

Heath Funeral Chapel Lakeland, Florida

We have seen over the years that children are affected in different ways than adults when it comes to grief. Over the past year we have looked at ways to better support the children who have lost someone in their lives. We have partnered with Good Shepherd Hospice in two ways: the naming sponsor for the children's crafts room at their Bethany center and handing out grief support bags to children at the funeral home during a funeral.

Detailed Description

The Bethany Center in Lakeland is a part of Good Shepherd Hospice. It's goal is "to provide quality counseling, hope, and healing free of charge for all children and families who grieve. Experienced grief counselors guide children to healing after a loss." Our funeral home gave the Bethany Center a donation to help with their new building in Lakeland. The Craft wall that we sponsored will allow children constructive methods to deal with their grief. In the summer of 2022, the Bethany Center opened and Bill and Caroline Schichtel went to the Grand Opening. About six months later, in early 2023, The Bethany Center reached out to the funeral home. The Center wanted to partner with Heath Funeral Chapel in giving out grief support bags to children at funerals. The Bethany Center Grief bags contain items suitable for an elementary and early middle school child, such as activity books, crayons, colored pencils, information on grief, etc. These bags are prepared by the staff at the Bethany Center and are held at our funeral home. When our staff sees a child at a funeral or arrangement conference, the staff can give each child a bag.

Benefits to Funeral Home and Staff

By sponsoring the Craft Wall, Heath Funeral Chapel has developed relationships with several staff members at Good Shepherd Hospice and we believe this is one of the reasons that the Bethany Center (Good Shepherd Hospice) want to partner with us on the grief support bags. The grief support bags created another opportunity for our staff to interact with the family. Our funeral directors and staff are caring individuals by nature and now can better funnel those gifts by identifying children who are needing a way to process their grief.

Benefits to Families and/or Community at Large

The children of the families that we serve now have another way to work through their grief at the funeral home and after the funeral with the age-appropriate grief support bags and craft wall at the Bethany Center. Items such as the grief activity book, comfort stretch flash cards, 100 coping skills, etc. gives the children interactive options to explore their grief in a healthy, safe manner.

Smith Family Funeral Homes North Little Rock, Arkansas

Smith Family Funeral Homes, Benton, AR; Smith Family Funeral Homes, Glenwood, AR; Smith Family Funeral Homes, Hot Springs, AR; Smith Family Funeral Homes, Little Rock, AR; Smith Family Funeral Homes, Sherwood, AR; Smith Family Funeral Homes – Westbrook, Beebe, AR; Ruggles-Wilcox Funeral Home, Arkadelphia, AR

Willow Award

Bringing awareness and appreciate to our end of life caregivers is extremely important to Smith Family Funeral Homes. We saw a gap that needed to be filled. Nurses were being recognized in hospitals all the time for outstanding work. But what about our hospice and end-of-life nurses? Who will recognize them for being there with our loved ones as they cross over the finish line? While most caregivers are able to see a job 'well done' when their patient goes home, having walked to the end-of-life with a loved one, end-of-life caregivers aren't able to see their patients' lives continue. Every day, we hear of exceptional stories. These hidden heroes are fulfilling a very special calling in this life. Shortly after the idea was brought up the Willow Award was created. The Willow Award was created to recognize end-of-life caregivers who provided exceptional compassionate care in someone's end-of-life journey.

The mission and vision are simple. We desire to help Central Arkansas families recognize and honor their end-of-life caregivers. End-of-life caregivers are often overlooked heroes in our loved ones' stories, and we want to help change that. Nurses, CNAs, medical assistants, social workers, Pastors, Deacons or other clergy, volunteers, administrative staff, custodial staff, any support staff can be nominated for the Willow Award.

