

A Sacred Choice Houston, Texas

A Sacred Choice is proud to be a founding board member for Twilight Wish Houston Chapter. Four individuals decided there had to be a way to bring joy to seniors and make an impact to their families. The group consists of a funeral home (us), real estate agent, senior living locator and community relations manager for a senior community.

The media is filled with bad news and we wanted to bring a bit of sunshine to the world. We discovered the Twilight Wish Organization which grants three types of wishes. We started the Houston chapter and started granting wishes. The first is Simple Needs wish which can be a wheelchair or a mattress. The second is a Living Life to the fullest which can be a ticket to a baseball game or football game. The final wish is Celebrating a Life which is an experience such as flying the senior to a relative's home that they haven't been able to visit.

Our team met, we reached out to Twilight Wish headquarters and started applying for grants to be able to serve the community. Our first wish was a BIG one. It received local and national news coverage and we are proud to say the family is so happy with the way they were served that they have offered to be our wish ambassadors!

Celebrating a Life Wish with Norma Sue Stephenson

Norma Sue's grandson heard about our organization and how we wanted to grant wishes so he reached out and told us the most amazing story. Norma Sue's husband, Victor Phelps was a fighter pilot who was shot down during WWII in Bologna, Italy. He was taken as a prisoner of war and survived the death march. On April 29, 1945, American troops led by Gen. George Patton liberated Phelps and others from Stalag 3. It was Norma Sue's dream to visit the memorial site that was resurrected for her husband years ago where his plane was shot down.

The Phelps family had no idea this site even existed until a few years ago and as soon as Norma found out she made it her life mission to visit. Our team hosted fundraisers, television interviews, newspaper interviews and countless calls were placed to make this dream come true. We helped obtain her passport, flights, accommodations and on Thursday April 27, 2023 Norma Sue, a 93 year old woman was on her way to Italy with our team ready to capture every minute.

On the other side of the pond arrangements were being made for a parade, the town mayor pulled out all the stops and when Norma Sue arrived she was treated like royalty. She spent a week learning about the city and how they honored her husband for his service. Her son and grandson took an extra trip to visit the camp where Victor Phelps was held captive. This was our first wish and it cemented our passion for helping seniors.

Our team started receiving more wishes and we knew we had to involve more volunteers to make a bigger impact. Our funeral is part of the Senior Estate Concierge and we knew we could count on them to help. This organization is dedicated to assist seniors in every aspect such as hospice, movers, home health etc. They are all vetted individuals and what better way to get the word out about our organization than with people who are out in the community and care to make a difference.

https://www.click2houston.com/topic/Norma_Sue_Stephenson/

<https://www.fox26houston.com/news/non-profit-grants-95-year-old-houston-woman-her-wish-to-visit-italy-for-memorial-honoring-her-late-husband>

<https://www.castelbolognesenews.eu/2023/04/il-29-aprile-incontro-con-norma-sue-stephenson-la-vedova-dellaviatore-texano-che-nel-1944-venne-abbattuto-lungo-il-senio/>

<https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/article/wwii-veteran-s-family-attend-ceremony-italy-17857331.php>

Our second wish was to provide a mattress to a senior that had not slept on a bed in years. This was truly heartbreaking and also very humbling. We partnered with a furniture company that is willing to help our chapter and provide furniture at wholesale cost.

<https://www.facebook.com/TwilightWishHouston/>

Our third wish was to reunite the Charlo Brothers boxers to their biggest fan who was dying from pancreatic cancer. As soon as we received the notification we knew time was of the essence. Our team started calling every connection we had and tried to get ahold of the boxers.

<https://www.fox26houston.com/news/72-year-old-houston-mans-dying-wish-to-meet-his-boxing-idols-comes-true-in-a-way-no-one-expected>

Our fourth wish is for a senior that has not missed a single Astros games in years but could never attend due to her mobility. We were able to obtain four tickets and have them attend a game with special access to several facilities at the park and tons of swag options.

Twilight Wish has allowed our funeral home to have a non-profit side that most funeral homes don't have and it sets us apart. It feels good to know we are making a difference and we can involve our team to be volunteers.

Houston has never had an organization like this and we can't wait to have other major cities such as Dallas or Austin to have their own chapter and help seniors in those communities.

