

**Arnett & Steele Funeral Home, Inc.
Pineville, Kentucky**

We have always tried to do extra for our veterans and especially since Covid 19 became an issue we felt the need to provide a dignified veterans service for them at their final rites. Jay Steele has for several years researched DD-214's to find out what our veterans had done during the time in service to our Nation and sharing it with the families we serve.

When we could no longer get our local honor guards to do services because they did not want to be together in cars or vans and be around crowds when they really did not know the people. Jay decided we could come up with a service worthy of our veterans. No, we did not get the gun salutes, but we gave them all we could.

We decided to do this presentation of the flag at the funeral home so everyone got to hear about their family member or friends service to us. After the minister finished his sermon, Jay went up and gave a personalized speech about the service provided by the veteran, his metal, his years of service and anything else special we could find using the DD-214 as a roadmap. At the end of his speech he would then step down and two of our employees would fold the flag, present it to Jay and then Jay would have the family member stand and he would present the United States Flag to them. Usually by this time almost everyone in the chapel had tears in their eyes. This was a very moving and exceptional closing to the funerals and word of this spread quickly through the community.

We heard nothing but accolades from everyone and even had a few people who loved ones we had already buried brought in DD-214 and asked us to research it for them, which we were honored to do. We have had ministers and many veterans tell us that they want Jay to do that at their funerals. Our families really like us doing this at the funeral home because we record it for them and they have the speech to share with family and friends who may not have been able to be at the services. We have had several people bring the loved ones to us to care for them just because they want the veteran speech. This service has made all of us realize how important it is to honor our veterans and we can see how much the veteran has not shared with their families about their services time, especially those that served during war times.

I am attaching a few pictures of Jay speaking and of him holding the flag to be presented and we have also attached a copy of a DD212 and Jay's speech.

**Arrington Funeral Directors & Crematory
Jackson, Tennessee**

Honoring Our Veterans

The rendering of Military Honors is the one thing, the last thing, that funeral directors can do to support those who have served. Many times, veterans are not recognized as they should and need to be during their life following their military service. The least we can do is help give them a respectful and honorable burial, for they always deserve the utmost respect and honor.

Arrington Funeral Directors has always supported our veterans. Since many of our staff were not able to serve in the military, our desire is to serve those we were not able to serve with.

Robert Jones, Command Sergeant Major (CSM) E-9, Retired, approached Bob Arrington about creating a challenge coin to present to families during the flag presentation at veteran cemeteries, specifically Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery at Parkers Crossroads, located in West Tennessee. The thought behind this project is for families to have a tangible memento to hold and carry with them, honoring and keeping the memory of their veteran with them at all times.

After several meetings, the specific design for the custom coin began and several design options were reviewed. During one meeting, Jones stated they needed two or three sponsors to make the project happen. Arrington Funeral Directors believes in supporting veterans in any way we can and offered to sponsor the entire project, touching all veteran families buried in Parkers Crossroads Cemetery.

In September 2021, Parkers Crossroads became the first cemetery in the State of Tennessee to offer these challenge coins to veteran families. On the day the coins became available, a media announcement was held with representatives from the State Veterans Office and other local veteran organizations were present.

After other state veteran cemeteries heard about and saw the coins, they reached out about offering their own version of coins to their cemetery veteran families. We are proud and honored to share that all veteran cemeteries in the State of Tennessee now have their own challenge coins, beginning with the vision of Arrington Funeral Directors and Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery at Parkers Crossroads.

Due to the reception with the challenge coins at the veteran cemeteries, Arrington Funeral Directors decided to commission our own custom challenge coins to be presented to the families we serve whose veteran is not being buried in a veterans cemetery. Making this decision has proved to be very appreciated by the families and has demonstrated another way we serve families with the utmost care and respect.

