



Danvers, MA

Section 1F

In December 2020 C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors produced a virtual Holiday Service of Light and Remembrance. Typically, this service is held in person each December. However, this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on in-person gatherings C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors was forced to create a new opportunity to provide this important holiday tradition. Planning for this virtual event began in September 2020. We had reached out to our funeral celebrant the Reverend Terri Bracy. We discussed with Terri our thoughts on what this year's Holiday Service of Light and Remembrance should look like and what it should include. Even though this was a virtual event we thought it was important to keep as many of the traditions of this service as possible while adding in some new things. We worked with Terri to outline the service including the music that would be played and the readings that would be read. Once all the program specifics were decided we scheduled a day in late November when we could record the program. Reverend Bracy came to the funeral home where we filmed the program. The program included a welcome from Reverend Bracy as well as music that included both holiday music and music from musicians Sara Bareilles, Ingrid Michaelson, and Cathie Ryan. This service also included the lighting of candles. Viewers were encouraged by Reverend Bracy to also light a candle for their loved one at home. Candles were lit for those that were lost this past year: children, spouses, parents, and friends. Once this service was completed the funeral home staff edited the program and then uploaded it to the Lyons Funeral Home YouTube page. In late November mailings were sent out to the family members of those who we served in 2020. Included in this mailing was a letter from the C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors staff. This letter served as a holiday greeting and invitation to view the Holiday Service of Light and Remembrance virtual program. A link to the program was included in this letter. Also included with this mailing was a brochure titled "Getting Past Christmas." This brochure offered some tips to help families get through the holiday season. We had over sixty views for this program on our YouTube channel. In a year where family and friends were unable to hold traditional funeral services for their loved ones, C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors thought it was important to try and keep an annual tradition alive with this virtual program. We received several notes thanking us for this service and expressed how it was extremely helpful for them during the holiday season.

Innovative Program Executed by Christopher Mitchell Funeral Homes, Inc.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! This traditional greeting is most often shared by most people during the time immediately following the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States. Christmas is traditionally a festive and joyous time of year. If you are the family of a person who has just passed away, or this is your first major holiday without them, or if you still are holding on tight to grief which is unresolved from years past, then Christmas isn't very merry. While the rest of the world is rejoicing and celebrating the season, many people are putting on fake smiles and sharing diminished laughter just to not dampen the mood of others as they are deeply hurting inside.

We at Christopher Mitchell Funeral Homes recognized this and decided to partner with the local contingent of Clergy in our area to try and face this issue head-on. We hold a "Blue Christmas Service-A Time of Remembrance" where people who are grieving can come together and remember their loved ones during the Christmas season. There are readings, and poems and a time where community groups such as "Hospice" and the "Survivors of Suicide" along with the Funeral Home staff and local clergy read aloud the names of people gone but not forgotten. Whether or not they have passed in the preceding year or not, as their names are read, a small candle is lit on a table in remembrance of the person gone before us. Traditional Christmas Carols are sung, but ones which are more on the contemplative side and not celebratory in nature. While the service is held in a church, and is done in conjunction with the local Clergy Community, it isn't overly religious. And while Jesus is the reason for the season, the prayerful, reflective and contemplative mood created by the readings and music is non-secular and encompasses all with a calming support. The funeral home sponsors the program by paying for advertising and the candles as well as specially made ceramic ornaments given to each participant of the service. Each ornament can be personalized with the name of the person being remembered...as there is a time of fellowship after the service where volunteers inscribe the names on the ornament with permanent markers.

Gamble Funeral Service, Savannah, GA

SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE AND HOPE

In 2000, we held our first annual Service of Remembrance and Hope when we were with the former Sipple Mortuary. The idea of such a program came during a regularly scheduled staff meeting, where our Sipple Mortuary funeral home family explored a number of topics focused on providing our families with aftercare assistance and bereavement support. An enthusiastic consensus was reached among the staff that we should pursue an observance that would help bring strength, encouragement, and healing to families and individuals during their grieving progression. With that vision in mind, the staff began a strategic planning process to construct a fitting Service of Remembrance and Hope. This vision has continued annually since Gamble Funeral Service was founded in October 2003.

