

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors Pte Ltd Singapore

As the pandemic calms down, we shift our focus back to the general road safety reminder. We replaced the previous Covid-19 Vaccination campaign with a new phrase “Drive safely. We don’t want to pick you up!”. This phrase when used by funeral company serves as a humorous and memorable way to convey a serious message about road safety.

While it may seem unconventional for a funeral company to promote safe driving, the intention behind this slogan is to raise awareness and encourage responsible behavior on the road. By using a light-hearted approach, we aim to capture the attention of the general public and remind them of the potential consequences of reckless driving. This message implies that accidents can be fatal, leading to the need for funeral services. It’s a clever play on words that combines humor with a meaningful reminder about the importance of driving safely.

This slogan can be seen as a form of public service announcement, as it indirectly promotes road safety and urges individuals to be cautious while driving. It highlights our concern for the well-being of the community and the desire to prevent unnecessary accidents and fatalities.

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors saw the need to shift our focus back to general road safety, thus running this physical campaign using our company’s vehicles seems like the most suitable solution. We installed the “Drive Safely. We don’t want to pick you up!” sticker on our company’s vehicles that travelled around Singapore daily. As the vehicles travel around Singapore, we are able to spread the message of road safety. Places the vehicle travelled to include wakes and funerals held across the country.

Our campaign was eventually picked up and covered by the public and caught the local radio station’s attention which was then posted on their social media.

Through this campaign, the little action advocates safe driving and remind on-the-road drivers safe driving is crucial for protecting lives, minimizing accidents and injuries, preserving property, complying with laws, and promoting a safer, more responsible society. It is a collective responsibility that benefits individuals, communities, and the environment.

While we are constantly doing our best to educate the public with our offline methods – sticker message on our vehicle which travels around Singapore, the public are also picking up the message and posting them online.

methods are helping to spread the message even further targeting different dynamics of people. Our offline methods reach out to the pioneers, older generation public, whom are not so tech-savvy, which they will see when our vehicles are parked near the funeral wakes area and also on the road traveling. Whereas the online presence reaches out to more millennials, younger generations, whom are always on the social media and dark humour will engage with them easier as they could take such topic more lightly.

The funeral profession in Singapore is still considered a “dirty” profession. By showing that a funeral company likes ours is actively doing good, we were also contributing to the uplifting of the funeral profession in Singapore.

Baird Funeral Home Troy, Ohio

Baird Funeral Home strives to provide the optimum in service to the families we serve on a daily basis. As our firm's position statement indicates, 'Personalized Reflections' to help honor and remember loved ones in a uniquely special way we believe in personalizing all services to each family. We also believe in honoring this position of personalization in all aspects of our business and community involvement.

One of the most unique community involvements this past year would be a theme of celebration and recognition of history in our community service and outreach. We started off on August 6, 2022 as we helped celebrate our colleagues and friends' 100th year anniversary of their funeral home firm. It was a wonderful opportunity for their community, current and former employees, fellow colleagues and retired owner to all come together for a day of celebration. We were able to reconnect with many we have not seen since the start of Covid and reminisce with our colleagues and friends. This firm has walked the road of bereavement with many families in their community as well as experiencing many losses in their own lives over the years so it was even more heartwarming to be a part of a positive gathering for our friends and their community.

On April 27, 2023, members of our firm were able to assist with the 90th birthday celebration of one of the semi-retired priests in our community. Fr. Gene has been a dear friend to our firm and many of our staff members. Knowing our longtime relationship his family invited us to be a part of some of the preparation details and attending to items for the day of the celebration. This gentleman has been a blessing to so many families in our community and others over his many decades of ministry. Though he has battled his own losses and health issues he continues his calling wherever needed. He is a true inspiration for a life of service.

On May 2, 2023, we were able to join The Local History Library as they conducted a city cemetery walk in our town. Participants learned about the unique lives and/or deaths of six deceased residents. We became a sponsor of the tour after we were contacted closely to the

event date about possible options to mark one of the unmarked graves in the tour. This grave represented a gentleman who attempted to save victims in the Flood of 1913 in our town. He became a victim of the flood in his efforts. This same gentleman was honored posthumously when he was recognized as recipient of the Carnegie Hero's Medal. Our director, Tami Baird being a native of our community and a student of the local history including the Flood of 1913 felt it was only appropriate that we find a way to mark the grave at least temporarily until a marker could be arranged. With the help of our friends at the nearby monument company and cemetery crew we were able to quickly arrange for a permanent marker for the tour. The response to the tour and the subsequent marker was somewhat overwhelming. It was all so well received that a second tour was scheduled for June 13, 2023. We know that we cannot provide for all unmarked graves in our local cemetery but this seemed appropriate and timely to our community's history.

On May 20, 2023, our own firm was able to celebrate and recognize our own firm's 100 years of history in our community. Our firm's predecessors began their service to the community in the original building in downtown Troy. Our senior and retired director, Robert Baird joined the firm at the original property in 1956. The current location was built and opened in 1966 on North Market Street in Troy. We enjoyed sharing our history with our community and our appreciation to our forefathers and our community. We hosted an ice cream social on our property open to all in our community. We were honored that many families, clergy, colleagues, neighbors and former co-workers came to share in the day of celebration and appreciation.

As a firm, we had the opportunity and honor to once again serve the families of our community in their time of need while reflecting back and recognizing the history in our community and neighboring communities over the past year. We give thanks for the history in and around our communities and for the

opportunities we have been given. We look forward to the future with grateful hearts and optimism as we continue in our profession of care providing personalized service to our families and community.

**Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home
Hammond, Louisiana**

Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home, Denham Springs, LA; Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home, Ponchtoula, LA

Tender Love and Share Garden

Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home's main location is in rural southeastern Louisiana. Situated on 26 acres of the former farmland of the Ard Homestead, the property is blessed with rich soil that is perfect for cultivating crops. The Tender, Love, and Share Community Garden was the brainchild of owners, Brandon and Martha Thompson and originally came to fruition in 2019. The garden was inspired by the memory of Brandon's grandfather, Wildon Thompson who was well known for his abundant gardens and great generosity. Although "Paw Paw Will" has been gone for 30 years, his knowledge and green thumb live on through Brandon and will continue to be passed down to future generations.

Since 2019, the Tender, Love and Share Community Garden has expanded from a simple, 4 raised bed during springtime to over double the size, with harvests in both the fall and spring. This year, we added an expansive herb garden which has been especially well received and enjoyed by local cooks. The original goal of the garden was to provide healthy and nutritious produce to the Thompson Team, the families we serve, guests of the funeral home, and the needy in our community.

This year, we were able to add our local food banks, senior centers, churches, and nursing homes to that list. This year's harvest included cabbage, corn, pumpkin, squash, bell pepper, okra, lettuce, asparagus, cucumber, tomato, zucchini, broccoli, cauliflower, green onion, mint, thyme, parsley, dill, oregano, and basil. In addition to being a tremendous resource to our community, the Tender, Love, and Share Community Garden has become a favorite among the Thompson Team and has proven to be a great team-building opportunity. The staff enjoys taking time out of their busy day, to check on the progress of garden and see what is ripe for picking. There is just something about being in nature and getting your hands dirty that is good for the soul! Funeral guests are often seen touring the garden and are encouraged take whatever they'd like. During picking season, a basket of fresh produce is always displayed and available in our kitchen to anyone who would like to have it.

Although many funeral homes do not have the luxury of having nearly the amount of greenspace that we do, this idea can easily be replicated on a smaller scale with potted plants and a small herb garden. "The lesson I have thoroughly learnt, and wish to pass on to others, is to know the enduring happiness that the love of a garden gives." ~ Gertrude Jekyll

Brown, Hill and Reigle Funeral Homes Grand Blanc and Flushing, Michigan

In December 30, 2022, we hosted our first American Red Cross Blood Drive. Hosting at Brown Funeral Home was ideal, since it is one floor and there are no stairs. This accommodated all of the Red Cross donors and volunteers nicely.

In the weeks prior, the coordinator came out to the funeral to determine if the space was large enough and would be a good site, and they determined Brown Funeral Home would fit their criteria. The coordinator would contact us to provide the information, and fliers so we could display them both at the funeral home, and social media. They also had another group of volunteers, who took care of contacting the potential donors and making them aware of the upcoming blood drive. In addition, there was good communication between the Red Cross representative and us so we could host a successful blood drive.

The week of the Blood Drive, our amazing staff was there to move and take out any furniture which would create a large enough space for the drive. The morning of the drive, the volunteers were there setting up the cots, tables and various stations for donors. They also brought t-shirts for all of the donors to receive, whether they tried to donate or donated. In addition, they supplied the snacks and beverages for donors.

Our amazing staff also stepped up and donated, which is awesome. At the canteen area (where donors sit, drink and eat after donating) we were able to speak to some of the donors. Some of them mentioned this was their first time at Brown Funeral Home, and they complimented the space. It was a wonderful community event, and we hope to make this an annual event.