C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors Danvers, Massachusetts

This year C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors partnered with the Town of Danvers Veterans Services department to help organize and bring back the annual Memorial Day parade in person. The Danvers Veterans' Services department offers a unique and efficient approach to serving the needs of qualified veterans and their dependents in a way designed to benefit their well-being with the dignity they deserve. Funeral Director C.R. Lyons serves on the Veterans Council for the Town of Danvers. This year the Danvers Veterans Services department was looking for a way to try and get more veterans and their families involved in this annual parade. C.R. Lyons attended meetings with the Veterans Council to discuss how best to coordinate this year's Memorial Day Parade. It was decided that Lyons Funeral Home would help reach out to the families that we have served over the past year and invite the families of the deceased veterans to come and participate in this year's parade. Letters inviting these families were sent out at the beginning of May. These letters were sent by funeral directors C.R. Lyons and Amanda Lyons Brinkley. Family members were invited to walk in memory of their loved ones. Families participating were encouraged to carry an American flag or a flag of their Veteran's service in the Armed Forces of the United States. A local trolley company provided a trolley to be used to transport Veterans or family members who were unable to walk the parade route. This trolley was handicapped accessible for those needing it. Stops and placement of wreaths were conducted at the Porter Cemetery on High Street and the Memorial Flagpole site in Danvers Square. Richard A. Greenlaw, a US Army veteran, was selected to be the 2022 Grand Marshal. He is the recipient of the Korea Defense Service Medal which he earned for his service in Vietnam. The Danvers High School Marching Band and Chamber Singers performed during the parade and at the service. Following the completion of the parade there was a Memorial Ceremony in front of Town Hall. During this time the names of each Danvers Veteran who passed during the year was read aloud. Lyons Funeral Home provided a list of deceased Veterans with their years of service, rank and era of service. Guest Speaker at the service was the Reverend Michael J. Doyle, CAPT. Chaplain Corps, US Navy (Ret), and Pastor of St. Mary of the Annunciation Church. He explained his role as a military chaplain and shared some of his experiences. This year's parade was well attended. The addition of the families was very popular with everyone. Going forward the Danvers Veterans Services will continue to invite the families of the deceased Veterans. Veterans Services has already reached out to Lyons Funeral Home to help plan for next year's parade and to figure out how we can reach more families of Danvers Veterans.

Finch & Finch Funeral & Cremation Service Altavista, Virginia

Over the decades, our funeral home has been privileged to work with local veteran organizations, the U.S. Army National Guard Honor Guard, and active service military Honor Guards when honoring the lives of our local veterans who have passed away. It is important that we strive to provide respect, integrity, inspiration, professionalism and tradition to all who have served our country.

The Dutch author, Maurice Maeterlinck said, "At every crossroads on the path that leads to the future, tradition has placed 10,000 men to guard the past." This quote perfectly describes the importance of an Honor Guard.

While the active military Honor Guards are extremely precise and skilled in the honors they render, it is our local veteran organizations who serve us most often. They are longtime members of our community and familiar faces to the families we serve.

The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization. Our local Post, American Legion Altavista Memorial Post 36, was founded several years ago upon the disbanding of our local D.A.V. Chapter and shortly thereafter became available to perform Honor Guard duties for funeral services in our area.

The past two years have been difficult for everyone, but it has been especially hard for those who have lost someone during the COVID-19 Pandemic, whether the loss was directly due to COVID-19 or the celebration of their loved one's loss was restricted by precautions put into effect for the protection of the general public.

During the Pandemic, many local veteran organizations suspended the availability of their Honor Guards, which presented a difficulty to us and other local funeral homes in scheduling military honors for the families we serve. In an effort to overcome this dilemma, the Altavista Memorial Post 36 partnered with another local Post (Gretna Post 232) to perform Honor Guard duties for local funeral homes. Many of these services were outside of their normal traveling distance area.

They were challenged by the availability of their membership and the added travel, as their work load nearly doubled during this time due to the suspension of activities by other area veteran groups. As we all know, veteran organizations are being hard pressed to find enough membership, especially in small rural communities, to provide Honor Guards.

As Memorial Day approached, we saw an opportunity to provide a small thank you to them for the sacrifice they had made over the past two years to our local communities by sponsoring a meal for them at a local restaurant. We hosted eighteen people that evening while enjoying the comradery of their group.

We thanked them for bestowing the great honor of providing military rites for our departed veterans and their families. Hearing their stories that evening was inspiring and encouraging.

Flanner Buchanan Funeral and Cremation Services Indianapolis, Indiana

Hello, my name is J. Stewart Goodwin, Brigadier General, USAF, (Ret) with 37 years of service in all three components of the Air Force. Active, Guard, and Reserve in operations and support positions. My final assignment was Commander, Indiana Air National Guard that consisted of two F-16 Wings and 2000 Airmen. I am currently the Executive Director of the Indiana War Memorials Commission where we manage 25 acres of properties in downtown Indianapolis to include monuments, fountains, and a 30,000 square foot museum that honor Hoosier Veterans.