The final product has been followed each year, only with minor adjustments. A huge Tree of Remembrance is placed in the front of our chapel and is adorned with striking ornaments that have the name and date of death of each person who died in the past year. This is a service provided by our funeral home and is offered without any cost to the public. Much thought has been given to these three areas: the title of our service, the timing of our service, and the type of our service.

- A) The title of the service—Our staff felt that most of the families had previously been through a funeral or memorial service for their loved one. We determined this service should be more than just a message of hope but rather a service designed to deal with the brokenness that grief brings and a service of reflection, thankfulness, and simple tribute. This is why the staff chose to title the occasion as the Service of Remembrance and Hope.**

- B) The timing of the service—Most services of this type are held before Christmas Day. There is certainly nothing wrong with this approach, however, our observance is typically held the Sunday evening following Christmas Day. Our staff felt that most friends and family members are keenly attentive to the close survivors until Christmas Day.**

Unfortunately, after that special day, most of the friends and family members return to their homes and go about living their own lives, without giving personal support to the other members of their family.

- C) The type of service—The staff and management of Gamble Funeral Service desired our observance to be a non-denominational program and not related to a particular religion. We wanted to avoid offending any particular family that we had served or a family we may serve in the future. The order of service includes an opening hymn, a prayer, scripture reading, special music from a local group, the citing of those whose names are on the Tree of Remembrance, a message of hope, a prayer, the closing hymn, and benediction. At the conclusion of the service, the attendees are invited to enjoy a time of fellowship where refreshments have been prepared.**

The actual planning of the service begins at our staff meeting in August and September when we gather names of potential clergy in the community who have demonstrated their ability to connect with bereaving people and can articulate solace. We contact the selected clergy shortly after their selection in order to eliminate any scheduling conflicts and to collaborate with them concerning desired scriptures and music that may be used during the service.

The next phase is the process of personalizing the ornaments for the Tree of Remembrance. The initial group of ornaments are designated for those individuals who were served by our funeral home from December 1st of the past year through November 30th of the current year. Insuring each ornament is correct and legible is a very time-consuming process.

In November, the staff turns to social media to provide public service announcements concerning the upcoming service. These messages inform others in the community of this program who may not have a connection to Gamble Funeral Service and would like to attend.

On December 5th we typically mail a personal letter to the next of kin of each deceased person we provided a service for during the past year. The letter invites all of the family members and friends to share in our service, and

reminds them of our offer to provide an ornament for other members of their family who have died.

Throughout the process, we make certain the officiating clergy, organist, and our staff members have communicated with each other to ensure a smooth flow with the order of service. The bulletin is proofed, printed and folded, and the refreshments are ordered during the final days of preparation.

The ground work for the next year's service begins with our first staff meeting following the Service of Remembrance and Hope. All of the staff are asked to share any positive or negative feedback they may have from the service. We challenge each other on every detail from the message and music presented, the availability of parking, the placement of our staff, to the refreshments offered. These comments and discussions have helped us "fine tune" our services over the years.

The Service of Remembrance and Hope has been unquestionably a very positive observance for our funeral home. It has provided us the opportunity to acknowledge the loss of loved ones and to share once again with grieving family members our compassionate attention as they take those steps towards healing.

The local newspaper, the ABC and NBC affiliate television stations have provided valued coverage to our funeral service after the service.

In 2016, we reached out to clergy members representing more than one denomination to participate in and lead the service. This gesture was intended to add more diversity to our service which aligns the service more closely to the families we serve. Our intentions are to continue with this practice.

Then in 2017, our staff opened the service to all families, not just the families for whom we had provided a service. Additionally, we do not charge for nor do we limit the number of ornaments requested and given to a family.

A number of improvements to the logistics of the service were made in 2018. Backlogs to families waiting to receive their ornaments after the service was becoming a trying experience for our staff. As a result, we increased the number of staff used to locate the ornaments on the tree in order to expedite

families receiving their loved one's tribute. This change in process, coupled with pre-sorting the ornaments for families requesting multiple orders for other family members reduced the "wait-time" that previously caused the backlog. The staff is constantly trying not to cause anymore delay than necessary during an already stressful time to the family members and friends who are attending the service.