The American Red Cross had a goal of 31 donors and we were able to receive 24 donors. This donation was able to help save many lives, which we were so honored to assist in their efforts. Although this was our first time hosting, we don't plan on it being our last and we would love to make this an annual event.

We are so grateful that we were able to host this American Red Cross Blood Drive. We believe it is so important that we host community events in our area, and we look forward to hosting many more events in the upcoming years.

**Chambers and James Funeral, Pet and Cremation Services
Wellsburg, West Virginia**

Chambers and James Funeral, Pet and Cremation Services, Follansbee, WV

Chambers and James Funeral, Pet and Cremation Services Best of the Best Project for 2023 is a simple but impactful idea. Our idea is our very own parade float. We have purchased trailer which was originally a camper. That is the beauty of this project you can do a larger or smaller, whichever suits your funeral home or cemetery. We purchased this local which was the base of a camper. Once we were able to bring it to our property, we were able to purchase carpet for the flooring and made signs for the side of the float making a fixed and some parade float supplies. The float supplies were purchased from the internet which included floral sheeting and tinsel. Finally, some table skirts from a local catering hall that were throwing away. This new program of advertising of the funeral home has cost us about \$900. It is last us for years to come and is the cost of a professional float per parade. This year alone we were able to use the float for five parades so far which is a saving of over \$4,000.00.

So, lets get into why this form of advertising is an unique idea helped our funeral homes. First, we just love parades but at a parade our staff is able to connect with the community on a different level. This is a joyful event and we are able to wave and smile. It is like we are local celebrities. It goes back to old say, "It is better to know us and not need us than to need us and not know us!". This form of advertisement helps to take us out of the suits and the white shirts into shorts and golf shirts. It makes us connect with the community on a different level.

We were recently asked by our local Kiwanis Club if they could barrow the float for our community Christmas Parade. We said yes of course. We provided the driver and the blank float with our name on the side and they made it their own. The Kiwanis Club had riders and even signage to show their organization. They have already asked to reverse for the next parade. This is like an endorsement program. Even further for the small amount of funds that we put into the float we are able to help organizations. It is mainly a walking billboard.

Finally, as you can see from the photos, this is a simple project to help your community and our organizations. You can use it for yourself or for community groups. The possibility are endless. We have recently had a band on the float pulling around for a back-to-school program. So, when we say the possibilities are endless, we mean that.

We are so excited to share this idea as our 2023 Best of the Best project. We feel that it is unique, easy to duplicate, and has a huge impact for the funeral home through advertising as well as resource need for our community.

Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels Hutchinson, Minnesota

The Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels serve several communities in Central and South Central Minnesota. Our funeral directors, office administrators, and part-time funeral staff live, worship, play, and patronize local businesses in small towns, where their neighbor is more than an acquaintance, they are friends.

Our funeral staff realize that they need to be socially responsible and in order to do that, they have to be actively involved in their community. They strive to help make their community a better place to live and are proud to volunteer for community service events. This not only promotes our business, but also makes the community aware that our business cares for the town and the people that live there.

A few of the ways that our funeral staff volunteer and donate time in their community are: attend Lions Club Meetings and serve at their Fish Fry and Scholarship fundraisers ~ Sponsor Music in the Park ~ Participate in local Business Expos ~ Water Carnival (City Celebration) – donate driver and limousine use for “Miss” candidates ~ Rotary Club Member ~ Participate in High School and College Career Fairs ~ Civic and Commerce ~ Sponsor and Organize Mock Car Crash (high school demonstration) ~ City Ambassador ~ County Fair Board Member ~ Memorial Day Program ~ Safe Roads Coalition/Fatal Review Committee ~ Bowl-a-thon fundraiser for Alliance of Domestic Violence ~ Fun Runs ~ Coaching and/or volunteering for their children’s sporting event.

New people and families that have moved into our communities, as well as current community members, may not realize that one of the volunteers is a funeral director or a staff member. It may be that until they arrive at the funeral chapel for the first time, they recognize them and say “I’ve seen you at _____. I didn’t know that you were a funeral director or worked at the funeral home.”

This community presence outside of the funeral chapel is a small but crucial first step in developing a connection and building trust with families that may be served in the future. It is also an opportunity to meet new people. Community members have an opportunity to get to know the funeral directors and staff on a more personal level and, as a result, find comfort in knowing that when the time comes, their loved one will be treated with the utmost care and respect. Because of this, the Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels staff feels a special closeness to the families they serve.

**James Funeral Home & Northlake Memorial Gardens
Huntersville, North Carolina**

I had the unique opportunity to do an event that was completely outside of the box. We live next to the academic village of Davidson, NC (Davidson College). They have a film group that meets to discuss international films, that are all subtitled. <http://davidsonfilmclub.com>

One of my favorite international films is Departures. Departures is an award winning film:

Yôhirô Takita, Departures (Japan, 2009, 2h10). Oscar for Best FL Film of the Year, 34 wins and 8 nominations: Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor and Actress, Best Editing, Best Lighting. In Japanese w/English subtitles. [Regent Releasing/HereMedia]

I love Departures because it makes funeral service look so good. In this Japanese film you see the love and care given by this young man. Though not all like subtitles, I think the message is very important.

I connected with this film club and asked if they would consider this film as it met their criterion. I told them afterward I would love to lead a Q & A. Typically, these are led by college professors, but they did agree. They loved the movie and said it was the best Q & A session they had ever had. The questions were wonderful and everybody left with a much higher view of funeral service. They typically have 50 or so in attendance. We had 100 this night. I did not promote our funeral but instead the value of a funeral (which is easy to do following this movie). I also go to promote the value of viewing and the value of the local funeral director.

The coordinator sent these words following the showing--

I wanted to thank you again for your fine contribution to the screening of Departures last Saturday evening. I've received glowing feedback on this event, which very nearly filled the theater. I think that the announcement of your participation as discussion leader played an important role in drawing people in.

It was amazing how college professors that are not used to seeing a body present at a service (I know because we do their funerals) all of the sudden had so many questions around the value of the body being present at a service. Many of their questions centered around my thoughts on body presence.

It really is a blessing to promote the value of funeral service, and I especially enjoyed doing it in this out of the box way.

Jennings-Calvey Funeral and Cremation Services, Inc
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania
Scranton Area Cremation Care, Scranton, PA

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally
How a Funeral Home Engaged the Community to Reunite a Ukrainian Refugee Family

The war in the Ukraine is a devastating tragic event that has destroyed the lives of so many Ukrainians and shocked the world. Our funeral home found ourselves in a situation where we could provide safety and security by aiding in the relocation of a Ukrainian family to the United State. We have employed Hanna Savaterri, an American citizen whose country of origin is the Ukraine since 2006 and who has worked at our funeral home since 2020. When Russian invasion of the Ukraine began, Hanna was distraught that her only son, Rev. Yevhen Shmihel, a Ukraine Orthodox priest and his family were in danger like so many. Our funeral home associates did not think twice and immediately began organizing to bring Hanna's family of five to our community. Despite the labor-intensive process we achieved this goal in one week.

Hanna's family included Rev. Jake (Yevhen) Shmihel, age 44 and an Orthodox priest, (son, husband, father), Maria Shmihel age 45 (wife, mother), Angelina Shmihel, age 10 (daughter), Victoria Shurkhai-Shmihel age 22 (daughter, newlywed wife), Anatolli Shurkhai (son in law, newlywed husband). The family were in dire circumstances as the war in the Ukraine worsened.

Upon arrival they needed to find employment, and we provided economic opportunities for them while also addressing the reality of work force shortages within the funeral and other industries. Their arrival helped fill several open part-time positions which allowed us to continue to provide a high level of service. Rev. Jake provided an especially important role as a member of the clergy as it is paramount to ensure that clergy may be available for people in their time of need, and unfortunately there is also currently a shortage of members of the clergy.

Our funeral home in collaboration with our community provided a safe space where the family could build a new life. The process began when one of our funeral directors, Christopher C. Calvey, (Chris Sr.) saw a Facebook post from Uniting for Ukraine with the goal to bring refugees from the War in the Ukraine to the United States. This process had many facets to ensure proper paperwork was filed, procedures were in place to ensure a smooth passage and the family had resources upon arrival.

The word traveled through our community of the work our funeral home was doing for the family and this led to a Go FunMe page that raised nearly two thousand dollars in donations. A Shmihel Family Fund bank account was established with a personal donation from the bank manager. Necessary documents to sponsor Yevhen, Maria and Angelonia through "Uniting for Ukraine" were prepared pro-bono by Atty. Ernest A. Sposto, Jr.

