

## **Lakeshore Memorial Services Holland, Michigan**

A funeral home can be an intimidating place for many – with so many locked doors, hidden panels, and tall velvet curtains on walls, who knows what is really going on when no one is around? It is this sentiment that we were looking to dispel when we reached out to our local High School Career Technical Center, asking if any of their programs would be interested in visiting the funeral home and learning not only about us, but how their prospective careers could potentially interact with funeral professionals in the future. The school director loved the idea, and sent the word out to instructors.

In the fall and winter of 2021 and 2022, we were visited by students studying public safety, emergency medical services, advanced healthcare, and aided nursing. During their visit, we talked about why we went into our professions, what it took to be a funeral professional, the many careers in the death care industry, and how we may work together in the future. For our public safety students we even brought our transfer gurney in to show them how it works so that they would see what we would bring to a scene if we were called to do so.

We would later learn that some of the teachers built a lesson plan around our tours, including watching PBS' "The Undertaking" before visiting us!

As a part of all of our visits, the students also toured the funeral home. Showing them our funeral chapel and arrangement room got them asking questions about things they saw. We were able to talk about scattering laws in Michigan, and show off a mantle clock that doubled as an urn. In the garage, showing them our funeral coach and transfer vehicle. We were even able to talk a little bit about the history of funeral coaches doubling as ambulances to our EMS students. It was during this time that their teacher shared a story about another instructor helping with ambulance runs during this era, and some experiences that he had shared.

As the final part of the tour, we would bring students into our care center where we prepare decedents for their final viewings. This was very important to us, as this is what many in the general public consider "behind the curtain." By comparing the space to a surgical suite (with bright lighting, sterilizing equipment for instruments, and an abundance of personal protective equipment), and showing them the precautions we took not only for our safety, but also for dignity and care of the deceased, many students expressed that they were pleasantly surprised and that what they had imagined was nothing like what they saw.

As any tour does, we fielded many questions from the students. Questions about funerals, things we had experienced, and many questions once they saw our care center. We answered each and every one, ranging from the very serious ("How do you handle being around so much sadness all of the time?") to the very silly ("Have you ever seen a ghost?"). What was so meaningful too was that most of the time, the bus drivers joined us for these tours, and we took quite a few questions from both them and the instructors as well.

A funeral home can be an intimidating place for many. I would like to think however, that after touring our funeral home and learning a little bit about the funeral process, they will be able to care for those going through one of the toughest times in their lives, and be able to walk them through what may happen next, having been through a funeral home and being shown how the care begins once we receive their loved one. Knowledge is power, and I'm so grateful we could give these young people (and their adult companions) this tool.

**Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc.**  
**Albion, NY**

**A LESSON THAT ALL CAN LEARN FROM**

For the past several years, the Mitchell Family Funeral Homes have been proactive in participating in and supporting mock DWI drills at the schools within our County. These drills are generally put on the week of or the day before the school Prom. The drill involved coordination between the school, the local fire and EMS responders, law enforcement, the Coroner, a local judge and our Funeral Home. It is staged in the parking lot of the school and utilizes a couple wrecked cars from a local junkyard. Bleachers are set up so that not the interaction between the 'drunk driver' and the police can be witnessed and heard, but the extrication of the 'deceased student' can be witnessed first hand as can be the examination of the body, the pronouncement of death, and the identification of the victim by the parent or parents. Students are faced with the blunt and hard reality of the consequences of poor decision making. They can see and hear first hand, the pain and anguish of a parent having to identify their dead son or daughter.

A group of well-known and liked students are selected to participate and it is determined that as a result of the simulated crash, one of the students is going to be a fatality. In many instances, the parents of the student who 'dies' are invited to participate in the drill by coming to the scene and having to be interviewed by the Coroner and identify the 'body' of their child. This part of the drill can be somewhat emotional because the 'acting' of the parents often times becomes raw emotion when they realize what actually could have happened and when they see their child with all the make-up associated with a simulated crash victim.

The Funeral Home is involved in two ways. First, the Coroner is Scott Schmidt, who is one of the staff members of the Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc. He wears his appropriately marked clothing and approaches the scene in his response vehicle to assess the situation and speak with the various incident command people finding out what happened and where the victim is. He'll then approach victim, (who generally is under a sheet on a backboard,) and will do an examination of the 'body'. Following that, he'll generally talk with law enforcement and then call for the parent or parents to come and identify the 'body'. He'll explain the process which needs to take place moving forward such as the transportation of the body to the Medical Examiner, the performance of a post mortem examination or autopsy, and then if feasible, the possibility of an organ or tissue donation if consented to.