The 2019 Service of Remembrance and Hope saw continued improvements to the logistics and coordination between staff and families receiving ornaments. The staff initiated a new process to the program which now allows for the immediate production of additional ornaments requested by families at the time of the service by having two areas set up with extra blank ornaments, manned by staff who are able to reproduce any additional personalized ornaments in a timely manner. Additionally, Gamble Funeral Service offers to mail additional ornaments to requested family members or to those who are unable to attend the service in person.

The challenges of 2020 due to COVID-19 are of course well-documented. With concern for the health and safety of our staff and the families that we serve, the in-person service was suspended, and instead personal letters were delivered to the families of those who had lost a loved one in the past year. We reached out to the Reverend Dr. Drew Corbett, who is also a local hospice program chaplain, and were able to offer grief counseling as well as the personalized ornaments that were either mailed or hand delivered as requested by surviving family.

Gamble's Service of Remembrance and Hope is an integral part of our long-standing tradition of continuing to minister to our families in their journey of grief after the death of a loved one. We strive to live by our watchword of "Ask a family we have served."

HOLIDAY MEMORIAL – A DRIVE-BY EVENT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Holiday Memorial Service became a drive-by Holiday Memorial Event. Although we were skeptical about families attending we decided that even through the difficult time we were facing, it was important to host an event in memory of those who had died within the past year. This event was held Tuesday, December 8, 2020.

We sent an invitation to the families of those we served inviting them – and their family – to participate in the drive-by event. The event was held at our facility and items were set up in front of our event center. In front of the event center we set up tables with Merry Christmas from Heaven poems, keepsake candles, and an inspirational cross. There was also a Christmas tree decorated with ornaments symbolizing those being represented.

The parking lot was set up almost as if a funeral procession would be taking place. We had staff members guiding vehicles to form lines and instructing them when to drive up for their gifts. The Edinburg Police Department also helped by sending a few patrol cars to the funeral home to block off traffic for those attending the event.

The first step was to check in and give the name of their loved one and date of passing. We then gave them programs that included the names of everyone being represented and asked them to proceed to the front of the event center. There we had additional staff members handing out the keepsake items. They received a 5” by 7” inch frame that held the poem Merry Christmas from Heaven, a small silver cross that had an In Memory message, a candle that signified the love for our loved one and the love we shared together, the memories of holidays and special days past, the grief that we experience living our lives without them, and our hope for the future. As we were unable to host a reception, we gave trays of baked goods to those who attended.

Memorial Funeral Home, Edinburg, TX

This event was quite successful as we had close to 100 persons represented. Families arrived with the names of their loved ones on their vehicles, as well as with their cars decorated with Christmas lights and Christmas decorations. We received praise from those in attendance who truly appreciated us hosting such an event that honored their loved ones. For some, it was difficult as they had lost more than one family member due to COVID. Nonetheless, they were touched to receive gifts in their memory. The positive feedback we received made our efforts worthwhile and we hope that this year we can host an in-person event.

HOLIDAY MEMORIAL EVENT

Every December, Memorial Funeral Home hosts a Holiday Memorial Service to honor those who have died within the past year. Using our database, we mail an invitation to each family inviting them to attend. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event was changed from a memorial service to a memorial event.

We set up a Christmas tree with ornaments representing those being honored, as well as a table that had framed Merry Christmas from Heaven poems, keepsake crosses, and small candles. There was also a Christmas tree decorated with ornaments honoring those being represented. In place of a reception, families were given goody trays to take home with them.

Cones were set up in our parking lot and some of our staff was helping direct the vehicles. We had a few persons in a designated area where families were asked to check in and give us the name of their loved one and date of death. At this point they were given programs that had the name of everyone being represented. From there they were asked to continue further to where the tables and Christmas tree were set up. Additional staff was at this area to give the poem, a lighted candle, ornament, and goody tray to those who attended.

During the planning phase we had some concerns as to whether or not families would attend the event. Due to the pandemic, attendance at funerals had greatly declined and we worried that the same thing would happen for our holiday memorial event; luckily, we had a good turnout. The families were grateful that even during the difficult times we were facing we still hosted this event to honor their loved ones.