Why the Willow? There is an old adage about the relative strength of trees and which is the strongest. It suggests that the mighty oak is the strongest of all trees: Tall, thick, sturdy. But the contrasting view is that the Willow is the strongest. Supple, swaying, flexible. When the wind is severe - damaging, hostile, punishing and harsh - the oak will withstand up to a point, but then snap. The Willow on the other hand will yield and bend and nearly touch the ground, and after the wind, will stand upright and resume its place. Like a willow tree, a caregiver working in end-of-life care bends to accommodate the needs of their patient and family in their storm. Regardless of the challenges that lie ahead, these caregivers are steadfast and resilient to the very end. Like the pliant Willow tree, they will stand back upright and tall, ready to care for another patient. This award is for them! We want to honor and recognize their strength and their flexibility to do what the families need and support them in their last moments together.

"We hear stories all the time from families about the great care that was given to their loved ones by nurses, Hospice workers, friends and family members," says Jeff Smith, owner of Smith Family Funeral Homes. "The Willow Awards will give more people a chance to hear those stories and pay honor to the wonderful caregivers in our communities and celebrate their lives also."

A Willow Award pinning ceremony is held at the recipient's place of employment. The nomination letter will be read to the Willow Award recipient as they receive an engraved crystal Willow Award and a Willow Award lapel pin, pinned by a selected board member. This individual will also receive recognition on our website and various publications. Tipton & Hurst also creates a special arrangement that will be awarded to all Willow Award recipients. This arrangement was custom designed to symbolize the beauty and resilience of this compassionate and loving group of caretakers who go the extra mile to make the end-of-life experience as peaceful as possible for the families and their loved ones.

Here are some excerpts from previous nomination letters:

Audrey has a loving way to handle the most fragile of patients, which June became in the following weeks. Audrey came by our home two days later to check on me and get another hug. She calls to check on me throughout the week and has been a source of strength and encouragement during this difficult time. I know my wife and I were not Audrey's only patient, but she made us feel as though we were, and I am forever grateful.

We realize how demanding the responsibilities are for a nurse working in the coronary care unit of a hospital. So, we recognized quickly the quality of caring and attending this nurse unselfishly offered to our mother. She communicated with kind words that made mom feel safe. She held mom's hand and talked with her about things to take her mind away from being at the end of her life. She made our mother feel as though she were her only patient, giving her as much time as she needed. Like the limbs of a willow tree, Makayla bends to meet the needs of her patients and their families. That is why our family is honored to nominate Makayla McBride to receive the Willow Award Excellence in End-Of-Life Care. She is very much a Hero to us.

The Willow Award is so much more than a special arrangement or crystal award, it is a thank you to each and every hero that sacrifices for our loved ones to have a peaceful and dignified end of life. These sacrifices are not unseen or unnoticed, we see them and want to draw light to those heroes! They selflessly give day in and day out as they help families and loved one through the journey we call life draws closer to the end. Thank you heroes! We see you and we appreciate all that you do!

Tetrick Funeral Services
Johnston City, Tennessee

Oakley-Cook Funeral Home & Crematory, Bristol, TN

This is the story of a few people coming together as one and what they did for people in our community who needed a helping hand.

Laura Graham Community Ambassador for Tetrick Funeral Services in Johnson City, Tennessee, was at the office of then Avalon Hospice, which is now Gentiva Hospice on the first of December 2022. Debbie Moore a social worker for this hospice organization came to her and asked if she would consider taking the lead in a fundraiser for patients in nursing homes who have no one or any financial support to purchase basic items of need. Being in nursing homes frequently, Debbie had become very concerned that many of the patients need to have socks on their feet to be comfortable and warm. Being a sock wearer to bed, Laura couldn't imagine being able to sleep if your feet are cold!

Laura told Debbie that she thought a sock fundraiser was a wonderful idea but we needed to do two things: (1) wait until Christmas was over and hold the fundraiser in January and February to end around Valentine's Day. Hence they decided on the name of Socks of Love for the fundraiser because out of love to help someone in need we are doing this and it was conducted during the month of love, February, and ending around Valentine's Day. (2) include all of the hospice organizations in Johnson City and Elizabethton, TN in this endeavor and work together as one unit to have an appeal to the Upper East Tennessee community. Debbie was in agreement so they approached Tonja Schnelle, Director of Gentiva Hospice with the idea. Tonja Schnelle got right on board with the idea and Laura contacted the directors of the other hospice agencies and they were in 100% in agreement of participation as a unit for this project.

