

# Business Weekly

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## LEADERSHIP

# New director of two Berks cemeteries is youngest in state

Kemberly Soria looks to continue growth of Gethsemane and St. Mary's cemeteries.

By Susan Shelly  
FOR MEDIANEWS GROUP

When Kemberly Soria accepted a job as a receptionist at Gethsemane Cemetery, she never imagined she'd be named executive director less than four years later, replacing longtime director Timothy Kolasa, who filled that position for 35 years.

Soria credits Kolasa for preparing her for the role of leading both Gethsemane, located in Muhlenberg Township, and St. Mary's Cemetery in Reading — the care of which Gethsemane took over in 2016.

"Tim set me up for success, for sure," Soria said during a recent interview at Gethsemane Cemetery. "I can only hope to do as much work for this place as he did during his tenure here."

With her promotion, Soria, 26, of Reading, became the youngest executive director of any cemetery operation in Pennsylvania, and the first woman and Latina in that position.

### FROM CALL CENTER TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Soria, a wife and the mother of a six-year-old son and two-year-old daughter, was working from home for a call center in 2021 when an employment service referred her to an open position at Gethsemane. A self-described "people person," Soria was attracted to the receptionist position and applied.

Two years later she was promoted to the position of assistant to the director, a role intended to prepare her to eventually take over for Kolasa. When he unexpectedly accepted another position earlier this year, he assured Soria she was ready for the job.

"Kemberly has shown herself to understand the big picture of what's involved in the day-to-day management while having the needed experience in all aspects of administrative function," Kolasa

said in a statement. "I'm thrilled that Kemberly agreed to take on this position and will be directing the growth of both cemeteries for the coming years."

Although surprised to have assumed her new position so quickly, Soria is confident of her ability to lead.

"I learned so much as a receptionist here, and Tim provided much-appreciated direction during the time we worked together," she said. "I'm happy to be here and think I'll be around for a while."

### SORIA'S VISION

As executive director, Soria hopes to oversee continued growth of both cemeteries. She also wants to achieve greater involvement with the community through educational programs about pre-planning for funeral and burial arrangements.

She is particularly passionate about partnering with the Hispanic community.

"One of our main goals is outreach to the Hispanic community," said Soria, who in addition to English speaks Spanish. "We want to help people understand the value of pre-planning, especially in the case of a sudden, unexpected passing."

She also wants people to know that Gethsemane and St. Mary's cemeteries are welcoming places where families and friends of the deceased are encouraged to visit.

"There's a lot of history in a cemetery and we want people to be able to appreciate that," Soria said. "I think being in a cemetery gives you a sense of appreciation for family and heritage and life itself."

### ABOUT THE CEMETERIES

Gethsemane Cemetery traces its roots to 1895, when Monsignor George Bornemann, rector of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Reading, purchased a 54-acre farm along Kutztown Road.

A garden-style cemetery that



Kemberly Soria is the new executive director of Gethsemane Cemetery and St. Mary's Cemetery in Reading. BILL UHRICH/MEDIANEWS GROUP



Gethsemane Cemetery in Muhlenberg Township. BILL UHRICH/MEDIANEWS GROUP

includes a natural burial section, it has been expanded to about 75 acres and contains more than 35,000 graves.

The cemetery, which includes a 21,000-square-foot mausoleum with more than 2,000 crypts, is still administered by St. Paul's.

St. Mary's Cemetery began in 1912 when Father Adalbert Malusecki, rector of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Reading, purchased land on New Holland Road, just off Lancaster Avenue.

The cemetery includes a Veteran's monument and special plot adjacent to it for service members.

Both cemeteries fall under the auspices of the Diocese of Allentown.