

# A Family of Entrepreneurs Believe in Cornerstone Alliance

It's truly a family affair of entrepreneurs when it comes to the Starks family business! Three generations are now involved in the Starks Family Funeral Homes & Cremation Services. Robert (Bob) and Carol Starks moved to the Twin Cities in 1961 and bought the funeral home from the Kerlikowske family, who started the business in the mid-1800s.

In 1986, their son Tom returned to the community after several years of working in the funeral home industry to join his father in the family business. Today, Tom's daughters Olivia and Laura are following in their father and grandfather's footsteps. Olivia recently received her mortuary degree and is now part of the funeral home management team. Her sister Laura, owner of the Cremation Services, is doing her internship at the funeral home and has plans to join the family business upon completing her mortuary degree.

Tom's wife and the girls' mother, Tracey, lost her battle with breast cancer in 2004. Helping families deal with loss is important to Tom and his daughters, and they feel that their experience helps them empathize with their clients. Olivia Starks is excited to join her family in the business. "Growing up in a small town, it was frustrating to me that everyone knew everyone else," said Olivia. "Now that I'm older, I have a deeper appreciation of the community and I'm delighted to be able to work here and live here."

Laura Starks was determined to choose a different career, since she grew up in the funeral home business. However, her mindset slowly changed as she watched her family help and serve the community. "My mother's death allowed me to understand what others are going through," said Laura. "Being able to help others get through a difficult time is rewarding to me."

Supporting the community's entrepreneurial spirit is important to the Starks family. According to Bob, "We are proud to invest in Cornerstone Alliance because they are the **ONLY** organization that works with businesses of all sizes and understands what they need to grow and prosper here." Tom added, "My family is very proud of this community and we try to give back in many ways. We invest in Cornerstone Alliance because of the support that they offer to local businesses. Together, we can make a more significant impact on the economic prosperity of Michigan's **Great** Southwest than individually."

Both Bob and Tom feel strongly about why the community should stand behind Cornerstone Alliance in delivering economic development outcomes. "As a local business here, it allows us to determine the type of standards we uphold and the type of service we want to provide to the community," said Tom. "And we support the community by keeping the dollars local. Putting investment back into the community, allows other small businesses to grow and succeed here."

"We all need to support the efforts of Cornerstone Alliance," said Bob. "For over 50 years my wife and I have built a strong and successful business. We started with one funeral home and now we have five locations throughout Berrien and Cass Counties. Cornerstone Alliance is here to help our local businesses be successful."

Bob, Carol and Tom have worked diligently to create a successful business. They are proud to welcome their daughters and granddaughters into the business. "We couldn't be more pleased to have Laura and Olivia be part of our team," said Bob. "Family businesses make this community a great place, and I'm delighted that both of my granddaughters will continue this tradition."



Bob & Carol Starks



Olivia Starks, Tom Starks, Laura Starks

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