Throughout my career, I have visited service members in hospitals and retirees in Veterans Administration (VA) facilities. My father was a WWII Veteran, Captain, who served as an Army Combat Engineer in Europe, was injured and spent almost two years in VA Hospitals at the end of the war. Healing in a hospital away from your family can be difficult and the fact there are people, even strangers, you have never met that want to sit and talk can be a great help. It was a lesson I never forgot.

In 2013, I was approached by Flanner Buchanan Funeral Centers (FBFC) about the possibility of meeting with HOSPICE patients who were Veterans. My initial thought was this would be a great way to let the service member know how much they were respected and to thank them for their service, many of which have never experienced that feeling. What I did not realize was the amazing reaction from their families. The visits also provide us the opportunity to tell them about the Indiana War Memorials properties and Museum.

Here is how it works. I am contacted by FBFC and the HOSPICE folks who attempt to obtain military papers such as a discharge or a DD 214. I have had several "joint" assignments with all the military branches so figuring out what they did and where they did it is pretty easy to understand. The families are invited to attend the "ceremony" where we present the Veteran with a certificate of service and a challenge coin which is a tradition that dates back to WWI. The coin is presented for outstanding service and if the presenter later "challenges" the recipient if he has the coin and he does not he owes the presenter a beverage of his choice. We start from the day they enlisted and talk about anything and everything they want to tell about their experiences. The stories are unbelievable and so telling of how amazing these warriors are. Some of them could not tell you what they had for breakfast but could give you the full name of their First Sergeant from 1942.

The biggest and best surprise of meeting with these Veterans is the reactions from the families. It would take hours for me to re-tell just the best stories but the recurring theme is it is very common following the meeting for a family member or two will approach me and tell me they heard things today that the service member had never revealed. One of my favorite stories came from the wife of almost 70 years whose husband, who was 96 years old, earned the Purple Heart in WWII and she never knew where on his body he was shot. During the ceremony, I was trying to determine what battle he was in when he received the injury. So, I asked him, "Where did you get it?" He spent some time thinking about it and replied: "In the butt." There were probably 25-30 family members and friends present from four generations that were laughing so hard some of them were on the floor. It was not uncommon to be shot in that area when lying in the prone position. Tom Brokaw was correct. Theirs was the "Greatest Generation," but they rarely spoke about their involvement.

I have been asked, "What does it mean to you to do these ceremonies?" My response is there is absolutely nothing I do that is more important than sitting with these heroes and their families and learning about their sacrifices and the accomplishments they have made to protect our country and freedoms. The bottom line is if these brave men and women had not done what they did, our lives would be very different today, and I doubt we would be speaking English. Anything we can do to ensure they leave this planet knowing how important their military service was to our country is the very least we can do.

Although times have been tough during the COVID times, I still feel absolutely obligated to pay these great men and women a visit. I look forward to continuing meet these great people for years to come.

I am grateful for the efforts Flanner Buchanan Funeral Centers have made to make this program possible, to offer me the opportunity to be involved, and represent the Indiana War Memorials Commission.

Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels Hutchinson, Minnesota

Here at Dobratz-Hantge Funeral Chapel, we took the last few years to excel and find new ways to meet the needs of the families we serve. As our world was completely changed, we were challenged to find new ways to maintain our standard of professionalism, fellowship, and respect. As our community was shut behind doors and told to stay quarantined, we continued to support our community in any way we possibly could. We have learned the importance of interacting and supporting fellow members of our community.

One group we have focused on in the last few years has been our Veterans. Our community is filled with numerous Veterans who have promised to serve our country during times of war and peace. With the changes that we have faced due to the pandemic, we had restrictions on how we were able to honor our fallen troops. This was heartbreaking, after the sacrifices they made for us, they deserved to be honored for their service.

We are always looking for different ways in which we can support the Veterans in our community. This past year we had the opportunity to help support the installation of the Veterans Memorial Park in Darwin, Minnesota. The park was dedicated in a ceremony on Monday, September 13, 2021. The park is made up of five black pillars that honor each branch of the military. Two flags fly, one in honor of the prisoners of war and the missing in action service members, the second for our state of Minnesota. The park also offers benches as a place to sit and reflect on the bravery, sacrifices, dedication, and lives of our troops. Along with the sponsorship of the Memorial Park, we continue to give back to the Veterans and the community of Darwin by hosting the Annual Memorial Day Program at our Chapel in Darwin. It is an honor to be a part of this program and have the opportunity to honor our troops. Each year at our program, we are fortunate to have the Litchfield Honor Guard, a veteran to share a memorial, a pastor to share the Lord's word, and musicians to lead the voices of the community in song.