The second way the Funeral Home is involved is by actually coming to the scene with the removal van and removing the body from the crash site. Again, in plain view of the Senior Class audience on the bleachers, the Funeral Directors along with the Coroner, remove the stretcher from the vehicle and place it along side of the 'body'. They open a new body bag and place it on the stretcher. The 'body' is then carefully and gently lifted from the ground onto the stretcher and placed inside the body bag. The body bag is zipped up to the neck of the 'deceased' and then the cot cover is zipped up to that point as well. The stretcher is then loaded into the removal vehicle and slowly driven away. Depending on what school is conducting the drill, a narration over an amplification system may be done while things are happening so students get the full impact of what has happened.

The student who was driving the car, is interrogated and given a field sobriety test in front of the students and then handcuffed. Again, at some schools, the student is then escorted inside the auditorium to an awaiting judge who, once the Senior observers file into the auditorium, will be arraigned in front of the arresting officer, the parents of the 'victim' and the district attorney.

There is usually nothing but silence throughout the whole event, and when the 'victim' is driven away there often are many tears being shed by members of the audience who have witnessed the entire drill. It is the belief of the Coroner and the Funeral Home staff, that if the event saves one life...it's worth it.

Rationale: To help prevent poor decision making by young adolescents which may have fatal consequences

Benefits to Funeral Home & Staff: Interaction with the community on any level is a benefit to the Funeral Home and Staff. By being seen doing something proactive and something so personal and potentially life-saving is a win-win for everyone involved in this activity. It impacts everyone involved and in particular impresses upon the participants and observers, that the Funeral Home staff are people who live and work in the community and not only are there during 'normal' deaths but, are there to help and assist in tragic ones as well.

Benefits to the Families/Communities: There is a benefit to the community and to the families of all the participants which touches the hearts of all and reminds us on how quickly life can be taken away. Prom is one of the first stepping stones to an adolescent crossing into adult hood. It's been traditionally associated with sneaking drinks into the venue, or having some in the car. Most young drivers think they can handle anything and also think that nothing can ever happen to them. A drill such as this, reminds us all that irresponsible actions can have life-altering effects. In an instant, a poor decision or a slow reaction caused by alcohol or drug related affects can cause a catastrophic event. Reinforcing that death is real and irreversible by having the Coroner and the Funeral Home participate and having a student 'die' because of those actions is immeasurable. The saving of just one life, make this activity worthwhile each and every chance we get to present it at any school.

## **Life Celebrations Alexander City, Alabama**

In recent years there has been a reduction in the available workforce in all professions and businesses. The funeral service profession is no exception. Funeral directors across the country have positions to fill in their funeral homes. We all are looking for ways to recruit people into our profession.

To create interest in the funeral profession among high school students in our area we have implemented a shadowing program. The shadowing program is offered to high school juniors or seniors who have expressed an interest in entering the funeral profession. Shadowing gives those that are considering funeral service as a career the opportunity to observe the daily operation in our funeral homes.

For a student to be considered for the program, they must be recommended by a school counselor or teacher. A meeting is scheduled with the potential shadower and a parent or guardian. An explanation of the program and what the shadower will experience is explained and the parent must grant approval for their child to enter the program. Our signed embalming authorization grants permission for interns or students to be present or participate in embalming. Shadowers are introduced to families in arrangement conferences and a brief explanation of their presence is offered.

The shadowing program lasts for one week. At the beginning of the program, the shadower is introduced to the staff and assigned to a director. Depending on the work to be done, the shadower may work with several different directors during the week. On the first day the shadower is introduced to funeral service by viewing the NFDA Career Day video. Following the video there is a discussion of the educational requirements for the funeral service program at Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama. The legal requirements of obtaining funeral professional licensure is explained as well. A tour of the funeral home and crematory is provided and a discussion of the work in specific areas is explained. The importance of confidentiality during this process is discussed at length with the shadower. If there is time remaining in the day, the shadower will shadow the assigned funeral service professional.

Day two allows the shadower to participate in the work done in the funeral home. The shadower is permitted to observe an arrangement conference to understand what arrangers do when meeting with families. They witness the collection of information, planning of services, selection of merchandise, and completion of required paperwork. Following the observed conference, the arranger takes time to explain each part of the conference and why it is pertinent to the arrangement process.

When possible during the shadow opportunity the shadower will observe an embalming operation. The use of personal protective equipment is explained and the shadower is required to adorn their protective equipment in order to observe. They are also exposed to the cosmetic treatment of a deceased person in preparation for viewing. Preparation for cremation and the cremation process is also witnessed.