Some families caravanned, some decorated their vehicles with Christmas lights and a few had the names of their loved ones painted on the windows of their vehicles. Perhaps the most touching part of the evening was a caravan of four vehicles who arrived as the event was close to

Memorial Funeral Home, San Juan, TX

ending with their cars decorated and, just as they were about to receive the keepsake items, had a balloon release in honor of their loved one. After the event, the Christmas tree and keepsake items were brought into the funeral home where those who were unable to attend could still stop by and take the gifts in their loved one's memory.

The staff of Memorial Funeral Home worked hard to plan and execute this event. There were approximately 135 persons represented and the feedback we received from those families who attended was all positive. We look forward to hosting another holiday memorial event this year, hopefully in person and in our chapel.

I. Basic Requirements (Section F)

Annual Holiday Remembrance Program

Oliverie Funeral Home has successfully served the surrounding areas of Manchester, New Jersey for over 30 years. We are dedicated to going above and beyond to provide support for our families, as losing a loved one is never easy. Our staff fully believes grieving individuals should commemorate cherished moments as much as possible, especially during times of grief.

The family cultural and religious demographics Oliverie Funeral Home serves in Ocean County New Jersey is a 90% Christian community set in a suburban area. To be more specific, Ocean County has 60,000+ senior citizens in senior development communities with an age restriction of 55+. These senior citizens are originally from North Jersey and metro New York.

These senior citizens have moved into Ocean County for their retirement years based on cost of living, climate and wanting to still be near their children and grandchildren. Since we live in a mobile society their families can live as far away as a few miles to hundreds of miles.

Around the holidays, the surviving nuclear family of the deceased may not be in close proximity to each other, often leaving a void for those dealing with a sense of loss. The first year and the first of the major holidays are the most difficult for survivors to deal with. There is often a feeling of putting on a "brave face" for those around you to keep the holiday spirit upbeat, while inside the survivor is suffering in silence unable to share those intimate feelings.

Oliverie Funeral Home hosts an annual Holiday Remembrance Program for those going through the first year of grief. It is a safe place to share their feelings, memories and traditions of their lost loved one with others that can relate to their specific heartache.

Normally each year we host our Holiday Remembrance Program on the second Monday in December at a lovely restaurant in the area. This year due to COVID-19 and the safety and well-being of our families we decided to host it virtually. We still had a large turnout and were able to host it live via Facebook. People attending virtually were able to interact with us and everyone else during the whole event. Anyone who RSVPed were sent out angel ornaments in the mail early in order to have them in time for the virtual event. Anyone who did not RSVP we asked them to give us their names and mailing addresses and we sent their ornaments through the mail after the virtual event. We were also able to still play the virtual memorial tribute video for them and also supply them with a free link for whoever wanted to download and save the tribute video. During the virtual event we encouraged the attendees to discuss openly how this past year after losing a loved one has been for them. We also had our grief therapist on staff to reach out to anyone who openly shared their feelings during the event and check-in with them.

Not only does this Holiday Remembrance Program benefit the families we serve, but also our staff. It gives us a chance to reconnect with the families we have served and assist them in anything else they may need. We like to remind them that they have our continued support. This year especially was important since COVID-19 increased the people in our community to isolate for many months. We wanted them to know that even though we had to

Oliverie Funeral Home, Manchester, NJ

keep our distance for health and safety reasons that we were still here for them no matter what. We knew early on that even though we could not host our Holiday Remembrance Program in person this year that we still wanted to host it virtually and we made sure we accomplished all the major steps and planning to make it happen. Listening to the families that attended talk about how much this event meant to them made it all worth it.

Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home, East Pittsburgh, PA

2020 Christmas Service of Remembrance

Same service for the same reason since 1994, but a very different delivery.

Since 1994, annually on the first Wednesday of December, the Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home has presented our Holiday Service of Remembrance. We invite all of the families that we have served in the past year to attend. The Service consists of a religious service by a local clergy person, a lecture on Grief and the Holidays by our Bereavement Counselor, Jill Kazour, a presentation of a specially made Holiday ornament and some time for refreshments and goodies.

As life in general was deeply affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, so too was the viability of our Holiday Service of Remembrance. After deep discussion amongst co-workers and stake holders, it was agreed that it we should find a way to continue the Service as it may be more important and impactful this year, than any other year.