In our forever changing world we strive to find ways in which we can support and give back to the community. This year has been a year of learning and growth for our family at Dobratz-Hantge Funeral Chapel. One thing that will forever remain is our respect and honor for the selfless, men and women who sacrificed their lives for us. Thank you to our veterans and their families.

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory
Villa Rica, GA

An innovative program, service, or activity executed by our funeral home that has not already been done around the world is a tall challenge. The vast majority of all NFDA Funeral Homes that participate in the National Funeral Directors Association Pursuit of Excellence program are among the firms that provide exceptional service to grieving families and the community while adhering to the highest ethical and professional standards. Each community has different challenges and needs. With that said and for us and our community this year, we will talk about an opportunity that presented itself to us. To honor our veterans, we created a customized "Challenge Coin" that has our logo in the center on the back of the coin with the logo from each of the six branches of our U.S. Armed Forces. This is a story of not only an innovative idea but also how an innovative idea can come from anyone if you only choose to listen and believe in your team. This idea came from a team member that had only been with us for a few weeks. He worked in funeral service a little while growing up, but for his entire life chose a different career path. When he was called back into funeral service, it was a leap of faith and a total career change. Often times when life takes us out of our "comfort zone", we can be silent and more reserved than normal. However, Chris, our team member, believed in our mission and presented this idea for our team to give to the Veterans within our community. At the first listen, we were all in and jumped on this idea 100%.

The men and women who unselfishly sacrifice so much of their life activities and family time to protect our freedoms and liberties are genuinely appreciated by the Jones-Wynn Family. As a way to show our support to veterans, we have created the Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes and Crematory Challenge Coin. Veterans hold a very special place in our hearts, and we have the opportunity to show them with the Challenge Coin. As we stated before, each of the six branches of the Armed Forces is represented (which is something we are proud of since the 6th branch is very new to our armed forces) and each coin stands for every service member, past and present, who has stepped forward to protect our freedoms. The first event we chose to honor veterans with our Challenge Coins was to the individual Veterans who attended the Meadowbrook Memory Gardens Veteran Section Dedication Ceremony in April of 2022. A large gathering of veterans and their families, along with many community members from all around West Georgia joined together in a prayer and dedication ceremony that featured members of the Jones-Wynn Funeral Home Family presenting the coins during the ceremony. We were taken back at how special and meaningful and deeply appreciated these coins were to each proud veteran. After each coin was presented by the Jones-Wynn Family, everyone in attendance was served an "Appreciation Meal" provided by Jones-Wynn Funeral Home and Crematory and Meadowbrook Memory Gardens team members.

**Hightower Family Funeral Homes
Carrollton, Georgia**

Remember. Honor. Teach.

In the early 2000s, Bryant and Cathy Hightower had the opportunity to take their three daughters, Cason, Karlie, and MacKenzie, to Arlington National Cemetery for National Wreaths Across America Day. They were able to join up with their friend Sally Belanger and the Maine Funeral Directors Association for an experience they would never forget.

One special day every year, people from all different walks of life come together to remember our Nation's Heroes and honor those who serve. This doesn't just happen at our National Cemeteries; it happens at over 3,100 participating locations across the country. On December 18, 2021, Hightower Family Funeral Homes sponsored National Wreaths Across America Day at West Georgia Memorial Park. Not only were we able to thank the interred veterans for their sacrifices, but participants also said each veteran's name aloud to keep their memory alive for family, friends, and our community.

On December 17, 2021, Cathy, Cason, and MacKenzie Hightower were there to receive 19 boxes of wreaths. There are 9 wreaths in a box, allowing West Georgia Memorial Park to receive a total of 171 wreaths! Those Wreaths traveled all the way from Columbia, Maine to our little town of Carrollton, Georgia. Volunteers placed a wreath at the grave of every interred veteran at the memorial park. The extra wreaths that West Georgia Memorial Park received were able to be taken to the Georgia National Cemetery in Canton to ensure every veteran there was remembered.

We were able to involve our community in this project by allowing them an opportunity to volunteer by placing the wreaths or by sponsoring a wreath to ensure that every veteran was remembered. This was our first year officially participating in National Wreaths Across America Day at West Georgia Memorial Park and we had close to 40 volunteers come out on a rainy Saturday morning to participate. Remembering our veterans, honoring their sacrifice and memory, and teaching our next generations about the freedoms we enjoy in this country is a mission we believe in with all of our hearts. We will continue to sponsor this program for years to come and we look forward to being able to expand the mission to other cemeteries to honor all of our local veterans.