There was a delay in the newlyweds Vitoria and Anatolli traveling because there was a typo on Anatolli's passport. Congressman Matt Cartwright (D PA-8th District) immediately wrote a letter leading to their ability to travel in a timely manner to the U.S. Transportation was arranged to bring the young couple to be reunited with their family in the home rented from the Clarks Green United Methodist Church for the whole family to reside in. The home had been the parsonage of a United Methodist church. A lease had been negotiated with the clergy and board of the church, but we even had an offer Dellin Isaac, from the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, located in Philadelphia offering secure housing if our original plan fell through. Funeral home staff secured brand new bedding and other community volunteers collected furniture and clothing. Friends of the Poor, an agency that accepts donations and supports those in need, collected the items and our funeral home employees transported the items from the Friends of the Poor to the family.

Fr. John Lapera, pastor of the Church of St. Gregory, Catholic Church in Clarks Green covered the cost of the transportation from the airport and the first month's rent. Msgr. Joseph Quinn, pastor Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Church provided food from a food pantry. Members of the Clarks Summit Presbyterian

church ensured the family had all of the information they needed to establish their new life. Local medical professionals were contacted and provided health examination. Sandy Lamanna, a highly regarded educator and community organizer took charge of enrolling Angelina into grade school organizing with the Abington Heights School District for an interpreter. Sandy also took her granddaughter and Angelina to purchase school clothing and items.

In addition to part time work at the funeral, the family was able to supplement their income through other employment which our funeral home staff arranged. Rev. Jake Shmihel, in addition to offering clergy assistance and other ad hoc work at the funeral home maintains a full-time position in a manufacturing plant. Maria Shmihel is a domestic worker and a pet supervisor at Doggie Day Care, a local day care provider for pets. She also started a business baking and selling cookies. Victoria Shurkhai-Shmihel has worked with a florist, in pharmacy and does office work. Anatolli Shurkhai, helps at the Methodist church next to where they live and is employed at a local business supervised by Bill Fiore, a neighbor and board member of the Clarks Green United Methodist church. The family also now arranges perogies sale at the Clarks Summit Festival, an annual event seeing 15,000 in attended. Additionally, the Shmihels have become very civically engaged and volunteer at other community events.

The Jennings-Calvey Staff, or as we refer the "funeral home family", graciously put every effort forth to reunite the family suffering under war time as commitment to helping others is a core value of our funeral home. After countless hours of planning, securing the proper paperwork, outreach to the community for assistance we felt a deep joy seeing the family reunited and safe and how they became part of our community. This humanitarian aid would not have been successful without the involvement and support of the community at-large. The Uniting for Ukraine organization was deeply grateful and acknowledged our work on social media. We feel this example embodies the criteria for a Pursuit of Excellence as award as it helped a family in a tragic situation, but also benefited our funeral staff as well as the community on so many levels. It demonstrates the power of people joining together to serve others through compassionate service.

**Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory
Ellensburg, Washington**

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory, Cle Elum, WA

On March 13 & 14, 2023, Johnston & Williams Funeral Home hosted a special event at the historic Roslyn Theatre in Roslyn, Washington, with the aim of both honoring the building's rich history and engaging with the community in which we operate. The event featured a screening of the movie "My Girl," which was preceded by a presentation by Henry Johnston on the history of the building and the role of funeral directors in small communities. (LINK to video recording of presentation found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P9u0PVK0qU>)

The event was promoted entirely on Facebook (cross promotion between the funeral home and the theatre), with an announcement video being aired live on February 16 (LINK to announcement video: <https://fb.watch/l4uitlxqXV/>). Leading up to the announcement video, we shared "clues" on our Facebook page to get people to try to guess what we were doing and what we would announce.

The Roslyn Theatre was chosen as the venue for two reasons: first, because it is situated in a small community that we serve, and second, because the building itself has a storied past - it served as a funeral home in Roslyn from 1900 to 1972. This made the theatre the perfect place to both acknowledge the history of the community and the profession with which we are most closely associated.

Henry Johnston's presentation was a highlight of the evening, offering attendees a glimpse into the important role of funeral directors in small towns. By sharing the history of the building, the Stoves and Davies families (original proprietors of Roslyn's only funeral home) and the profession as a whole, Johnston was able to highlight the essential work done by these individuals, often behind the scenes, to support and care for their communities.

The presentation was well-received and appreciated by all in attendance - both those from the community and those members of the Davies family who traveled over from the Seattle area to be our honored guests both nights of the event.

The choice of movie, "My Girl," was also significant - it provided an opportunity for attendees to gain a deeper understanding of the work done by small town funeral directors on a daily basis. The film is an emotional and compelling portrayal of the challenges faced by a young girl growing up alongside her father, a funeral director in a small community. By showcasing this unique and often overlooked perspective, the event helped to bring awareness to the vital role played by funeral directors and their teams in supporting communities during some of life's most difficult moments.

Perhaps most significantly, the event was free to the public, with Johnston & Williams paying for all tickets. This not only made the event accessible to all members of the community, but also underscored our firm's commitment to supporting the communities in which they operate. By hosting a free event that both honored the past and brought awareness to an important profession, our goal was to demonstrate our continued dedication to serving our community.

By all accounts, we believe that this was a deeply meaningful and thoughtful tribute to the history of Roslyn and the important work done by small town funeral directors. The choice of venue, movie, and presentation all worked seamlessly together to create an event that both educated and entertained attendees while also highlighting our firm's commitment to serving the community.

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory

Villa Rica, Georgia

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Douglasville, GA

The Jones-Wynn/Meadowbrook Team Launches "Retire Your Flag With Honor Program" in West Georgia Area

The Jones-Wynn Team, a funeral/cremation service provider in the West Georgia area, and its sister company, Meadowbrook Memory Gardens, a cemetery, are proud to announce the launch of their "Retire Your Flag With Honor Program." This program allows our community to drop off any and all American flags that are in need of retirement and/or are worn and should no longer be flown.

The Jones-Wynn Family and Meadowbrook Family are longtime supporters of supporting and honoring our United States Veterans. As an example, these end-of-life companies have offered a free burial space at Meadowbrook, along with an honorable DD2-14, for families who wish to bury their loved veterans locally rather than in a military cemetery.

To facilitate the program, the Jones-Wynn Team and the Meadowbrook Team have installed "Retire Your Flag With Honor Donation Bins" at two of their funeral home locations: Villa Rica Chapel at 306 Westview Drive, Villa Rica, GA 30180, and Douglas Chapel at 2189 Midway Road, Douglasville, GA 30135, as well as at Meadowbrook Memory Gardens at 1100 Hickory Level Road, Villa Rica, GA 30180. These bins provide a convenient and accessible drop-off point for individuals who wish to retire their flags in an honorable manner.

In an effort to ensure a respectful retirement for each flag, the Jones-Wynn Team and the Meadowbrook Team have established outdoor secure drop-off spots at each location, accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This commitment reflects their dedication to honoring the service of both deceased United States veterans and the retired American flags that symbolize our nation's history and values.

As part of the "Retire Your Flag With Honor Program," the Jones-Wynn/Meadowbrook Team will retire each flag by incorporating it into the cremation process of a United States Veteran. This symbolic act unites the service of a fallen hero with the emblem that represents our shared commitment to freedom and democracy.

Cheryl Bryce, a member of the community, said it best to describe our hearts on this service; "I haven't been flying Old Glory because I had no way to dispose of the old ones in a way Daddy would approve. Now, we are flying high again because Jones-Wynn Funeral Home will "retire" torn and tattered flags with the respect they deserve. They definitely are a Family Serving Families."

The Jones-Wynn Team is proud to offer this program as a heartfelt gesture of gratitude to all United States veterans and the service they have rendered to our country. By participating in this program, community members can contribute to a lasting tribute that upholds the integrity of both the flag and those who have bravely defended it.

**Leo P. Gallagher and Son Funeral Home
Stamford, Connecticut**

Leo P. Gallagher and Son Funeral Homes, Greenwich, CT; Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher & Son Community Funeral Home, Monroe, CT

Caring for our community is an integral part of who we are as a funeral home. In fact, one of the shirts that we wear at local events is a teal, "Caring for Our Community" shirt, with a large heart on the front. We are always looking for new ways to connect with and care for those around us.

Our community relations liaison, Wendy, has been a member of the Project Warmth committee for many years. Project Warmth was created to "help residents bridge the gap in energy assistance programs during the winter months." When the winter of '22-23 brought record high heating costs to homes in Connecticut, it was more important than ever to find ways to help neighbors in need heat their homes. The team at our funeral homes worked together to come up with the idea of a "Hot Cocoa Bomb Drive-Thru Giveaway" to raise money for Project Warmth.

A hot cocoa bomb is made up of a hollow sphere of chocolate which is filled with marshmallows and hot chocolate mix. The hot cocoa bomb can be placed in a mug and then covered with hot water or milk. The hot cocoa bomb melts and once stirred, all of the components come together to create a delicious cup of hot cocoa.