After much brainstorming and gut-wrenching, we decided to hold the service in a virtual format, as we would not be able to have an in-person Service.

We contracted with our Video Specialist, Sanders Video, to produce the service and use his professional live-streaming capability to deliver the service to all families.

We decided to continue to rent Olympia Hall in East Pittsburgh to be the setting of the Service, just as it has been every year since 1994. We felt it was important to have the Service in that setting, as opposed to a funeral home viewing room, in order to differentiate this service from a Memorial or Funeral Service and to make this Service as distinctive and unique as it has been since 1994.

Present at the Service was Pastor David Jones who presented the religious portion, John Marcinzyn a professional guitarist who provided warm, holiday-themed background music, our Bereavement Counselor, Jill Kazour, our folks, and the staff of Sanders Video.

After a prelude of Holiday music by John the guitarist, the Service began with Pastor Dave's reading of scripture, brief homily, and prayer. He was followed by Jill's presentation of Grief in the Holidays and that was followed by something special for this virtual Service.

Each year since 1994, each family is presented a specially made Holiday ornament. Any family not having representation would be mailed an ornament. Since none could be presented in person, all were mailed in 2020, along with an invitation to our 2021 Service. To replace the ornament presentation, we also contracted with Sanders Video to produce a video much like the NFDA's Service of Remembrance video. The names of each deceased on the video which was backed by beautiful live music from John the guitarist. The deceased's names were scrolled at a very slow pace so that viewers would have sufficient opportunity to see their loved one's name. Each name was also individually announced by a co-worker during the scrolling.

Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home, East Pittsburgh, PA

We kept the broadcast of the Service on our website for over a month and published it to our You Tube Channel for future viewing. It can still be viewed on You tube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rllhnTIOA4&t=1232s>.

There have been over 500 views of the Service on You Tube.

Unfortunately, we could not duplicate via streaming the final segment of our in-person Service. That part is the fellowship that is shared after the Service. Typically, this portion of the Service is informal, yet important, as old acquaintances are renewed, hugs and handshakes are exchanged, coffee and cookies are enjoyed, tears are shed and understanding is shared.

Although the virtual Service was well-received and appreciated, we certainly are hoping to welcome a return to our in-person Holiday Service of Remembrance this year, and perhaps include the live-streaming.

Pines Funeral, Carthage, NC

The circumstances of 2020 left many families without the opportunity to have a funeral service or celebration of life. In addition to these circumstances, many families in our community faced their first Holiday season without their loved-one, or in some cases loved-ones. As many know in the funeral service profession, the Holiday Season can be a tough time for those who have experienced a loss. Whether the loss of a loved one is recent or far in the past, the grief and weight of the loss remain the same.

Naturally, as a funeral home but more importantly as a member of the Carthage, Robbins, and Southern Pines communities, we made it a priority to organize an event which would give families the opportunity to remember their loved ones.

With this in mind, we at PinesFunerals sought to give the deserving families in our communities the opportunity to gather and share in fellowship to pay tribute, celebrate, and remember their loved ones.

Thus, we created the PinesFunerals Luminaries of Remembrance. This event is extremely important not only for those who have lost a loved one, but also for us giving the community a chance to grieve. These remembrance events were held not one, but three times and three different locations in our service areas: Fry & Prickett Funeral Home, Kennedy Funeral Home and Pinelawn Memorial Park.

We personally sent a signed letter of invitation to the families who we had served from July 2019 to November 2020 to invite them to the Luminary of Remembrance. After the invitation letters were mailed, we extended the invitation to the rest of the families in Moore County, NC, even the families to whom we did not provide services for.

The Luminary encompassed a walkthrough of the corresponding location which was lit by luminaries on the interior and exterior of each facility. During each luminary, a memorial slideshow was being played on multiple screens with images depicting those who we had served from July 2019 through November of 2020.

During the ceremonies, families also gathered to share in moments of prayer and remembrance. Families were encouraged to share special memories or moments they had of their loved one with other community members who had also suffered a loss.

From seeing the impact, the Luminaries of Remembrance had on our previously served families in our service area communities, we have chosen to continue hosting this event annually moving forward.