National Wreaths Across America Day will be held on Saturday, December 17, 2022. We will soon begin our marketing efforts for this year's event and would encourage you to find a location to volunteer near you by visiting www.wreathscrossamerica.org.

Martin Funeral, Cremation & Tribute Services Mount Morris, Michigan

1. The rationale behind the idea:

In the fall of 2018, owner, Adam Martin, was invited by the Michigan Funeral Directors Association to fill a vacant position on the board of the Great Lakes National Cemetery Advisory Council. Great Lakes National Cemetery is located in Holly, Michigan, about 6.5 miles from our funeral home in Grand Blanc, Michigan, and about 25 miles from our funeral home in Mt. Morris, Michigan. The national cemetery's reach covers some 20 counties in Southeast and Mid-Michigan, serving hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families.

The Advisory Council has members from nearly every veteran's organization within its area of coverage. Many VFW and American Legion posts, auxiliary posts, DAV, county government VA offices, Patriot Riders and of course the national cemetery director. The council supports the cemetery in a myriad of ways and it was during Mr. Martin's initial meetings with the group that he was able to ascertain a need within the communities where we have funeral homes and serve veterans and military families.

As many are aware, there is a high percentage of veterans that live below the poverty line or that are homeless. They have a variety of needs throughout the year, but this is more prevalent during the holiday season.

It was during this time frame that Mr. Martin was still serving as the president of the International Order of the Golden Rule (OGR) and learned of a fellow member funeral firm in Clearwater, Florida, Veterans Funeral Care, and a program their owner, Jim Rudolph, had developed entitled "Operation Toy Soldier" that specifically address the needs to veterans and military families during the holiday season.

One of the great benefits of "Operation Toy Soldier" is that Jim and his team worked directly with us, to develop and implement a program that was truly unique to Martin Funeral Home and the military families and veterans we're honored to serve in Mid-Michigan.

The mission that was developed and its results are detailed as follows.

2. A detailed description of the program, service or activity:

The easiest way to describe "Operation Toy Soldier (OTS)" is that it works in a similar way to "Toys for Tots." The basic mission of OTS is to collect new unwrapped toys and monetary donations and distribute them to less fortunate military families during the holidays.

The goal, through the gift of a toy or gift card, is to help bring the joy of the holiday season to less fortunate military families. OTS is an IRS recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit charity.

Perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of OTS is that we are in control of the toys and monetary distributions and we, along with our OTS "allies" can know that we are truly supporting local military families and veterans.

For the 2021 OTS mission, each of our three Martin Funeral Home locations, located in Mid-Michigan, were going to participate and our goal was to involve local veterans groups and our communities and local businesses.

Our "Allies" during the months of October through early December, where we had OTS Toy collection barrels out at the following locations:

- Martin Funeral Home - Grand Blanc
- Martin Funeral Home - Mt. Morris
- Martin Funeral Home - Vassar
- Genesee County Dept. of Veterans Affairs
- Grand Blanc VFW Post #822
- Grand Blanc City Offices
- Grand Blanc Township Offices
- Mt. Morris City Offices
- Vassar City Offices
- Vassar Eagles Aerie #2380
- Bullard Sanford Memorial Library
- Mt. Morris Library
- Flint Elks Lodge
- St. Mary Catholic Church of Mt. Morris

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Catholic Church of Vassar
First Baptist Church of Mt. Morris
Cooks GM Chevrolet
Vassar Building Center
Fox 103.9 Flint's Classic Rock Station
98 KCQ Country
Family Hair Salon
June's Florist
B's Flowers Plus
The Oaks at Woodfield
Grand Blanc Outdoors
Abbey Park Assisted Living
Los Cabos Bar & Grill

In addition to our barrels out at so many places, we partnered with two local radio stations to promote OTS. Fox 103.9 covered our funeral home in Genesee County, while 98 KCQ covered our funeral home in Tuscola County. Our commercials (which are included in our video for this event that is being sent to NFDA) were uniquely produced and have voice actors playing the parts of members of the military helping us with "Mission Operation Toy Soldier." These commercials ran during the months of October through December 2021.

While the radio spots were beneficial to getting our message out, we also used our many social media accounts, speaking engagements and local newspapers to promote OTS in other ways.

