

From a Basement Staircase to an Industry Shift: How the Stretcher-Stepper™ Was Built by Listening

Mortuary Lift Company announces the next generation of its Stretcher-Stepper, an all-electric removal system developed directly in response to years of feedback from funeral professionals navigating real-world removal challenges.

It all started when Katie Hill's brother, a fellow funeral director, hurt his back during a home removal. "He threw his back out trying to get someone out of a basement," Katie recalls. "And it wasn't just a quick recovery. He had to wait six months for surgery and hire another funeral director just to keep his business running."

For Katie, president of Mortuary Lift Company, that moment wasn't just personal, it was a stark example of a systemic issue in funeral service. "People die in unpredictable places. Basements. Narrow staircases. Cluttered bedrooms. But the equipment funeral professionals rely on hasn't always reflected that reality," Katie said, "And yet for years, funeral directors were improvising. They were standing stretchers on end, dragging weight, bending over in awkward positions. People were getting hurt."

That injury became the starting point for what would evolve into the next generation Stretcher-Stepper—a tool shaped not by a single design breakthrough, but by years of feedback, testing, and iteration in real homes, with real removals.

Designed in the Field, Not the Boardroom

Early concepts focused on one thing: helping funeral professionals navigate stairs more safely. Katie began exploring electric stair-climbing technology, envisioning something intuitive. Something roughly the same size as a traditional stretcher, familiar to use, but capable of powered ascent and descent.

"We wanted it to feel intuitive right away," she said. "If it looked and felt like a stretcher, people wouldn't have to relearn everything."

But once prototypes hit the field, the feedback started coming and it didn't stop. "It was too tall. People couldn't see around it," Katie said. "Especially women. And more women are entering the profession every year."

Funeral directors also raised concerns about family perception. An upright removal might be functional, but it didn't always feel appropriate in front of loved ones.

"They were cautious," Katie explained. "They asked, 'What will the family think if they see this outside the home?' That mattered."

Each concern sent the Stretcher-Stepper back to the drawing board. The unit was shortened. Tip-back loading was added. Lateral transfer capability followed. Wheels were integrated so the device could function like a stretcher, not just a stair climber.

Then came the moment that changed everything.

“We Have a Problem”

During a field demonstration at a medical examiner’s office, Katie watched as attendants struggled to lift a fully loaded unit from ground level into a vertical position.

“I couldn’t do it,” she said. “And one of the guys there couldn’t do it either. He was stronger than me, and he still couldn’t lift it.” Katie stopped the demo, “I pulled it out immediately. I wasn’t going to sell something I couldn’t physically use myself,” she said. “That’s when I knew—we have a problem.”

The solution wasn’t more training or better technique. It was eliminating lifting altogether. “Going all-electric wasn’t about following a trend,” Katie said. “It was about meeting the real needs of today’s funeral professionals. The average professional is over 55. As I mentioned, more women are entering the field. The physical demands haven’t changed—but the workforce has.”

The All-Electric Shift

The next-generation Stretcher-Stepper now electrically raises and lowers from horizontal to vertical at the push of a button. It climbs and descends stairs using powered secondary wheels. It loads like a traditional stretcher into a vehicle. And it eliminates the need for manual lifting entirely.

“The biggest complaint we heard was the strain of lifting from ground level to bed height,” Katie said. “So we electrified that movement. The second issue was transfers—people didn’t want to move from a stepper to a separate stretcher. So we eliminated that step entirely.”

Functioning as three tools in one—electric stair climber, stretcher, and dolly—the Stretcher-Stepper is designed for real removals, not idealized rooms.

“Houses are cluttered. Hallways are narrow. Stairs curve,” Katie said. “This had to work everywhere.”

With a 375-pound capacity and a lightweight 65-pound frame, the unit remains transportable while delivering controlled, powered movement in environments that often challenge traditional equipment.

“There is no basement too difficult, no stairway too steep or curved, no hallway too narrow,” Katie said. “That’s the reality of the job.”

Built Through Listening and Relentless Refinement

Industry-standard features like a quick-release hinge system allow smooth transitions between vertical and horizontal positions. When collapsed, the unit aligns with a standard removal cot for controlled transfers. For bed removals, the stand lowers to raise the Stepper to bed height, allowing straight lateral transfers with a BodyGlide™ board without lifting or tilting.

In vehicles, the Stretcher-Stepper slides beside a cot or locks securely into place.

“This product exists because we kept listening,” she said. “Every iteration came from funeral directors telling us what didn’t work.” That feedback-driven approach, she believes, is what makes the equipment resonate.

“It’s not a product we stopped refining,” Katie said. “We continued to elevate it because the people using it needed more help.”

A Second Attendant Without the Injury Risk

By removing manual lifting, keeping attendants upright and ergonomic, and minimizing transfers, the Stretcher-Stepper effectively functions as a powered second attendant without the injury risk.

“Our goal was to protect the people doing this work,” Katie said. “So they can stay healthy, stay in the profession, and focus on serving families.”

For Katie, the success of the Stretcher-Stepper isn’t measured just in specifications or features, but in longevity and satisfaction. Careers are extended by avoiding injuries and dignity is preserved during some of life’s most difficult moments.

“This started with one injury,” she said. “And it became something bigger because we didn’t stop listening.”

Availability

The Stretcher-Stepper is available through Mortuary Lift Company. Product demonstrations, technical documentation, and ordering information are available upon request.

For more information, visit: www.mortuarylift.com