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Care Center. Dan and Peg Jonkhoff

- D. Provide a statement, signed by the funeral home owner or general manager, stating that the funeral home gathers customer-satisfaction feedback (e.g., via surveys, comment cards, letters requesting family feedback, NFDA's Family Satisfaction Survey program, or an equivalent customer-satisfaction survey program) regarding the quality of services received. Include the method of gathering customer-satisfaction feedback and how the information is shared with staff in your statement.

[Our funeral home gathers feedback using several methods.](#) First and Foremost is the Graystone survey for both atneed and preneed. The deceased's contact name is sent to Graystone, surveys are returned via email to Peg who then hard copies and places on Lindsey's desk to review with the funeral directors. The monthly survey scores and comments are routed to all staff. A second method is the multiple followup calls made by the funeral directors and that helped the family and so documented on their Care Contact system. Dan and Peg

- E. Submit an essay describing an innovative program, service or activity executed by your funeral home. (You are encouraged to describe a program/service other than a personalized funeral service.) **The essay must be a minimum of 400 words** and will be used to determine recipients of the Best of the Best Award, Richard Myers Pinnacle Award, and Certificate of Honorable Mention.

Documentation Required: In addition to your essay, you must submit supporting documentation (e.g., photographs, advertisements, newspaper clippings, flyers, etc.).

Address the following in your essay:

- Rationale behind the idea.
- Detailed description of the program, service or activity.
- Benefits provided to funeral home and staff.
- Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large.
- If applicable, list any community organization(s) (e.g., church, hospice, etc.) involved with the development and/or implementation of the idea, and describe the role the organization(s) played.

Note: Describing a program/activity from a previous year's entry will only be accepted if changes or improvements are noted within the essay.

The idea described in this essay can also be used to fulfill one criterion in Categories 2-6.

Participant essays will be featured on the NFDA website and used in other idea-sharing activities.

[These Three Trees](#)

1- [Rationale behind the idea: Our funeral home presented a Holidays and Grief program for the past 36 years. However due to the COVID-19 pandemic and gathering limits indoors in Michigan, we decided to take our program outside on our west lawn and live stream it for the](#)

Pursuit of Excellence

world to see! Our focus was on what we COULD do to help people who were grieving so many losses (not just death) especially given the current circumstances.

2- Detailed description of the program, service or activity: Our 37th annual "Holiday Help and consequence Hope" idea was a pandemic-sensitive program, an amazing service as it helped so many in various ways and unique never been done before activity!

Our "These Three Trees" event on December 3, 2020 was a huge success as people gathered along the sidewalk and 60 people joined us at www.rjfh.tv during our live streamed event. It was a magical evening with Lindsey's heartfelt message of hope surrounded by work family members and especially as the three trees were lit one at a time while four Victorian era attired Old Town Playhouse carolers sang "Oh Christmas Tree". Senior Funeral Director, Rick Harkert, shared a very special prayer and coordinated the carolers. Kyle and Brandon worked their AV live streaming magic on the lawn complete with lights on set.

3- Benefits provided to funeral home and staff: We received positive press in the Traverse City Record Eagle and curbside "literally" as the roaming WTCM radio van pulled up on Sixth Street and interviewed Peg pre-event. All staff members were invited to participate in the event and experience the "meaningful magic" of the evening. The temperature was even ideal with this memory etched forever in their hearts.

4- Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large: We distributed 247 gift bags beginning that evening through Christmas Eve day that contained a small red cardinal with special message (When a cardinal appears, it reminds us of those we loved so dear. We cherish the fond memories and we may shed a tear. Forever in our hearts, they will always be near) brochure with 10 helpful coping tips as Christmas Day approaches and a few other items. We received many emails and cards of thanks and one person even commented on Facebook that "It should be an annual tradition."

On November 24, 2020, Ben Komrska and crew delivered three 12' blue spruce, decorated them with LED warm lights, secured them to the ground and even let us "borrow" the three huge tree stands until he returned in early March to take the trees down and haul them away for us. The three trees remain lit through February providing "light" as these gentle giants stand strong and represented Perseverance, Strength and Hope. They were so beautiful during the winter in the evening as our community experienced their peaceful beauty and went forward faithfully one day at a time.

