

## **Cannon Cleveland Funeral Directors, McDonough, GA**

Funeral Service is just one piece of the puzzle when a death occurs. We often think that we as funeral professionals handle everything when it comes to death, but the truth is usually there are other phases of the loss. Regardless of the situation surrounding the death, there are other groups and people involved, from hospital staff to first responders, hospice nurses to coroners. There is a larger picture to consider.

Cannon Cleveland staff came together to see how we could bridge the gaps between these groups.

We started with one scenario, Hospice. How can we as funeral professionals connect with hospice nurses who are often the first on site after a death has occurred. How can we build a better transition from their care to ours? The answer was simple. Educate them on what we do, why we do it, and how they can be involved. On several occasions our staff received questions from hospice nurses regarding the embalming process. They have asked how it works, what is involved, and a few even asking if they could watch the process.

As a staff we began brainstorming. What do you wish you could tell a hospice nurse? We have been on countless removals where somebody has tried to position the body. They might lift their head up, but way too high and tilted to the left. We have even seen rolled towels placed under the chin. Their desire is to help. So, what would happen if we gave them the information to help in a beneficial way? We spoke to a few people throughout local hospice organizations to see if our idea was valuable. We were met with overwhelming support and intrigue. We discovered most hospice nurses did not know what it is that we do. They were unaware of things like the importance of having dentures when we take a person into our care. They were unaware that the position of the body could affect the outcome.

On June 14, 2021, Greg Cannon and Hannah Zeplin hosted an event with Southern Grace Hospice. All of their nurses attended. When the nurses learned of the topic they would be discussing there was a loud response. There were cheers, gasps and even a "woo-hoo". Over an hour was spent educating and explaining the embalming process, the importance of body and feature position, the importance of viewing, and sharing a few fun facts along the way. In the pictures below you can see them learning about facial proportions. The event ended with an opportunity for the nurses to ask questions. They had many questions, but most notably, they wanted to know more. It was decided that we would plan a time for them to learn more about the cremation process. This event will be recurring with different topics in the future.

Funeral Professionals and Hospice Care workers share a common goal. Whether it is the end-of-life experience or after the loss, we both strive to make the experience a little easier. We can do this by educating ourselves and working together to serve those who need us.

## Pursuit of Excellence Essay – Requirement 1F

### Karrer-Simpson Funeral Home, Port Huron, Michigan

During the very early days of the COVID pandemic, we became extremely grateful for the education received at Wayne State University's School of Mortuary Science, especially under the tutelage of the late Dr. Gordon Rose and the late Dr. Walter Pool. The medical science and epidemiology training of our older directors had focused on pandemics and contagious disease and we felt that we knew what to do to deal with this new threat. When contacted by county health personnel, we were able to respond with intelligent plans, adequate supplies and the superb national information being supplied to us almost daily by NFDA. We published a blog outlining the most recent funeral news on our website. While apprehensive and taking every precaution for the safety of our staff and the public, we also felt this was exactly why we were licensed as funeral directors. The Detroit area (60 miles to our south) suffered greatly early in the pandemic. Our two local hospitals and some nursing homes were used as "overflow" facilities, but the panic occurring in Detroit did not initially overwhelm us. We had plenty of COVID deaths, but did not require extra refrigerated storage, outside DMORT assistance and some of the other issues encountered elsewhere in Michigan. With great communication and assistance from our County Health Department, our staff was vaccinated early in 2021. During the course of the pandemic, we handled over 150 COVID deaths.

Our Thumb area experienced a late surge in April 2021 when we became a national "hot spot". While our established procedures allowed us to handle the largest volume month we had ever experienced, our local health care providers were being swamped and morale when we went into the facilities was clearly down. One of the local hospice nurses we work with happened to post on Facebook about the stress the hospital staff were experiencing, which gave us the idea of doing something to thank, encourage and help sustain them through this difficult time. We knew we had to act fast as this was a "right NOW" situation.