We looked at many different places online to buy a large amount of hot cocoa bombs. We were fortunate to find a local woman who had a small chocolate shop business. She was thrilled to make 150 hot cocoa bombs in the colors of our town, which are red and white. These colors were also perfect as the event was going to take place 10 days before Valentine's Day. We created flyers for the event, posted the flyers around town, and also promoted the event through our Facebook page. We used the saying "a Valentine's treat to turn up the heat" on all of our marketing materials.

On the day of the giveaway, we were excited for our event but also dressed in layers with warm coats, gloves and hats. It was one of the coldest days of the winter! We had lawn signs made to put at the entrance of the funeral home, balloons to guide the way to the giveaway, and a table set up with lighted hearts and P and W letters for Project Warmth.

We had a successful day as members of our community came to the event, took home many hot cocoa bombs and made generous donations to Project Warmth. We were encouraged by the positive response to our fundraiser and grateful to be able to pass on these donations to such an important cause. We would consider the "Hot Cocoa Bomb Drive-Thru Giveaway" a great success and know that local homes and hearts were warmed thanks to this special event.

**Memorial Funeral Home
Edinburg, Texas**

INNOVATION – RIO GRANDE VALLEY LITERACY CENTER

Memorial Funeral Home sponsored the Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center's 10th Annual Boots & Bling Gala. The event was held Friday, October 7, 2022, at the Regency Hall Galeria in Pharr and the theme was "Shine Bright like a Diamond & Support Literacy in the RGV!"

Velma and Leon have been proud supporters of the RGVLC for several years. In the past they have attended their fundraisers and donated items for the gala's live and silent auctions, including party bus rides and weekends at a South Padre Island oceanfront condo. This year, they decided that it was important to directly sponsor the event and Memorial Funeral Home was an Emerald Cut Diamond Sponsor.

The Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center began as a Literacy Project in 2011 and had one location. On August 13, 2013, the organization officially changed their name to the Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center (RGVLC). In January 2018, the RGVLC became a member of ProLiteracy, the largest adult literacy and basic education membership organization as well as the leading resource for adult education and literacy nationwide and worldwide.

Through fundraising efforts such as the Boots & Bling Gala, they have grown to serve the cities in Hidalgo County with centers in 13 different cities, Edinburg, Pharr, La Joya, McAllen, Hidalgo, and Mercedes, to name a few. The purpose of these centers is to help education and provide services to adults in the Rio Grande Valley in order to improve their economic opportunities. These programs include GED classes, computer literacy classes, English and Spanish as a second language classes, and U.S. Naturalization classes.

Many of the persons who have completed these classes have shared how they have improved in many aspects. For many, they were unable to complete their high school education and through the GED classes not only have they earned their diploma, they have gone on to further their education. Our area, the Rio Grande Valley, has persons who are not U.S. citizens but through the Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center's U.S. Naturalization classes, are able to prepare for their test and earn their citizenship. For many this opens new doors as they are able to continue studying and make careers for themselves that may not have been possible otherwise.

The Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center has provided many opportunities for the members of our community. For this reason, Memorial Funeral Home was proud to sponsor this year's Boots & Bling Gala. Velma and Leon realize that by helping our area residents to succeed, it will in turn help our community and our economy. We look forward to continuing to support the Rio Grande Valley Literacy Center.

**Miles Funeral Home
Holden, Massachusetts**

Miles Funeral Home, Holden, MA; Kelly Cremation and Funeral Care, Worcester, MA

**Educating for Change:
Transforming the Face of Funeral Care in a Grief-illiterate, Death-Phobic Culture**

Idea: Utilize a systematic education program to improve knowledge of funeral care and the funeral industry. Educational opportunities will be exclusively designed for and directed towards four groups: funeral professionals, the general public, the bereaved and collaborating professionals.

Working in the funeral industry in a grief-illiterate, death-phobic culture can be, in a word, challenging. But it also creates countless opportunities to teach and to heal. Miles Funeral Home is committed to assisting the bereaved, informing the community and promoting the funeral industry through educating for change in the way death and funerals are viewed. To this end, in April of 2021, we hired a Director of Community Education whose role is to design and provide education through social media, staff education, bereavement seminars, and community dialogue. A lifetime educator deeply passionate about life, death and education, our director of community education offers insight, hope, and healing around the topics of death and bereavement.

One intent of our educational efforts is to introduce consumers, the community, and our collaborators to the funeral industry. By educating them, we prepare them to work well with us, forge strong collaborations with paraprofessionals, and most importantly, help the bereaved with their grieving.

Education is our means for creating a culture in which death is less feared and grief is supported. In the last two years we have offered more than thirty in-person educational events, increasing funeral home literacy among nurses, hospice staff, educators, social service workers, and the general public. Additionally, our weekly blog Thoughtful Thursdays, recently published its hundredth original posting. Topics for the blog illuminate the following categories: children and death, cremation, the opioid epidemic, funeral etiquette, grief, loss and bereavement, and preneed services.

Our educational efforts benefit the community and collaborators in several ways. Tailored to their needs and goals, in a variety of settings, we have helped the community to address a myriad of issues and concerns with death practices, after-life care, and grief resources. Working with hospices, student nurses, grief support groups and schools, we have taken the approach to giving them what they need to support their mission and ours. For example, presenting to nursing students in their last semester in a "Communications in Nursing" course, we engaged students in role-playing conversations a nurse might have in speaking with families about the next steps at death: selecting, calling, and working with a funeral home. In thanking us, the professor remarked: "This was one of the most practical and important sessions these students have had in this course."

The Miles Funeral Home staff have benefited from having an on-site resource person that accesses and disseminates industry news and essential information to support their work. Notable opportunities for funeral directors included a three-part series Finding Our Way Through The Changes: Reviving the Professional, Revitalizing the Profession, that considered industry trends and practical applications of new products and skills for being a funeral director. Accessing and facilitating training sessions such as the online seminar for FTC training, and fifteen-minute mini-teachings during director meetings such as Encouraging Your Co-workers, have helped staff to improve professional practices and keep up to date with industry issues.

Families and consumers benefit from our educational endeavors in several ways. First, they receive a plethora of materials to help with grieving. Each informant receives a personalized collection of brochures that address their specific loss, including brochures and flyers produced in-house including a bibliography and a list of local resources for griefwork. Our Sharing Hope Bereavement Seminars, Embracing Loss: Finding Your Way and Healing Your Spirit, offers multiple unique seminars each year, free of charge and open to the public. Our philosophy is "All are Welcomed." Families we serve receive a special invitation.

Participants enjoy lunch to connect with other griever, and receive a complimentary book related to the topic. One participant, a widower deeply grieving the loss of his wife, described his experience this way: "I found this seminar so, so helpful, it was beautifully presented and helped me so much."

Another significant educational experience was an evening for parents and children offered by a local non-profit, Hope Lives Here. Our community educator took part as a member of the Q & A panel at a book event with author Jodi Meltzer who read her book *Goodnight Star Whoever You Are*. After the reading, the children did an art project with the illustrator of the book, and adults were engaged in a Q & A about the death experience and children. As a member of the panel, our educator addressed audience questions such as "Should I take my child to a funeral?" and "What should I tell my child about cremation?" Each family attending this event received a free copy of NFDA publications *When a Child Dies* and *Youth & Funerals*. Participation in this event led to a continuing collaboration with the event sponsor, Hope Lives Here, a local non-profit grief resource group. Our director of community education is now a volunteer with them, offering quarterly training for their volunteers.

Strengthening collaborations is fundamental to educating for change, keeps our community connections strong, and better prepares consumers to work well with us during their time of need. For more than 125 years, Miles Funeral Home and its staff has been known for providing high quality service that honors lives and celebrates memories. We are now becoming known as a leader in educating for change, opening new pathways to understanding death and bereavement. It is our deepest hope that together our staff and community collaborators will continue to bring consumers our best understanding, dignity, and hope when they experience death-loss.

Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc.
Albion, New York

*Christopher Mitchell Funeral Home, Middleport, NY; Christopher Mitchell Funeral Home, Gasport, NY;
Christopher Mitchell Funeral Home, Holley, NY*

Life Saving Initiatives by Death Care Professionals

In the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic, every business has had to adapt to a 'new normal' when it comes to dealing with the public. We've all learned the importance of hand washing, sanitizing surfaces, mask wearing, staying home when sick, and testing on a regular basis, especially when you don't feel well. With all the attention placed on COVID-19, we've seemingly forgotten the scourge of communities across the United States...the Opioid Usage/Overdose Epidemic. There's no group which know better, the impact which the epidemic has had on society than Funeral Directors and Funeral Homes. A sobering reality of the Pandemic is that it overshadowed the 30% increase in Opioid Overdoses across the Country. People were isolating, depression was on the rise and human interaction became less and less, opening the door for a replacement activity which provided a 'distraction' to the effects of the Pandemic.