5- If applicable, list any community organizations involved with the development and/or implementation of the idea and describe the role the organization played: We partnered with Old Town Playhouse with their carolers dressed in Victorian attire and entertained during the before, during and after the program.

Please see related materials as attached Category 1 F Best of the Best 2021. We also encourage you to visit www.rjfh.tv and enjoy this innovative "These Three Trees" program and hope that we will win our funeral home's third Best of the Best award this year!

Category 2: Leadership and Staff Professional Development

COVID-19. Just its name sends shivers down our spines-especially those of us serving families who have been so affected by it. In the height of COVID, families suffered-not only physically, but emotionally as well. Funerals were limited to ten people, travel restrictions were in place, fear was running rampant, those needing hospitalizations had to be alone, families could not be with their loved ones, and death counts were on the rise. As a reaction to realizing so many of their own residents in Clark County, Arkansas were affected by COVID and unable to have funeral services as they wished, Smith-Ruggles Wilcox sponsored and scheduled an outdoor Memorial Service to honor over 30 of their town's individuals who lost their lives due to COVID-19. The event was held Thursday, June 24, 2021, at the Clark County Courthouse Gazebo in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. The invitation that was published in the local newspaper, and advertised on Smith-Ruggles Wilcox Facebook page and website including this information:

This past year has been difficult and for many a year of solitude. Our community has lost over 30 great individuals to COVID-19. We want to invite everyone to an outdoor Memorial Service, where we may grieve for our family members and friends together and with the support of our Clark County community.

The guests of honor and speakers at the COVID-19 Memorial Service included: Arkadelphia Mayor, Scott Byrd; Clark County Judge, Troy Tucker, Professor on Death and Dying from Ouachita Baptist University, Bryon Eubanks; and owner of Smith-Family Funeral Homes, Jeff Smith. Each one of the guests gave a speech, addressed the families who have experienced loss in the past year, and offered words of strength and encouragement. Professor Eubanks was the main speaker who spoke about grief and loss and gave wonderful advice on how to live when a part of you has died. The evening concluded with a prayer by our owner, Jeff Smith, and a beautiful balloon release honoring all Clark County, Arkansas residents who passed away due to COVID-19. Despite the warm, humid temperatures, Clark County came out and supported, encouraged, and recognized those families who were so deeply affected by COVID-19. As names were read of those who had lost their lives, and bells were rang, there was not a dry eye standing on the Courthouse ground.

We have all been affected, so much has changed, things still don't feel right in our world...yet...there is a group of people who are willing to stand in the gap, to stop and take a moment to remember, to honor the lives of people in our community, to recognize, it's not just a number that COVID is affecting, it's people. People are hurting, people are afraid, people are lonely, and who is going to help them? We-the Smith Family Funeral Homes-are. The purpose of Smith Family Funeral Homes is *"We exist to share the love of Christ through our actions with those we serve."* And to join with that is one of our Core Values: *"COMMUNITY: We are integral in our community and will give back to the community."* We pray that somehow, through our actions in this Memorial Service, families have had closure, families feel strength, families feel loved, and most importantly-that families feel healing in their grief journey.

John F. Kennedy said it perfectly, "If not us, who? If not now, when? When do we get this right? We have an opportunity to do something great right now!"

Smith Family Funeral Homes, North Little Rock, AR

Smith Family Funeral Homes wants to be more than just someone helping you bury your loved one, we want to be an anchor to assist you in holding on when the waves of life are pulling you down. We don't want to wait to put our care into action, we are doing it now. People are desperately needing someone to serve, someone to help, someone to guide, and someone to care. Let's not wait, let's do it now.

Pursuit of Excellence Innovative Program

Luminary of Remembrance

During the global pandemic in 2020, New Jersey had been hit particularly hard. By March 15th NJ had been completely shut down, public gatherings were banned, and no public funerals could be held. To put this in perspective the Township of Old Bridge by the end of April and only 6 weeks into the shutdown had 996

residents infected by the Virus and at the time 45 lives lost. The funeral home was seeing death rates quadruple, the staff were entering hospitals and nursing homes each day ravaged by Covid 19 to retrieve the most recent decedents. Families could not say goodbye or be by their loved ones sides as they passed away, and they were robbed of the opportunity to have a public funeral. There was no viewings or gatherings with family and friends remembering or reflecting on life precious moments or the memories they would hold onto.