The nearly three month mission concluded with two events that took place at our funeral homes in Grand Blanc and in Vassar.

On Tuesday, December 1, 2021, from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm, we hosted a live broadcast from our funeral home in Grand Blanc with one of our allies, Fox 103.9. Three times an hour, we were interviewed live during our event to continue to invite generous individuals to drop off toys.

Earlier in the day, the Director of Genesee County Veteran's Affairs, William Pallmer, and several of his staff and our team, joined together for a shopping excursion at Meijer's (which is similar to Wal-Mart in Michigan) to purchase over \$1,500.00 worth of toys that the Genesee County Board of Supervisors voted to allot to OTS.

A local bakery, Great Harvest Bread Company, dropped off muffins and assorted pastries so each person stopping by to drop off a gift also received a gift.

On Wednesday, December 2, 2021, from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm, we again hosted a live broadcast, this time from our funeral home in Vassar with our other radio ally, 98 KCQ. The Yellow Ribbon Guard of Tuscola County and the 919th Army Reserve were both on hand and they brought military vehicles to display for the day and enjoyed the day playing yard games and assisting in loading and unloading toys. At 2:00 pm, Cooks GM Chevrolet drove to us in two new cars filled with toys to be donated. We were honored as we watched our 919th reservists carry all of those toys to our barrels.

3. Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large:

The outpouring of generosity from the communities was tremendous. We already felt blessed to have so many supporting the collection of toys and we were stunned by our mission's results this year:

Just over 1,500 new toys were donated, ranging from bicycles and video game systems to huge lego kits and barbie dolls - and everything in between

Several hundreds of dollars in gifts cards

Over \$1,500.00 donated to new toys purchased at the direction of the Genesee County of Veteran's Affairs Office Director, William Pallmer

Over \$5,000.00 in monetary donations which includes donations from:

Cook GM Chevrolet: \$2,500.00

Tim & Carmen Corcoran: \$1,000.00

Numerous hours of time

A tremendous amount of goodwill was done for military families in Mid-Michigan.

4. Benefits provided to the funeral home and staff:

We are involved and care deeply for our communities and are willing to put in the hard work and the time to show those in the community that we care. This has been an ongoing commitment by the Martin family for nearly 100 years.

5. List any community organizations that were involved with the development and/or implementation of the idea; describe the role the organization played:

Our "Allies" during the months of October through early December, where we had OTS Toy collection barrels out at the following locations:

Martin Funeral Home - Grand Blanc
Martin Funeral Home - Mt. Morris
Martin Funeral Home - Vassar
Genesee County Dept. of Veterans Affairs
Grand Blanc VFW Post #822
Grand Blanc City Offices
Grand Blanc Township Offices
Mt. Morris City Offices
Vassar City Offices
Vassar Eagles Aerie #2380
Bullard Sanford Memorial Library
Mt. Morris Library
Flint Elks Lodge
St. Mary Catholic Church of Mt. Morris
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Catholic Church of Vassar
First Baptist Church of Mt. Morris
Cooks GM Chevrolet
Vassar Building Center
Fox 103.9 Flint's Classic Rock Station
98 KCQ Country
Family Hair Salon
June's Florist
B's Flowers Plus
The Oaks at Woodfield
Grand Blanc Outdoors
Abbey Park Assisted Living
Los Cabos Bar & Grill

Special thank you to Jim Rudolph and Nancy Weil for development, training and hours of guidance.

Director of Marketing at Martin Funeral, Cremation & Tribute Services, Richard Whallon, for many hours on the road and phone and juggling everything.

Memorial Funeral Home Edinburg, Texas

The staff of Memorial Funeral Home decided to host a Veterans Appreciation Dinner as a way of honoring the members of the honor guards who we call upon throughout the year to provide military honors to fallen veterans. We decided to host the event on Wednesday, November 10, 2021, as the honor guard members are committed to several community events on Veterans Day.

An invitation was sent to the four different posts we work with, VFW Post 7473 of Elsa; VFW Post 8788 of McAllen; American Legion Post 101 of Pharr; and American Legion Post 93 of Mission, inviting them to attend the dinner in their honor. We then followed up with a phone call to the post commander to confirm that the invitation was received and to encourage their members to attend, along with their spouse. A day before the event we reached out yet again to get a count of those persons who would be attending to ensure that we had plenty of food and drinks for our guests.