There comes a point in time where it's OK to say you don't want to do your job. Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals serve a community of over 40,000 people and the Funeral Directors are deeply involved in several organization and are personally well-known and liked in the community. Burying young people is always a difficult task especially when you personally know the family. It becomes more difficult when you must try and make sense out of death which didn't have to happen and could've been avoided...if the proper help was given. All ages have been affected by overdose deaths due to opioids and fentanyl but people in the younger age demographic 18-25 seem to be affected the most. This is why we don't want to do our job sometime. We don't want to have to bury the children of our friends and neighbors in the communities where we live and work. However, it's our job, it's our calling and, no matter how difficult it is to have to endure that raw emotion time and time again, it's just what we have been called to do.

So in an effort to help eradicate the deaths due to opioid overdoses, the staff at Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc. decided to initiate a program to train people who are visiting the funeral home on the use of Narcan (Naloxone) and the distribution of Narcan kits to anyone desirous of being trained, in all of their locations. The funeral home staff has all been trained on not only the use of the antidote drug but also have been trained on training other to use it. They have had a banner created which has been placed in their lobby inviting people to get free Narcan training and a kit...just for the asking. Also on the banner are some recent statistics about local and State overdoses and deaths due to opioid overdoses.

In addition to the banner, the training and the providing of Narcan kits, the funeral home has various pamphlets available which can help guide people through the grieving process following the death of an overdose. In a partnership with Orleans Recovery-Hope Begins Here (ORHBH), a community support organization, the funeral home is now able to assist in providing a link and direction to people in need of assistance or support in the area of addiction, accidental overdose, treatment programs, grief support following a death, recovery coaching and transportation to and from meetings or appointments. ORHBH is also the vehicle in which the funeral home received the initial Narcan Training, the Train-the-Trainer training, and the Narcan kits.

Further, following the sudden Cardiac Arrest of the NFL Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin, the Nation was awakened by the need to know CPR and the need for training in the use of an Automatic External Defibrillator. The Funeral Home staff realized the possibility is great for people at the Funeral Home, while under severe emotional stress, (either as a family member or a mourning friend,) to go into cardiac arrest. The entire staff has since been trained in CPR/AED operation and has purchased an AED for each of the 4 locations they work out of.

The concept of putting more knowledge out there with regards to recognizing an overdose and having the means to help reverse the affects with Narcan is monumental in scope and is a simple, no-brainer for the funeral home and staff. There is no cost for the training and the kits are provided for free from ORHBH via an authorized supply chain from New York State. The same goes for CPR/AED training. The more people trained, the better. The more people having Narcan kits, the better. If it saves one life...mission accomplished. It's so simple, so important and so needed!

RATIONALE: To provide more people with recognizing the signs of an overdose, provide them with training on how to use Narcan to counteract the affects of opioid overdoses, and to dispense more Narcan into the community so more people have the tools available to possibly save a life if needed. To be prepared to immediately start CPR and implement the use of an AED in order to revive a person who goes into sudden cardiac arrest.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION: To train members of the community visiting the funeral home (on a voluntary basis,) in the use of Narcan to counteract the affects of an opioid overdose. To provide those trained individuals with a Narcan kit in order to give them the tools needed to provide life-saving measures if in a situation with a person down due to a potential overdose. To deliver as much knowledge to the public as wanted on how to use Narcan and to provide as much Narcan into the community as feasibly possible via the trained individuals leaving the funeral home. To have an AED on site for use by the trained Funeral Home staff in conjunction with the initiation of CPR should a cardiac arrest occur in the Funeral Home.

BENEFITS TO FUNERAL HOME AND STAFF: To let the community know we are concerned about the Opioid overdose epidemic and that we are tired of having to do our job for preventable and avoidable deaths. To show the community that we are being proactive in the prevention of overdose deaths by offering free Narcan administration training and free Narcan kits in our funeral home facilities during regular business hours and during times of visitations and funeral services. To be personally prepared to initiate CPR and use the AED if called upon in an emergency.

BENEFITS TO FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY: To receive the tools and training necessary to provide potential life-saving measures if one encounters an individual who is suffering the affects of an opioid overdose. To potentially SAVE A LIFE by having the knowledge and equipment to do so. To have the benefit of CPR-trained individuals and the appropriate life-saving equipment at the ready should a person go into crisis from sudden cardiac arrest in the Funeral Home.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION INVOLVED WITH IMPLIMENTING THE IDEA AND THEIR ROLE: Orleans Recovery-Hope Begins Here is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) Community Support Organization which has the ability to facilitate support groups pertaining to opioid overdose situations and deaths as well as any other addiction problems. It also offers links to people and organizations in the community for treatment, recovery coaching, grief support and a myriad of other issues. Some are faith based and some are non-secular. They provide training and Narcan kits at no charge for the asking and often host "Pop-Up" trainings at random areas throughout Orleans County, NY. The Central Orleans Volunteer Ambulance in conjunction with the American Heart Association was instrumental in training the staff in CPR/AED at their training academy in Albion, New York.

**Moments Funeral Home
Lucedale, Mississippi**

Moments Funeral Home, Leakesville, MS

All of us at Moments Funeral Home are extremely honored to live where we do and have the freedoms that we have. We are proud US Citizens and try hard to not take these freedoms for granted. We are honored to serve military families during their time of grief and give back to Veteran programs as much as possible. We are humbled to arrange military honors at services and have a hard time not tearing up during the playing of Taps. We assist military families with ordering markers through the Department of Veteran Affairs. We allow those markers to be delivered to our facility and set them at no charge to the families. We have also hosted various events focused on military families in the past. This year, we once again had the honor of being able to host a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The United States Flag Code, Title 4, Section 8k states- "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

No, this is nothing new. However, this is an event that our community loves and for a funeral home such as ours in the area, we are able to provide the perfect venue. We provided drop boxes at both of our locations, Lucedale and Leakesville. We promoted to donation of flags through social media, or radio program and the local newspaper for a few months. We purchased elephant trunk drop boxes at Home Depot and had a local print shop wrap those for us. See the photo below. We received several inquiries about the boxes. Other organizations such as the local VA and others were interested in offering the same. We received several flags and had to empty the boxes on several occasions. We solicited the help of local Veterans to make sure our program was done properly and with the utmost respect. Hammer Fallon is the current JROTC instructor at George County High School. Mr. Fallon retired from the United States Army after several years serving domestic and abroad. Mr. Michael Walker served in the United States Marine. We also took care of services for his wife, Mrs. Vickie Walker, when she passed away some time ago. We keep in contact with many of our families, and have become good friends with Mr. Walker. These two gentlemen assisted us in preparing the flags for retirement. We gathered all the donations and carefully went through each one. We did, of course, receive some flags that did not qualify for the program. We received state specific flags and military branch specific decorative flags. We also received many flags that were decorations in nature only. The American Flags were each folded and made ready.

Our event was hosted late one evening so the sun was low and the temperature was not so hot. Bro. Stephen, from our staff, was our host and kept the ceremony moving. The veterans who participated lowered the flag from in front of our building and raised a new one. We had the performance of Taps and all recited the Pledge of Allegiance. We offered bottled water and a variety of tea. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to participate in the burning of the flags.

We had a wonderful Flag Retirement Ceremony. We received positive feedback from the community and will continue to host this event again in the future.

Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre
Madison, Indiana

Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre, Hannover, IN

As a business with area competition, Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre significantly dominates but also fully realizes the importance of continually improving, adjusting with the times, bonding more with the community and maintaining our image as a caring steward. Our customers - present, past and potential - text, zoom, google and bank online. Competition loops only one click away. Despite these advanced, technological avenues of communication, some interactions still prosper best in 1:1, live settings with associates who can immediately answer questions, use everyday language to break down legal terms, give examples and provide trustworthy direction. Elder law, estate planning and funeral pre-planning certainly warrant that personal exchange.

For decades, our older generations have worked hard, implemented conservative measures and invested wisely to accumulate bank rolls and properties and naturally want those financial and/or legacy assets protected and distributed according to their needs and wishes. Too often action and decisions come too late or create problems because they were based on hearsay, assumptions or misconceptions, not law.

As a funeral home, our directors encounter the after fall of such procrastination way too often. Taking these factors into consideration in our quest to better serve our community and families, the Centre on April 29, 2023 combined those three concerns in one, free seminar open to the public. A specialist in elder law and estate planning, Attorney Lora Mount, headed those two segments with Morgan & Nay Director of Pre-Planning Gage Hartman addressing the pre-planning portion. Ms. Mount in her 70-minute presentation covered critical basics in each of her areas and offered advice on what to do and what not to do to protect life-savings and property ownerships when birthdays accumulate, health deteriorates and/or family structure changes due to death, divorce or issues such as addiction. She supplemented her address with an excellent PowerPoint presentation as well as numerous examples and explanations to illustrate points and note ever-changing laws. To better serve our guests, Morgan & Nay printed out Ms. Mount's PowerPoint presentation ahead of the seminar so guests could record extra notes along the way.