When we approached the H.R. directors at both our local hospitals, they responded with gratitude and, almost relief, as they knew something was needed but they didn't have the current time or resources to do anything. They both offered use of outdoor areas with electricity. We contacted some area "food trucks" which are becoming a trendy thing in our town. Being early in their season, they were available and eager to participate, and despite the short notice, mobilized their supplier networks and were able to get food and staff coordinated. We had Lily's Woodfire Pizza Oven (which smelled nice and smoky), Top Dog brats and hot dogs with exotic toppings and the Cheese Wagon with gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches and pulled pork nachos. Our local ice cream company, Jimmy's Frozen Custard agreed to bring a freezer trailer and called in his staff to work two 12 hours days to make enough frozen "Jimmy Bars" for dessert with three different coatings. The trucks all provided bottled water to drink.

In the morning of the events, the trucks set up outside the hospital employee entrances and we provided some canopy tents where we gave away antibacterial pens and mini hand sanitizers. We had several of our staff on-site directing people to the trucks and talking with the hospital personnel as they waited in line for their food. We had a large sign made which read:

And the hospital printed out the e-mail message we had sent inviting everyone to lunch on a sandwich board.

After seeing the original Facebook post from the hospice nurse on Sunday, April 11, 2021, we were at McLaren Port Huron Hospital on Wednesday, April 14 and Lake Huron Medical Center on Thursday, April 15. While April weather in Michigan is "iffy", the staff lined up happily to get their lunches and were absolutely delighted to be outside during the day and be treated to lunch. We did not contact the newspaper or announce what was happening outside the hospital community as we wanted it to be strictly a "just between us and them" event and we stressed that we SAW how hard they were working and what a great job they were doing. We served approximately 1000 staff over the two days with a total cost of \$13000. Had we waited two weeks to do this, the emergency situation would have been over and it would not have had the same impact. Our ability to jump on this situation and pull a unique event together quickly (as funeral directors should be able to do) enabled us to achieve a public relations and community-morale bullseye with local health care workers that we would never have been allowed to do under normal conditions.

The year 2020 will be one that forever remains in all our minds. Funeral service experienced change like never before during this time. Even though the days were long and difficult and no family in our community went unaffected by the wrath of COVID, we became more visible and involved in our communities.

When we first learned of COVID and how it might affect funeral service and funeral service professionals we realized that it would take a team effort to traverse the pandemic. We first reached out to the infectious disease department of our local hospital to develop a protocol for dealing with COVID related deaths. A meeting was set with healthcare leaders and a mutually agreed upon plan was put into place. We recommended to the healthcare team that all deaths that occurred at the hospital would be transferred into a containment pouch and taken to the morgue. Funeral service personnel would not make transfers from the patient floors. Due to a severe shortage of containment pouches at the hospital, our funeral home provided them with the necessary amount until they could obtain them.

We remained in daily contact with the hospital and were kept aware of the number of COVID patients. When the first COVID death occurred, the protocol was followed and worked seamlessly. There were many deaths that followed and all of them, whether COVID related or not, were handled in the COVID protocol to prevent the transfer of infection in or out of the hospital.

We also remained in contact with our County Emergency Management Director during the crisis. We talked weekly concerning the availability of personal protective equipment for county funeral homes. We discussed some options for dealing with a mass fatality incident if our deaths reached that level. During this time, we increased our refrigerated storage capacity in order to deal with any drastic increase in the death toll.

After several weeks of talking with healthcare and emergency personnel we became a part of the community wide COVID discussion group. This group included all healthcare professionals, emergency management contact, local law enforcement, fire and rescue operations, nursing facilities, and funeral providers. We were chosen as the funeral service contact in these weekly meetings and were charged with disseminating pertinent information to local funeral service providers. The group continued to meet weekly until the COVID death rate dropped to near zero.

The pandemic has been a difficult time in which to operate but has encouraged greater communication and cooperation between all these agencies and businesses in our community. We certainly are better prepared to meet similar situations in the future and have established funeral service as a vital part of emergency management in our area.