On the day of the event we displayed the United States flag, as well as banners from the different branches of the military. As the veterans arrived they posed for photos before they entered the ballroom of Memorial Event Center where the evening began with drinks, followed by dinner and then dessert. The formal welcome was given by Leon De Leon and the invocation by VFW Post 7473 Commander Efrain Solis. Although the meal was catered, it was the staff of Memorial Funeral Home who served the veterans and their spouses. Once dinner had concluded we took a group photo of those in attendance.

Before dessert was served, the owners of Memorial Funeral Home, Velma Sue and Leon De Leon, thanked those in attendance, including Felix Rodriguez, the Department Head of the Hidalgo County Veterans Services. Leon De Leon was then presented with a small medal in appreciation to the support that Memorial Funeral Home gives the veterans organizations in our community.

Memorial Funeral Home was proud to have hosted this event in honor of those members of the local posts. Throughout the year we call upon them to provide military honors to fallen veterans and they are always willing to assist. This dinner is a small token of appreciation on behalf of Memorial Funeral Home Staff for their continued service and dedication. It was also a way to gather with these groups not at a funeral, but at an event hosted specifically for them. The event also gave our staff an opportunity to meet and visit with the veterans who they often call upon but do not have a chance to interact with. Memorial Funeral Home plans on continuing to host Veterans appreciation events and will continue to support these organizations.

Moments Funeral Home Lucedale, Mississippi

All of us at Moments Funeral Home are extremely honored to live where we do and have the freedoms that we have. We are proud US Citizens and try hard to not take these freedoms for granted. We are honored to serve military families during their time of grief and give back to Veteran programs as much as possible. We are humbled to arrange military honors at services and have a hard time not tearing up during the playing of Taps. We assist military families with ordering markers through the Department of Veteran Affairs. We allow those markers to be delivered to our facility and set them at no charge to the families. We have also hosted various events focused on military families in the past. This year, we once again had the honor of being able to host a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The United States Flag Code, Title 4, Section 8k states- "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

No, this is nothing new. However, this is an event that our community loves and for a funeral home such as ours in the area, we are able to provide the perfect venue. We provided drop boxes at both of our locations, Lucedale and Leakesville. We promoted to donation of flags through social media, or radio program and the local newspaper for a few months. We purchased elephant trunk drop boxes at Home Depot and had a local print shop wrap those for us. See the photo below. We received several inquiries about the boxes. Other organizations such as the local VA and others were interested in offering the same. We received several flags and had to empty the boxes on several occasions. We solicited the help of local Veterans to make sure our program was done properly and with the utmost respect. Hammer Fallon is the current JROTC instructor at George County High School. Mr. Fallon retired from the United States Army after several years serving domestic and abroad. Mr. Michael Walker served in the United States Marine. We also took care of services for his wife, Mrs. Vickie Walker, when she passed away some time ago. We keep in contact with many of our families, and have become good friends with Mr. Walker. These two gentlemen assisted us in t preparing the flags for retirement. We gathered all the donations and carefully went through each one. We did, of course, receive some flags that did not qualify for the program. We received state specific flags and military branch specific decorative flags. We also received many flags that were decorations in nature only. The American Flags were each folded and made ready.

Our event was hosted late one evening so the sun was low and the temperature was not so hot. Bro. Stephen, from our staff, was our host and kept the ceremony moving. The veterans who participated lowered the flag from in front of our building and raised a new one. We had the performance of Taps and all recited the Pledge of Allegiance. We offered bottled water and a variety of tea. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to participate in the burning of the flags.

We had a wonderful Flag Retirement Ceremony. We received positive feedback from the community and will continue to host this event again in the future.

**Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home & Crematory, Inc.
East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

It has been a long-held belief of Pat Lanigan that the most significant Holiday for funeral service is Memorial Day. Not 'could be' or 'should be' the most significant Holiday, but he believes firmly that Memorial Day is the most significant holiday in our country to observe. Not only for funeral service to observe, but for all of our country to do.

Memorial Day often gets confused and celebrated as another Veterans Day. But as we know in funeral service, it is a day to honor and remember the men and women who gave their lives for the freedoms that we embrace and enjoy in our country.

Because of the true meaning and reason for the existence of Memorial Day, we view it as the companion Holiday for the profession of funeral service to support, revere and even adopt as our aligned Holiday. Each Memorial Day, our team of licensed and non-licensed, veteran and non-veteran personnel, have attended Memorial Day services. Not only do we attend, but we participate by donating coolers of water, loaning and setting up chairs, providing cemetery tents for shade and rain protection and lending our portable sound system for these services. Also, in the past, Pat Lanigan has portrayed several of our local heroes who have been Killed-in-Action throughout our wars.