For the introductory segment on pre-planning, Mr. Hartman observed the same format. Approximately 70 guests attended the free seminar which was held on a Saturday morning to accommodate work schedules as well as allow adult children to accompany their parents if the family so warranted. The total session ran approximately 95 minutes, but Ms. Mount stayed around another 30 minutes or so to answer personal questions. In our quest to extend a hospitality touch to the gathering, Morgan & Nay also provided light snacks and drinks.

As guests exited and again on Facebook and in many personal notes later, we received thank you after thank you for hosting the session. At no time was there any mention to sign up for a pre-planning appointment or attorney consultation. Under no circumstance did we want the attendees to consider the event a "bait" tactic.

Our first purpose was to provide a needed community service. The inherent, secondary benefits of showcasing our company and strengthening our bond with the community, especially newcomers who might seek our services someday, would evolve naturally if we did a good job and exuded a friendly, organized demeanor.

From our own personal experiences, we know people tend to put off dealing with those three areas and often do not know where to turn for trustworthy guidance. Although families may have and/or have had dealings with a favored attorney, that does not mean that professional is a specialist in elder law and estate planning. Like doctors, teachers and farmers, most sport a specific expertise and estate planning, elder law and Medicare/Medicaid rules change frequently. In our town/county specifically, there are no law firms that specialize in these areas and many send their clients to Ms. Mount's firm (Voelz, Mount & Reed, LLC) about 45 miles away. In addition to her firm in Columbus, IN, Ms. Mount also serves on state boards relevant to elder law and estate planning. Thus, Morgan & Nay felt assured that it was providing our guests with the best of information and direction, plus not offending any of our local attorneys.

We did run one small ad (2 col. X 6") in our local newspaper and three ad spots on WORX Radio 96.7 (30 seconds each) three times but we primarily (80 percent) promoted the event through our Facebook Page and flyers in the lobby.

Not only did the session fulfill our original mission, but also several attendees later contacted Mr. Hartman to arrange funeral advancements. Inexpensive and easy to execute, the seminar significantly benefited three parties - guests, community and company. It was Morgan & Nay's pleasure to organize and host the event, an endeavor we will definitely repeat in Spring 2024. A few people have already inquired about the date!

Olson Funeral Home & Cremation Service Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Olson Funeral Home & Cremation Services has been a part of the Sheboygan community for the last 131 years since 1892. We continue to be an active participant in our community through many local boards, charities, and volunteerism. James M. Olson, President of Olson Funeral Home & Cremation Service has volunteered on the Board of Directors for the Sheboygan County Historical Museum for the past 12 years and has served as the second vice-president of the organization for the last 9 years.

So, it only made sense that when the Museum started planning its 100th Anniversary, we wanted to be a part of the year-long celebrations. Not only by serving on the Jubilee Committee but by actively involving the funeral home staff in the festivities. One of the opportunities that the museum came up with was offering "Community Days" each month where the community is welcome to drop in and celebrate hands on history absolutely free. This would increase the number of visitors to the museum who may not have the financial means and to be able to bring in their families and friends. The Olson Funeral Home & Cremation Service jumped on the opportunity to not only sponsor these events but to also volunteer at and greet members of our community.

Bernie Markevitch was our funeral home florist for over a dozen years before his retirement. For the past several years, Bernie was the "Lead Elf" in charge of decorating the Sheboygan County Historical Society and Museum's Holiday Memories. He was also a long-time member of the Historical Society where he volunteered his time and shared his knowledge of local Sheboygan history at the Third Saturday education series. Bernie was the reason Jim got involved with the museum. On November 28, 2020, Bernie passed away from complications from COVID-19. The funeral home decided to honor Bernie for all his work by sponsoring the Community Days to show the residence of Sheboygan County one of Bernie's greatest passions. Our staff welcomed guests at the opening reception and set up a small memorial table in honor of Bernie as we greeted guests at the event.

We were so honored to memorialize Bernie in this way and were even more honored to be able to open the museum to greater numbers of people at no cost to them. Especially in the museum's 100 years of preserving, collecting, and educating about the history of Sheboygan County.

Paradise Memorial and Leon Williamson Funeral Homes Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Science Café

Health disparities, which are sometimes referred to as health inequities, have garnered an increasing amount of attention from physicians and health policy experts, as well as a renewed focus from federal health agencies. As a complex and multi-factorial construct, differential access to medical care, treatment modalities, and disparate outcomes among various racial and ethnic groups has been validated in numerous studies. The antecedents of such differences involve such “drivers” as cost and access to the healthcare system, primary care physicians, and preventive health services.

Racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare are important for several reasons. They pose significant moral and ethical dilemmas for the US healthcare system. As a nation, we have an abundance of healthcare facilities, cutting edge technologies, and pharmacotherapeutics and other assets that are the envy of the world, but which are not accessible for a myriad of reasons to all segments of the population. Also, healthcare as a resource is tied to various notions of social justice, opportunity, and quality of life for our patients, our communities, and the nation at large. A closely allied concern is the nation's economic well-being, which is both directly and indirectly tied to the health status of our population in general, and of specific population groups. As a result, inadequate, inaccessible, and/or poor medical care further exacerbates increasing healthcare costs that have broad implications for the overall quality of care experienced by all Americans.

As a result, Paradise Memorial Funeral and Cremation Services teamed up with Good Samaritan Westside Community Church and created the “Science Café”. The science café is an educational event that is geared to discuss an array of health-related issues. In particular, the discussion on gastrointestinal conditions. During the café, participants in the community learned about the various issues related to the stomach and intestines. The participants were led by Dr. Poonam Beniwal-Patel who is the Assistant Professor of the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology with Froedtert Hospital Medical College of Wisconsin.

This wonderful community event took place at the good Samaritan Westside Community Church located 5226 W. Burleigh Street, Milwaukee, WI. The members of Paradise Memorial Funeral Home believe that we have a responsibility to impact our community by equipping them with knowledge. The Science Café is just one way to foster positive relationships while also being responsible stewards in the community.

Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium Manchester, New Hampshire

Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium, Boscawen, NH; Pillsbury Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium, Littleton, NH

The Phaneuf Family Foundation is a 501(c)3 charitable nonprofit created by Phaneuf Funeral Homes & Crematorium that provides funds for New Hampshire and Vermont residents who are unable to pay the full cost of a funeral. There is a continuing increase in requests for donations, and a growing need for donations to fulfill these requests.

Also growing, unfortunately, are the numbers of families in economically insecure situations who are unable to pay for a loved one's funeral. Whether it's patients in nursing homes who have no family when they pass or families not able to come up with funds for a burial or cremation, there was a gap that needed to be bridged.

"We're dedicated to providing resources for all New Hampshire and Vermont residents to receive a respectful funeral," said Arthur "Buddy" Phaneuf, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. "The foundation provides us the ability to assist families in need, as well as those who pass away without family to honor them."

Foundation highlights

- By the end of 2023, the Foundation will have provided more than 130 families with grants.
- In its first full year, the foundation was able to grant 41% of the requests it received; in the past year, we granted 67% - an increase of 62%.
- The number of requests for grants grew from 40 in the first year to 63 in the last year, an increase of 57%.
- In the first year, 15 requests were granted, totaling \$3,395. In the last year, that increased by 173% and the foundation was able to fulfill 41 requests, totaling \$19,028.
- The average grant in 2020 was \$264. That has grown to \$447 in 2023.
- The maximum grant is \$1,000.

The foundation's motto is, "Everyone deserves a dignified farewell."

How the foundation works

The Phaneuf Family Foundation formed with a three-fold mission:

1. To provide financial assistance for funeral or cremation arrangements for individuals and families that cannot afford to finalize a service
2. To provide monetary support to hospice and other caregiver organizations
3. To give scholarships to students attending New England Mortuary College

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance has long been available through city, town and state welfare departments to New Hampshire and Vermont families who cannot afford the total cost of a cremation or funeral service. Welfare departments will typically pay an average of \$750, and the least expensive service at funeral homes in New Hampshire averages \$1,000, leaving a gap that families need to fill.

Donations made to the foundation can cover a range of funeral costs. Requests for grants for a cremation or funeral may be made by a family member, friend, funeral director, social worker, hospice or nursing home employee or other interested party.

Financial assistance is also available for those families using funeral homes other than Phaneuf.

Scholarships

The Phaneuf Family Foundation also awards \$1,000 scholarships annually to future funeral professionals.

Scholarships awarded:

- Nicole Judge of Peterborough, NH, in 2020
- Jennifer Roberts of Concord, NH, in 2021
- Kora Michaud of Concord, NH, in 2022

"I am very happy to support the next generation of funeral directors through scholarships to mortuary school," Phaneuf said.

