

ON THE **MOVE**



Dave McComb
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How has COVID-19 impacted the air transportation of human remains?

McComb and Kaiser: The most significant impact we saw – and are continuing to see – is in the reduction in flights and overall airline capacity. Indeed, few industries have been harder hit than airlines, with domestic capacity reductions of more than 65% at times during 2020 and the near total elimination of international capacity. This, in turn, forced airlines to reduce flights and furlough staff to reflect this drop in demand – all of which combined to make the air transportation of human remains more difficult than ever.

What were your biggest challenges?

McComb and Kaiser: We faced two primary challenges – one external and one internal. As mentioned above, the major external challenge was in navigating an airline industry with a sudden and significant reduction in flights and capacity. This understandably created considerable challenges for our team to ensure those we serve and their clients were still getting loved ones home for a ceremony on time. The internal challenge was how it affected our team, obviously. First and foremost, for us, was ensuring their safety. We were able to transition our entire team to work-from-home in less than 10 days with no interruptions to service or availability – and our team remains work-from-home to date. It was a true team effort – and an example of the service mentality of EWA.

You've been a part of many high-profile and challenging events, including 9/11. Where does the pandemic rate in terms of challenges?

McComb and Kaiser: It's certainly been the most challenging period of our careers for a number of reasons, including the sheer duration of the pandemic, as well as the impact on our airline partners and our team that we previously mentioned. That being said, we're excited how we've emerged as a team stronger and better positioned than ever. We've added staff and invested in new technology – all to enhance the service we provide to our funeral service clients. Indeed, where many industries and companies – including their airline partners – were laying off or furloughing staff, we continued to add to our team throughout 2020.

DIGITAL BONUS

What do Dave McComb and Frank Kaiser predict for the future of the airline industry?

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Many countries closed their borders during the height of the pandemic. How did that impact you?

McComb and Kaiser: While we've always prided ourselves on our strong relationships with the major airlines' cargo operations, we leveraged and strengthened those relationships even more during COVID to ensure loved ones were still making it to their destinations – especially when coming from overseas or cross-border – on time despite severely reduced flight frequency. We can't do our job without the cargo teams for all the major airlines – they are our true partners.

Will the airline industry rebound going forward?

McComb and Kaiser: We see the industry continuing to operate at reduced capacity for the foreseeable future. It's encouraging to see activity begin to ramp back up, but we believe it will still be some time before they approach anything near pre-COVID levels.

What's the biggest business lesson you've learned during the pandemic?

McComb and Kaiser: Two lessons, actually: 1) always be willing to adapt, and 2) nothing is more important than the quality of your people. While you can't always plan for a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, you can make sure your organization is flexible and adaptable. Our team's willingness to adapt to these historically challenging circumstances has been critical in our ability to meet these challenges head-on. And our team's expertise and commitment to service have also been critical. Investing in your team is always important – and never more so than during times of crisis. We're incredibly proud of the way our team adapted and evolved to meet these unique challenges head-on.

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