At the end of the week the shadower should have observed or participated in almost every aspect of funeral service. Our staff is proud to participate in the shadowing program because they understand this encourages new people to choose funeral service as a career.

Recently our first shadower completed the program. In her interview at the end of the week she seemed more excited about her career choice than she did at the beginning of the week. She experienced two arrangement conferences, participated in two funeral services with burial, witnessed a cremation and the processing of cremated remains. She observed an embalming operation and the dressing and preparation of a deceased for burial. The shadower was asked to write a brief description of the experience. This shadower was thoroughly exposed to what a funeral service professional does daily and is looking forward to a career in funeral service, hopefully at our firm.

## **Roller Funeral Homes Little Rock, Arkansas**

With all that our communities have had to endure the last few years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Denver-Roller Funeral Homes are happy to see that daily life is beginning to find some normalcy. This year Roller-Swift Funeral home, along with many other businesses in our area, has been able to engage with the community in a positive way by sponsoring Osceola, Arkansas's little league baseball program. The kids in our community are out and about enjoying some much needed physical activity and we were honored to sponsor a team. Along with sponsoring a team our Manager, David Tucker, also volunteered to coach a T-ball team. The amusement these kids get from playing this "All American Sport" is nothing compared to the enjoyment our staff and community receive from watching them play their hearts out.

Being involved and supporting community activities like little league baseball provide many benefits for our funeral home, our staff, the families in our community, and our community as a whole in many positive ways. One way, and probably the most important benefit of all, would be that little league baseball brings everyone together to cheer on the children of the community and gives us a chance to focus on the good things in life. Being in the funeral business, we tend to see all of the sadness that is in the community due to a family's loss of a loved one. When we volunteer to coach and give an opportunity for a child to be a part of a team, we bring a little happiness to them and their families. Who doesn't love watching those little ones hit that ball and round the bases?

As we sit on the sidelines in our lawn chairs, seeing the kids all dressed up in their blue uniforms with Roller-Swift written across the chest, smiling and cheering as the game is about to start, we get an amazing sense of pride and joy. Munching on a concession stand hot dog brings the big league baseball sensibility to our little hometown as we shout "Go Team" and see the smiles on their little faces as they scramble around chasing that baseball. It is quite the sight to see.

Playing a role in helping our community in the hardest time of their lives is something we do daily with great responsibility and understanding, but having the opportunity to play a role in bringing the community together to cheer on their youth helps us to acknowledge that although we do bring comfort in the hard times, we can also bring smiles and joy in the happy times.

## **Weeks' Funeral Home Buckley, Washington**

Enumclaw is a medium-size rural town that is just one hour or less from all the excitement of the big cities of Seattle and Tacoma. Because of this, Enumclaw prides itself on its small-town attitude and on being a safe, family friendly community.

Each year on Halloween, the local downtown businesses spend a few hours handing out candy to trick-or-treaters along the main street. The street is closed to car traffic so that the families can walk down the actual street. Our funeral home is one block away from the main street and originally did not get many visitors. Years ago we began handing out full-size candy bars as a way to entice families to walk the extra block to our location. The funeral home has even worked its way into the traditions of some of the families. Some now ask us in September what our theme is going to be for the night, while other families have set the funeral home as their meet-up place for the evening. Many families have mentioned to us that the night would not be the same without a stop at the funeral home.

Normally we would open the doors to our building and invite the trick-or-treaters inside to get their candy. As our community began to emerge from COVID lockdowns we wanted to change things up in order to facilitate some social distancing. We decided that the crowded doorway and lobby inside would not accomplish a feeling of safety to all. After much brainstorming, we came up with a creative way to have the event completely outside with space between us and our guests – we brought in a boat!

Yes, we hauled our fishing boat into town, parked it in front of our building, and commenced with a fishing and pirate mash-up theme. Most of our staff sat in the boat and gave out over 700 candy bars by way of clothes pins attached to fishing poles. They dressed in fishing or pirate clothes and sang along to sea shanties. Owner Russ Weeks swam “the waters” in an inflated shark costume and mingled with our guests. Peter McCowin made us a ten foot tall lighthouse equipped with a spinning light, and then sat in a dingy handing out over 250 non-food treats for those with food allergies or other special needs. Our guests seemed to really enjoy our unique take on the trick-or-treating!

This is one of the highlights of the year for our staff. It is a time when the public looks forward to coming to the funeral home - a time when they are happy to be there and happy to see us. This rejuvenates our staff and reminds us of what a close-knit community we live in and serve.