Assistance to Caregiver Organizations

To fulfill the third part of the organization's mission, this year the Foundation is launching its Caregiver Superstar of the Year Award to honor and celebrate a professional caregiver working at an accredited hospice organization in New Hampshire and Vermont, the two states we serve. The caregiver will receive a monetary award and the organization will receive a monetary reward to be used to do something to benefit its hard-working staff. This award will be presented for the first time in November 2023.

Return Home Auburn, Washington

Embracing Diversity: Return Home Green Funeral Home's Presence at Seattle Pride Events

Return Home, a trailblazing Green Funeral Home known for its ecological commitment in creating environmentally friendly end-of-life ceremonies, has recently taken an impactful step towards promoting inclusivity and diversity. Establishing a prominent presence at Seattle's Pride events, the organization successfully integrated itself into a celebration of acceptance and equal representation. This initiative was not only significant due to its unprecedented nature but also because it offered a broader perspective on death care, symbolized the embracing of diversity, promoted environmentally friendly practices, and provided a platform for direct community engagement.

Traditionally, the death care industry has been perceived as conservative and somewhat disconnected from societal shifts. Return Home's presence at Seattle's Pride events challenged this stereotype, making strides towards facilitating open conversations about death care within a historically marginalized community. This was done not just symbolically, but also practically through the direct engagement of attendees in planning for their end-of-life journey.

At the event, Return Home's booth was not merely a static display. It was a functional, interactive space that served the community in a multitude of ways. Attendees were offered the opportunity to sign up for pre-planning information, encouraging proactive discussions about end-of-life decisions in an open, accepting, and welcoming environment. These sign-ups provided attendees with a valuable, forward-thinking resource, ensuring that individuals could make informed choices about their final journey.

Importantly, the booth was not only educational but also an engaging and inviting space. Participants were treated to unique, fun swag, including "Soil Yourself" T-shirts. These items, while playful, held a deeper significance, serving as a constant reminder of Return Home's mission to propagate ecological responsibility and foster conversations about environmentally friendly death care practices. In addition, an example of their composting vessel was showcased, providing a tangible and striking illustration of their green mission, making the abstract concept of green funerals more accessible and real to the public.

Furthermore, the booth served as a comforting, open space for those families that Return Home had previously served. These meaningful interactions fostered a sense of ongoing community support and offered a platform for shared experiences. The ability to connect on such a profound level fostered a sense of unity and solidarity within the community, proving that Return Home's commitment goes beyond their services and extends to building lasting relationships with those they serve.

Crucially, the booth was staffed by members of Return Home's queer staff, adding another layer of authenticity and inclusivity to their presence at the Pride events. Their active participation amplified the message of acceptance and diversity within the industry and demonstrated their understanding and empathy towards the unique concerns and needs of the LGBTQ+ community. This participation served to reassure the community of Return Home's sensitivity and inclusive approach to providing end-of-life care.

In conclusion, Return Home's significant presence at Seattle's Pride events marked an essential stride towards greater inclusivity, representation, and environmental consciousness within the death care industry. From their proactive engagement in signing people up for pre-planning, distributing memorable swag, connecting with previously served families, showcasing innovative green death care practices, to including diverse representation within their team – every aspect of their involvement at the event played a part in creating a lasting impact. This approach, transcending mere marketing strategy, could serve as a trailblazing example for the death care industry's commitment towards inclusion, diversity, and environmental sustainability.

**Señoriales Corporación de Servicio
Guatemala City, Guatemala**

FOOTPRINTS THAT EMBRACE, TRANSFORM, REMAIN AND CARESS THE SOUL

Did you know that according to a study carried out by the Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary "the unique connection established between animals and humans derives from a region of the brain that we both have in common, and which is dedicated to voice and speech recognition?" the emotions that we transmit with it, among other similarities found?

Did you know that according to a survey carried out among Guatemalans in 2008, by Vox Latina, among the animals most accepted by Guatemalans are domestic animals and those that serve as companions, the favorite for 73.6% of Guatemalans is the dog, Said preference is much greater in urban areas, where 80.1% of those interviewed named it as their favorite animal, compared to rural areas, where only 53.1% of those interviewed mentioned it as their pet?

When we talk about pets, we are referring to those companion animals, those that have been domesticated by us men; like cats, hamsters, birds, fish, horses, among others. But the dog is undoubtedly the king of domestic animals, even for many years, it is called man's best friend; their qualities are innumerable, but beyond their unique and wonderful company, dogs establish a bond of loyalty, unconditional love and nobility with their love, highlighting on this occasion their exceptional ability to perceive people's emotions

Their unconditional love, emotional support and companionship provide us with a safe place where we can express ourselves confidently and without limits. Instinctively, they know how to respond in our moments of stress, illness, grief, or situations of emotional crisis.

Señoriales Corporación de Servicio, in the search for continuous improvement and to be able to provide tools that positively contribute to the emotions of the families we serve, integrated five Golden Retriever puppies, with the purpose of training them professionally as companion pets, Due to the characteristics; intelligence, emotional balance and empathy that makes them more suitable to be an emotional support dog.

Each puppy has received, from the first months, the care and love of a host, who is the person in charge of following up on the training that the training expert Luis Sicán has given them, together with the veterinarian who periodically evaluate.

By keeping a loving follow-up in the homes of the hosts, we achieve that the puppies can transmit affection, love and comfort during the services when identifying the person who is needing their company, even the host himself, who receives the best from the puppy. part.

Although it is true that the Guau Señoriales project was born to provide company to families during the process of losing a loved one, currently; Molly, Max, Milo, Maggie, Mocca and Otto (newly joined); They carry out their loving work on people who have had involuntary and voluntary losses, since each loss causes a process of adaptation and overcoming goodbye.

AYUVI is a private institution that provides quality services and treatments to patients with pediatric cancer; regular puppy visits have provided important psychosocial benefits to the children's families and to children receiving treatment; Maggie's tenderness, Mocca's nobility, Molly's antics, Milo and Max's beauty and obedience, have brought joy, comfort and distraction to the children, their looks dulled by pain and despair, light up and radiate! light with the visit of the puppies!, his illuminated face leaves a thread of hope in his parents, who benefit from the hugs and caresses that they also receive from the puppies, mainly reducing in them the stress caused by communication between patient parents and medical personnel assisting them. In addition to drawing a smile on the children and their parents, with the presence of the puppies, a safe environment is created for their relief, contributing positively to their emotional and physical state.

The social work offered by the puppies of the Guau Señoriales team extends to the Estuardo Mini institution, which provides support to 30% of patients who fight to the end with their families, without being able to defeat cancer. The presence of the Golden retrievers has contributed to the psychological and medical support offered by this institution in the face of the crises of the disease. Toasting with his periodic visit; peace, comfort, joy and company, given that 90% of patients come from within the republic, for this reason, a relative must accompany them in their process of dealing with illness and death, many of the relatives have been months without hug from loved ones; partner, son and friends. Maggie, who is characterized by providing love, immediately identifies the need and caresses them with great tenderness, settles on their feet and keeps them company, her breathing seems to communicate that the pain of others hurts her, Mocca, being restless, identifies sadness and with his occurrences distracts them and makes them smile with his antics, each one with his personality contributes to reduce the anguish and manages to distract them for a moment from pain and sadness.

The benefit extends to the doctors and personnel who assist them, since the constant palliative care of the patient generates physical, psychological and health exhaustion. Cuddling the puppies causes them to shed tears and eases the emotional burden on their shoulders, while Otto's wet tongue tries to dry their tears, his warm body offers them peace and comfort like the white color of his beautiful fur.

The team of hosts, with the support of the department of tributes and the director of the program, develop art therapy workshops in which the patient and their family member who cares for them can participate in some way, in each visit they deliver special and personalized details, which They contribute positively to your emotions.

The accompaniment of the puppies has become a necessity for some institutions that intentionally request the visit of the Guau Señoriales team; such as the Faculty of Medicine of the UFM Francisco Marroquín University; The extensive periods of practice and study that students carry out in hospitals increase their cortisol levels (a stress-related hormone).

Otto, with his huge and loving eyes, his calm personality, elegant posture and white fur, generates a sense of peace with his mere presence, while Molly, Mocca, Milo and Max offer caresses and hugs to the other students, but mainly the benefit of lowering your blood pressure and increasing your mood and positivity, especially since the visits take place before and after an exam. Expressions of feelings and emotions such as tears of joy flow in the environment, being of great benefit to their health and integral life. For many students it becomes one of the best days since the beginning of their career.

The embassy of the United States of America in Guatemala integrated its workers to face-to-face work earlier this year after two years of virtuality, in addition to having been transferred to a new building in another area of the city. Said changes or involuntary losses generate in them a process of adaptation to change; fears, anger, negotiation, sadness and even acceptance, are the emotions that constantly manifest. The department of human resources and organizational culture of said embassy, interested in the Integral health of its workers, sent us a request for the team of Guau Señoriales puppies to make a visit, the objective was that all the staff could have moments of distraction and interaction with the puppies, which would allow them to increase their mood, and improve the confidence of living in person with each other.