David Hernandez, the owner of the funeral along with the staff, were not going to continue to stand by but were determined to do something more to bring some meaning and solidarity to the situations at hand and to allow the community to start healing. At this time, most of the country was operating as business as usual, no mask requirements limited gatherings, or government shutdowns.

It was decided that On Saturday May 9th Old Bridge Funeral Home would hold a drive thru Luminary of Remembrance. Old Bridge has been one town that has really been hit hard by the Coronavirus these past few months and the funeral home owner did not want to sit idle and just bury the unfortunate victims of this deadly virus.

The Drive Thru Luminary would be designed to be a time to remember and reflect on those who have been lost during these uncertain times. The night of the event, the funeral homes driveways and parking lot, had all the curbs adorned with white sand filled bags with tea lite candles. It turned out to be a beautifully lit drive that took you through number of lights lit. Each one represented someone who had lost their life to Covid-19. A Memorial card was provided for each car that attended to write the name of a loved one or family that is suffering, to keep in their honor. That evening there was a continuous line of cars with everyone from, first responders, to community leaders and members, as well as families who came out to honor a loved one who was lost. This beautiful evening gave us time to come together as a community and most importantly Remember, Reflect and Honor.

Please see the below photographs of the Luminary as night fell.

The year 2020 will go down in the annals of history as one of the most unbalanced ever. Complete countries locked their borders and ostensibly ostracized themselves from the world because of COVID-19. Within the United States of America, different states applied different rules to mitigate the spread of this virus. Within states, different communities and counties applied and enforced different rules in different ways in order to mitigate the spread of this virus. With all of this tumult and confusion, funeral service changed.

Every year Wieting Family Funeral Home has a Holiday of Remembrance service near the middle of December. It is one of the most moving services for our staff because we all get to see families who we've served over the past year once again, and we can "check up on them", and see how they're doing.

It is also a moving service for the families that we serve, because in their minds, they're the only ones who are going through the holidays without their loved one this particular year. When they arrive, most people didn't realize how many people were in the same boat as they were, and it brings them comfort.

In 2020, Wieting Family Funeral Home didn't want to give up on this service because it brought a lot of emotional healing to families in the past. This year would be no exception. In fact, this may have been the first actual ceremony some families had to honor their deceased loved one because of the restrictions in place in our great state of Wisconsin.

These restrictions brought us to our next challenge: "How do we accomplish this without going to jail or getting sued?" We completely changed the make-up of how we invited families and how they could participate and be involved in the service.

Our old protocol was to invite families by mail and have them RSVP so we could know who would be there for certain because we make them personalized ornaments that are handed out at the service. At the service, when we recall the names of the families we served, that particular family would come forward to receive their

ornament and typically get a hug or a handshake from Jamie, one of the owners of Wieting Family Funeral Home. (She's a big hugger, so most people went with the hug) We would also typically have a photographer at the service who took pictures so that we could display them on our website and our Facebook page.

This 2020 year, we first contacted our local Sheriffs Department and told them that we were going to be doing this service. We told them that nobody was compelled to be there and that the people in attendance were there of their own volition. When we sent out invitations, we did so through our website. We typically gather every immediate family member's email address and we utilized these in order to send out digital invitations to this particular service. We also created a live stream link for people to watch the service without having to be around other people if they didn't feel comfortable. (<https://my.gather.app/remember/holiday-remembrance>) Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, we didn't invite a photographer, so there are no pictures available from this year's service, but the above link is still active so at least you know we ACTUALLY had this service.

Once the service began, instead of having people come forward for their ornament, Jamie went to them in order to have as few people crossing paths as possible. Before this was done, individuals were given instructions how to either receive a hug, a handshake, or to refrain from both.

At the close of the service, we made an invitation to people watching the live stream who wanted a personalized ornament to contact us and we would get it into their care.

Given the year 2020 was, and the many hurdles we had to jump over and the hoops we had to go through, we were proud of how this service was put together and how it provided healing to people who sincerely needed it in 2020.