

J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home: Third generation carries on 75-year-old 'ministry'

By Dan Yount
The Cincinnati Herald

The J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home in Avondale is celebrating 75 years of serving Cincinnati families, with the business currently operated by the third generation of family members, brothers J.C. Battle III, Lynwood Battle Jr. and Winona Battle-Oliver.

The J.C. Battle Funeral Home was founded by J.C. Battle Sr. and his wife, Theresa Battle in 1932 at Copeland & Battle at 832 Barr St. in the West End. The business was later moved to 838 W. 7th St. in 1934, and then to its current location at 543 Rockdale Ave. in Avondale in 1959.

J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home continues to live up to their call of being "The Family Morticians" as the business observes its 75th anniversary.

"We want our families to feel at home here and to feel as comfortable as possible as they begin their grieving process," said Lynwood Battle Jr. "Also, we offer personalized service so that no two funerals are alike, with the center piece of our services being the professional tribute videos, which we started to provide in 1991."

The video tributes are carefully crafted using family photos woven in beautiful landscapes and other familiar scenes from the deceased's home area, with background music selected by the family.

"We try to include pictures from the family that make the family members laugh, that show their good times with the deceased to help them get through their grief," he said. "We want this tribute to be a celebration of their life, not just a slide show."

Battles was the first funeral home in the area to produce such video tributes, which the family members get to keep. The tribute program, which produces the videos of a loved one, also provides similar services for graduation, retirement, weddings and other events.

Services for veterans are especially unique, they said. The Battles honor deceased veterans with a full military funeral, including a 21-gun salute similar to what they would receive if they were buried at Arlington National Cemetery. They try to capture each veteran's story and present it in the tribute, they said. Ray Charles' rendition of "America the Beautiful" is played, and is often the emotional high-point of the service.

"Our business is all about the loved one and honoring their memory so there is a meaningful experience there for the family," Lynwood Battle said. "We also want the graveside service to be as memorable, because this is the last memory they will have of their loved one." Doves or balloons are released at the end of the graveside service so family members leave looking up into the sky rather than down at the gravesite, he said.

The Battles said because anything can occur during a funeral service that can interrupt the flow of the service, special attention is paid to ensure that all of the details fall in place so this does not occur. Mary Battle, wife of Manuel, has tended to many of these details for more than 40 years.

"Every family's loved ones who come through our doors must feel they are the most special family we serve, and we pay close attention to details," Lynwood Battle said.

During these tough economic times, families are experiencing hardships attending the funeral service for a loved one. They may also not be



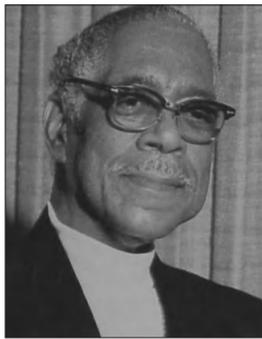
J.C. Battle III, at left, and Lynwood Battle, brothers and third generation members of the J.C. Battle family to operate the J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home are shown at the present location at 543 Rockdale Ave.



James C. Battle, Sr. founder of J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home



Theresa Battle, the wife of the founder James C. Battle Sr.



Lynwood Battle Sr., son of founder James C. Battle Sr.



Manuel Battle, son of founder James C. Battle Sr.



Lazelle Battle, the wife of Manuel Battle, Frances Battle, the wife of Lynwood Battle, and Theresa Battle, the wife James Jr., are shown at the funeral home in this 1955 photo.



Second generation operators of the J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home were, Lynwood C. Battle Sr., at left, and Manuel C. Battle.



Third generation members of the Battle family to operate the family funeral business are shown in this 1985 photo. From left, are James C. Battle III, Deborah Battle-Moore, Winona Battle-Oliver, and Lynwood Battle Jr.



J.C. Battle III and Lynwood Battle Jr., display video tribute presentation in the seating area of their funeral home.



J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home when it was at 502 East 13th St. during the years 1962 to 1987.



J.C. Battle III, at left, and Lynwood Battle Jr. display digital casket selection service.



First ambulance owned by the J. C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home

able to be there due to physical limitations. J.C. Battle & Sons Funeral Home, which first introduced the Tribute Program in 1991, a video presentation of a life remembered, now has another revolutionary breakthrough in funeral service. It is a visual memorial experience that celebrates a life well lived and connects families and friends across the globe in real time using a GlobalLinx videophone by which family members in any part of the world can view the service live and participate in it. The Battles provide a similar service known as See Your Troops Cincinnati, so local residents can carry on a live video conversation with a loved one in the military.

The selection of a casket is often a difficult time for the family, the brothers said. So, rather than taking the family into the basement of the home to look at an array of caskets, they make it possible for that decision to be made while looking at images on a computer screen in the comfort of their home or the conference room of the funeral home.

The Battles say they are the third generation of a family ministry, rather than a family business. "The clergy has the tough job of starting that bereavement process. We are called in then to carry on that process, which deals with the emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of grieving."

Starting this year, Hamilton County has contracted with J.C. Battle & Sons to provide burial services for indigents, becoming the first African American business to receive this designation.

As a community service, the Battles provide free seminars anywhere they are called "Planning for Life and Beyond; If only I had....," which provides information and a workbook to help families prepare for the financial requirements involving sickness and old age, estate planning and funeral preparations.

For more than 40 years, some member of the Battle family has been enrolled in the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. At one time, there were six family members operating as licensed morticians in the business. They were Manuel Battle, Lynwood Battle Sr., Lynwood Battle Jr., James Battle III, Deborah M. Battle-Moore and Winona Battle-Oliver.

"We are proud of our 75 years in the community," Lynwood Battle said. It is a privilege to be one of the oldest African American businesses in Cincinnati."