The Guau Señoriales team surprised the embassy workers! When they went out for their break they found themselves in the beautiful garden of the building; Molly, Mocca, Maggie, Millo, Max and Otto, who without hesitation began their accompaniment with the movement of their hairy tail, their long and pink tongue that denotes happiness and their cold coal-colored nose, in search of those who needed them most. They created the perfect environment for the desired integration. The hosts, who always accompany the puppies, are part of the relief, with empathy they actively listen to the expressions of feelings, thoughts, reactions and emotions of the people and give the appropriate commands to each puppy for an integral accompaniment.

Said activity exceeded expectations, so the same workers requested a new visit, so that this time their children were present, who were also affected by the absence of their parents after having them at home for two years and the process of adaptation to the change of housing for the majority and schedules for others, it was a family coexistence where parents and children received all the love that puppies know how to give, hugs, toys, kisses, caresses and mischief, they were part of the accompaniment.

Puppies are always very present but without a doubt when someone is struggling with something they know how to sit up and be loving especially if it is a child your attention was focused most of the time on them during the visit. They innately provided mindfully attention, intention, passion, and awareness. In addition to promoting family life, they encourage the motivation and loving care of a pet, inviting them to want to have one at home. It was possible to appreciate in the garden of the US embassy, moments of tenderness, children leaning confidently on the puppies, holding secret conversations between the two; kisses with a flavor of concentrate, furry caresses and traces of love with their hugs, were part of the invaluable moment that the children lived, while their parents enjoyed the trusting and secure loyalty of Mocca, Millo, Molly Maggie, Max and Otto, who now they have a special agenda of visits during the year to said embassy.

Margarita Tejada is an institution that seeks to generate a comprehensive development model for people with Down Syndrome, contributing to the strengthening of children's social skills, for this reason they seek activities that allow them to improve their conditions, such as accompanying a pet , due to the properties that they contribute to them. The puppies of the Guau Señoriales accompaniment project do not know how to judge, they focus on making others happy with their mere presence, for this reason the children with disabilities felt free to socialize with them, they were very calm while they played, they snuggled and caressed them very tenderly. We could say that we have never seen a child love a pet as much as they did. This interaction lovingly contributed to the strengthening of their social and behavioral skills.

We cannot fail to mention the main task of accompanying our pets to families in the initial mourning process, during the farewell tribute to a loved one. Her mere presence makes the suffering of that day more comfortable, her elegant walk in the viewing room distracts them from negative thoughts and generates in people a feeling of love and tenderness when they receive a flower with a personalized message that they hold with their muzzle or carry inside a special bib. On many occasions they stand guard next to the chest where the loved one is, who has been a lover especially of dogs. It seems that they understand the importance that it has for the family, those moments of honor, next to their loved one, with obedience and instinct, they maintain a posture of calm and solemnity. Its huge and comfortable fur often serves as a pillow for children who confidently lay their heads on them, as if seeking the warmth of their loved one who is no longer there, helping them process the difficult day and tearing from their sad look an inexplicable shine along with a smile.

And last but not least, we want to mention the work they do in the activities that are held at Cementerio Los Parques, on significant dates. Puppies become the joy of that day for many families, due to the anniversary syndrome, the day when the stages of mourning are experienced again. Señoriales Corporacion de Servicio with the Guau Señoriales project, makes that day something special, since the puppies participate in all the activities that take place; They are the ambassadors of peace, comfort and joy, from the beginning our comprehensive accompaniment begins; the puppies receive the families with special notes, gifts or flowers that they deliver with a welcome message, willing to receive and give hugs, caresses and wet kisses, creating an environment of trust to express emotions, which do so much good to the human being before the losses. Their contagious love and tenderness goes viral, we see families embracing, together with the puppies, hugs and conversations that they could not have for a long time due to the reactions of their grief, reconciliation of couples, expressions of forgiveness and repentance for the involuntary distance between them. . Puppies not only give joy, they are also the best at active listening, the ideal man to dry tears and without a doubt unite hearts and leave a mark.

Given the acceptance of said project, the puppies have more than 1,500 followers on their Instagram social network, "gauenoriales" <https://www.instagram.com/gauenoriales/> in which they receive requests for accompaniment and even for photo sessions of celebrations such as weddings and fifteen years. In addition to keeping followers informed of the activities in which they are a part, we hereby invite

them to the puppies' birthday celebration, where they can participate in the cake game, even the followers' pets; this event is carried out in a big way; music, walks on the trail with the pups, photo sets, lots of fun and cake, on his long-awaited birthday.

Their presence cannot be missing in all the activities that are carried out, in which the families we serve are present, even in internal activities, there are innumerable stories and moments that pottery offers us daily, which we can hardly make known. some.

It is important to highlight that coexistence in the homes where they stay is vital for the behavior of the puppies, loving care is reflected in each accompaniment.

Due to the emotional charge that the pet receives in each accompaniment that it carries out and that should not be more than two hours; Molly, Maggie, Mocca, Millo, Max and Otto, have a game hour or two of naps to be able to release the acquired emotions and not affect their health; In addition, they have a day of rest and play with the other puppies in the program, but mainly they receive from each host the time, walks and love that a pet requires to face people, dogs and unknown places without fear, happily and more safely throughout his life.

While researchers continue to explore the many benefits of having or living with a pet, at Señoriales Corporación de Servicio, together with the Guau Señoriales team, we try to reduce the suffering caused by direct or indirect losses in the families we serve and people who they need it, with the accompaniment of Golden Retrievers specially trained to give love, affection and tenderness.

**Soxman Funeral Homes, Ltd.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

In 2020, we began working with a service dog program in the attempts to introduce a facility dog to our staff. In August of 2021, on her third birthday, Lilo- a beautiful yellow Labrador Retriever, joined our team. Over the course of her training and initial placement, we received incredible feedback from both the families we serve and also local community members. As we settled into the transition of having a facility dog and worked to become comfortable handling her, we desired to make her role a bit more impactful. Motivated by the overwhelmingly positive feedback received by her presence, we decided to develop a birthday campaign for donations in her honor to be gifted around her fourth birthday on August 1, 2022.

Not surprisingly, Lilo became our social media sensation, dressing up for photos at the holidays and indulging our lighthearted posts in which so many delight! People near and far would take the time to comment on our Facebook posts showcasing our canine colleague. It was following an inquiry from one of Lilo's fans regarding shipping toys to her that we had an idea. Our best girl is blessed with a bounty of toys and treats of her own; what if we took up a collection of pet necessities in honor of her birthday and donated them to a local shelter? That's just what we did. An informant for one of the families we served had become involved in a local animal shelter. She was promoting that shelter's good work within the community. After discussing our idea with her, she put us in contact with the director of Paws Across Pittsburgh Animal Rescue, a non profit, foster based shelter just a few miles from the Funeral Home. With their direction and resources, we were able to begin our campaign for goodies. We posted the collection to our Facebook page and before we knew it, donations were rolling in.

Beginning shortly before Lilo's 4th birthday, we placed a bin at the entrance of our building boasting a darling picture of the birthday girl. The bin remained in place for a few weeks. We had people dropping off various items to the funeral home sporadically, as well as when attending visitations and services. A family member of a decedent for which we cared lived out of the area. Most of our correspondence for arrangements had been done over email and phone. As such, she was remotely introduced to and followed Lilo's social media presence. At the onset of Lilo's birthday collection, this woman was quick to ship her contributions via Amazon. In addition to the many items, there were several days where we found monetary contributions in the basket as well. We know that this activity brought people to the funeral home that may not have otherwise known about Lilo or the services we provide. Our staff had the opportunity to also speak with people about their furry coworker simply in passing as people took note of the collection bin.

What felt most impressive to us, was the joy and energy that this collection created. People smiled when they saw the signs at the entrance of our building. Generosity was abundant from all corners of our community. While not directly reflecting the work we do within the funeral home, there was a distinct appreciation for Lilo that was expressed by the plentiful offerings made.

At the conclusion of Lilo's birthday drive, we had received bowls, beds, food, treats, toys, and more for the benefit of Paws Across Pittsburgh. A trunk full of items were packed up and sent on their way to the shelter, while we here at the Funeral Home felt really good about the success of this project.

Without Lilo's position here, we may not have had the foresight to expand our vision for community involvement. Accounting for perhaps several hundred dollars worth of contributions, our donation to the animal shelter brought to us a sense of charity and accomplishment. When introducing new ideas or implementing changes to the funeral home, we must also consider the potential for a positive ripple effect to occur. Introducing Lilo to the staff was of benefit to the families we serve, our own staff members, and the community alike as she has a way of bringing about comfort at all times. The extension of her impact by way of projects such as her birthday collection enhances the service we can provide to those in our community in times other than that of loss. That gift is one which we never expected to offer or receive in such abundance and yet one that we hope to share and enjoy in perpetuity.