A couple of weeks later Laura Graham called a meeting at Tetrick Funeral Services to lay the plan out for the fundraiser. Those who committed to be involved were Debbie Moore and Tammy Pearman, social workers with Gentiva Hospice; Sarah Hale, Volunteer Co-ordinator with Ballard Hospice; Becky Bragg, social worker with Caris Hospice, a social worker from Amedisys Hospice; and Laura Graham, Tetrick Funeral Services.

We brainstormed on how best we could promote this fundraiser and collect socks for those in need. Sarah Hale from Ballard Hospice offered to make a flyer that could be used for promotion and advertising. She asked that each one represented at the meeting send her their logo so all would share in the benefit of the advertising. On behalf of Tetrick Funeral Services, Laura Graham offered to pay for the advertising needed to get the word out and to try to get free TV and radio time to promote the project. Each hospice office involved placed a collection container for the socks at their respective office and Tetrick Funeral Services placed a collection container in the foyer of Tetrick Funeral Services in Johnson City, TN and one in Tetrick Funeral Home in Elizabethton, TN.

As Laura stated in a newspaper article, she remembered a story about a missionary in England in the 1800's by the name of George Mueller. Mr. Mueller built an orphanage for children in London and on the opening day, no children came to the orphanage. That evening he remembered that the one thing he had not been praying for was that the children who needed this facility would come to the orphanage. He prayed and by the end of the next day the orphanage was full. So, Laura believed if the Lord would do this for George Mueller and the children, He would do the same in sending socks to this project to warm the feet of the widows and widowers and other patients who were in need of a pair of socks to warm their feet. So, she started praying in December to this end believing that the Lord hears and answers our prayers.

By the end of the first week in January, the containers were set up in the various locations and Laura was scheduled to appear on WJHL-TV with the Tetrick comfort dog Little Richie Doodle for two appearances on Daytime Tri-Cities and an interview on an early morning radio program on WJCW radio. The outpouring from the community was unbelievable! In all of the years of promoting community events,

Laura said that she has never had the response of so many people who saw them on TV, heard the radio broadcast, and saw the newspaper ads.

Firstly, a loosely joined group called the Wild Women of Jonesborough in Jonesborough, TN sent the call out to residents there and 3 large boxes of socks appeared at the funeral home. Then a church member of a Baptist church in Colonial Heights, TN called and asked if we would like for them to do a fundraiser within her church. A Sunday School class at Crossroads Christian Church in Gray, TN donated 3 large boxes of socks and their retired minister personally donated an entire box case of footies. Private individuals donated socks, the publisher of our local weekly newspaper donated socks. The list goes on and on.

On February 10th those involved met at Tetrick Funeral Services and divided the sock donations up between the hospice organizations and all of those actively involved in the project went to Agape Nursing Home and presented their director with several tubs of socks. The representatives from Agape Nursing Home were so appreciative as they have a large number of patients who are on Medicaid. The remainder of the socks were divided up among the social workers and they as a group decided which agency represented would take the remaining socks to which nursing homes that they thought needed them the most.

Since the campaign has officially ended, we are still receiving sock donations at the funeral home for the social workers have to draw from when they see the need to replenish the supplies. We have also had a Baptist church near Jonesborough, TN do a sock fundraiser since the ending date.

We have decided to make this project an annual fundraiser event as we believe that in a very small way we are contributing to make someone's life a little better by giving those in need "a cup of kindness" by helping them to keep their feet warm.

An idea and a pair of socks have multiplied into hundreds of pairs of socks being donated and for that we are very grateful.

On a footnote: You will see the Amedisys logo in the advertising flyer. A representative was sent to the meeting in December but they did not follow through in contributing to the project nor come to help in disbursing the socks. Laura Graham talked to their social worker and he said he would come for we wanted their organization to share in the recognition received by the other organizations. We published their logo on the advertising flyer but they were non-participatory as the project moved forward.