and is known worldwide for his ability to care for the deceased who have faced traumatic deaths or diseases that have caused them to lose their recognizable appearance. Matt teaches the students procedures that will allow family and friends to say goodbye to their loved one with a vision as if they had fallen asleep.

Students including **Jillian, Gabby Ducharme, Andrea Sebbly, Connor Schwehofer, Scott Young** and **Pat Kenrick** spent the day turning a styrofoam head covered in clay to the likeness of a photo of the per-

son of their choice. While most students chose family or friends, one student chose David Bowie.

Jillian was accompanied to the Eugene Applebaum College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences at Wayne State University where she attended a cremation certification class put on by the *National Funeral Directors Association*.

Professor of Embalming, **Sharon Gee-Mascarello** has been teaching at Wayne State for 17 years. Jillian embarked on her final test of embalming and preparing a deceased in the embalming lab, and as expected by her professor, Jillian successfully accomplished the procedure, giving this person the dignity, respect, and care that the program teaches its students to uphold as their principles. It seems there is no shortage of these poor souls who find their way to the Wayne State mortuary science program due to lack of either family or the funds for a proper burial. After watching the love and care that's taken into their preparation, you gain a real sense of just how wonderful this service is to the Metro Detroit community.

Famie asked Jillian why she chose this profession. While she was working, she simply responded, "I want to be there for people in a time of loss and difficulty in their lives."

Completing his time with the students, Famie reflects, "I am sure the audience will find it interesting and fascinating to learn not only the depth of necessary training, both scientifically and psychologically, that goes into this profession, but also why these students choose this career path. Make no mistake: these are kids only a few years out



(L to R) Students Patrick Kenrick, Jillian Rutherford, Connor Schwehofer, Gabriele Ducharme, Andrea Sebbly and Scott Young.

of high school. Some come from families in the business, so-called "legacy students", while others have chosen this path for their own personal reasons. One thing is absolutely for sure. These caring young men and women will someday be caring for you and me and most importantly will have the responsibility of helping our loved ones as they come together to say goodbye to us."

"I'm excited and proud that we will be able to feature the day in the life of these wonderful people who have chosen a profession that so often is marred with misunderstanding. I am certain this film and their stories will change that perception. The series, through our featured professionals, such as funeral directors, spiritual leaders, psychologists, physicians, and authors, as well as very personal stories of people and families facing end of life issues, will create an opportunity for open discussions about personal end of life issues for both young and old," concluded Famie.

Of Famie, Matt Smith said, "This is a man with a vision to make funeral service important from the perspective of the public. He is dedicated to repair the bruised eye funeral service has suffered in recent years with news and media bashing contests."

"The Wayne State University Mortuary Science Program is proud to be a part of this important documentary. We recognize

the importance of getting out the message that funeral service professionals are dedicated to serving their communities with a high sense of ethics and professionalism," said Evely. In addition to Wayne State, the series has received endorsements from many organizations including Hospice of Michigan, University of Michigan, *Michigan Funeral Directors Association*, and the Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network, along with many businesses and individuals.

The series is slated for completion in fall 2015, accompanied by a theatrical release that will tour several major cities. Planned events in support of the film's premiere tour will benefit local hospice organizations in various ways. The series includes the history of hospice, following then-CEO *Dorothy Deremo*, director of Hospice of Michigan in London, England last summer. Other topics include the history of a funeral director in America, right to die issues, Gift of Life organ donors, why we grieve, why we perform military honors funerals in America and featured interviews with well-respected authors on afterlife experiences. For a list of all featured individuals, which includes many funeral directors, or to see a trailer for the film and review production filming that has already taken place over the past year, visit [www.embraceofdying.com](http://www.embraceofdying.com) and click "Embrace of Dying."