We are making a difference one wish at a time.

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home
Pennsauken, New Jersey

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes, Camden, NJ

On Sunday, June 25, 2023 from 1:00 PM to approximately 2:30 PM, we at Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home hosted an Estate Planning Lunch & Learn partnered with Capehart & Scatchard Law Firm at our Pennsauken Funeral Home located at 6600 N. Browning Road.

During this seminar, Associate Stacey Gorin, gave a detailed presentation on the procedures and methods of estate planning for the surrounding community members of the Pennsauken and Camden Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes. The presentation focused on areas such as Wills, Durable Power of Attorney, Healthcare Power of Attorney, and Living Trusts.

One of our funeral directors, Ashley Caruso-Condon, also presented a small section on Funeral Agents and the importance of including this designation in their will.

We also had Susan Grimm, of Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, present a small section on being a Certified Probate Real Estate Specialist, explaining how it works when properties are included in the probate process and what family members can do to better prepare for those moments.

During this event, we provided free light refreshments including an assortment of wraps, vegetables, fruits, crackers & cheese, iced tea, lemonade, water, and desserts. We believe that this event was important for us to host for our community because it helped to educate the members of our communities on the need for estate planning.

Often, we encounter families that enter our funeral home to plan a service for their loved one and during the arrangement conference they express they are at a loss of what to do with their loved one's personal matters, such as their house, car, retirement accounts, etc. We felt as though this presentation could help to give guidance of the proper steps, they can take ahead of time to lessen the stress and issues they might encounter after their loved one passes. There have even been situations where families discover assets or accounts their loved one had that they did not even know exist. By taking care of their estate planning ahead of time, it helps to communicate what assets or accounts exist and what should be done with them.

This presentation also helped to stress the importance of a will and designation of a Funeral Agent if need be. The existence of a will helps provide families with the answers to questions they may be unsure of themselves, such as what their loved one's wishes were for their funeral services. In addition, many times families do not even know what a Funeral Agent is and by the time they find out, it is too late for them to assign one as the person has passed.

Following the event, we sent a thank you email to all participants and invited them to share their thoughts to help us learn what we can improve on for our next event.

Our goal with this Lunch & Learn was to provide an informative free event for the members of our community to help educate them on pre-planning steps they can take to hopefully help lessen the burden and stress they experience while grieving the loss of their loved one. Hosting this type of event, helps not only the community, but also benefits us as a funeral home and staff. If families understand the pre-planning steps, it helps us to better serve them in their time of need because final affairs were made prior to their loved one's passing.

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home
Royal Oak, Michigan

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home, Utica, MI

Since 1906, Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors has been living up to its legacy of care. As a fourth generation, family-owned funeral home, much of our ongoing service is based upon relationships that are built within our communities. This is true for all departments within the funeral home, both preneed and at need. The latter is what we are focusing on for this year's Pursuit of Excellence essay.

This past year, our preneed program has focused on making continued connections by being involved with the local senior centers and churches. We have been present serving breakfast, donating prizes, helping run senior bingo, donating meals, sponsoring a Christmas pancake breakfast, and providing everything for an ice cream sundae event, all while being there to serve. As funeral home staff, we can get outside of the building and share a meal with our community members. Many of them shared stories with us about times that we have served their families in the past and elaborated about their own grief stories. These families are comfortable sharing their journey with us in an environment that is different from the funeral home setting. Our staff listens and learns about what families value within the funeral home's services. Those conversations are irreplaceable and allow staff to listen, respond and support at the time of passing when we are serving the family. Connections allow families to feel more comfortable when they see a familiar face and a sense of belonging to a place in their community. Community connections have a positive impact. When people are connected, they are more likely to invest in the community's success. When people come together and work towards a shared cause, we create an environment of trust.

Many of our staff contribute their time, energy, and talents to serve Utica, Royal Oak, and the surrounding communities. Our staff have a friendly competition each quarter, reporting on their volunteer hours and striving to be the staff member recognized as the one who gave it their all. The "winner" of that quarter is awarded a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant and recognition among their colleagues. We have seen our fellow staff members encouraged to make positive acts of kindness for our community, because the Sullivan and Lope' families strive to enrich the lives of those they serve. Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors is and will continue to be dedicated to excellence in service.