This year, we went a step further. In fact, we went several steps further. Funeral directors, Joe Strednak and Paul Borgony, along with our part-time college co-workers, Lewis Migliore, Noah Gordon, Michael Azinger and Jacob Holleran, bestowed dignity and respect to the graves of hundreds and hundreds of deceased veterans. Those aforementioned steps were taken to decorate the graves of the veterans buried in All Saints/Braddock Catholic Cemetery in Braddock Hills, PA. Each veteran's grave was decorated with a small American Flags on wooden dowels which were pierced directly into the earth or inserted into an existing flag holder. Although only a small percentage of those veterans were Killed-in-Action, the flag placing continues the tradition of 'Decoration Day', which was the former name of Memorial Day.

The placing took place over 2 days, and we partnered with the North Braddock Amvets to place the flags. The Amvets are an aging group of Korean and Vietnam War vets who take the responsibility for the placements. They gratefully welcomed our help. Those May days were hot and sunny and the terrain of the cemetery is anything but flat, as it encompasses a hilltop with various levels, plateaus and inclines. Our team was personally gratified to be able to contribute to the dignity and solemn nature of Memorial Day. The college staff were reminded of the true meaning of Memorial Day and their participation gave them a greater appreciation for those who died in war.

Although these college guys took thousands of steps in the heat of May and up, down and sideways on the cemetery hills, Lewis put it best. He said, "Our steps are nothing compared to the steps the vets took to earn these flags".

Pollock-Randall, Karrer-Simpson and Marysville Funeral Homes Port Huron, Michigan

In December of 2017, John, Ann, Laura and their families participated in the Dodge Chemical Company sponsored trip for funeral directors to take part in the Wreaths Across America wreath-laying at Arlington National Cemetery. The trip was an amazing opportunity for us to learn more about the Wreaths Across America mission. It was such a great experience that three more staff members, Tina, Amey and Patricia, along with their spouses, participated in 2019 and we hope to be able to send more staff in the future. We also became involved in the yearly placement of the wreaths at our local Allied Veterans cemetery.

In 2019, Ann read an article in a funeral service journal about the Wreaths Across America Mobile Education Exhibit. Due to our interest in WAA, Ann reached out to ask about the potential for bringing the exhibit to Port Huron. We were thrilled to find out that a Midwest tour was planned! Unfortunately, that tour was postponed due to the pandemic and we weren't sure if/when it would happen again. In Winter 2021/2022, we were contacted and told that they were coming in May 2022 and we were able to secure the date of Memorial Day to coincide with many local military events taking place in town.

We began an extensive marketing campaign announcing the event with our local radio stations, schools, social media, etc.

The Mobile Education Exhibit arrived in Port Huron on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend and we parked the trailer in front of our Karrer-Simpson location (which is on the major thoroughfare that traffic heading to the local beaches & parks would use). We took the WAA team members traveling with the exhibit out to dinner and it was great to get to learn more about their experiences and treat them to a relaxing evening (their travel schedule is quite rigorous). Then on Monday morning they set up the exhibit bright and early and we began to welcome guests at 11 a.m.

The exhibit is a semi-trailer converted into a museum. Guests enter at one end and there are visual displays, and then at the other end is a small theatre where a movie about WAA is shown. Outside is an example memorial stone with a wreath and exterior TV screens. We set up tents with informational pages as well as coloring pages for children. We provided water and ice cream bars from one of our favorite local ice cream shops (for the first 200 guests).

Visitors began to arrive almost immediately and remained steady until the 4PM closing. We hosted about 175 individuals, which ended up being the perfect amount of people to enjoy individual attention from the docents. In addition to the regular WAA information, the docents also performed many "Welcome Home" ceremonies for Vietnam veterans throughout the day. It was surprising to us how many Vietnam veterans, including some of our own staff and retired staff, came out of the exhibit emotionally expressing to us that they had never been welcomed home after their Vietnam tour of duty.

The Mobile Education Exhibit is currently touring the nation and we learned is more often hosted in parking lots of supermarkets and veteran facilities. We highly recommend that every funeral home make an effort to offer to host this program if you are ever on their planned route. There was no cost to host the Mobile Education Exhibit but we made a \$10,000 donation to WAA toward their costs, which clearly are substantial, considering gas prices and the staff involved.

BRINGING FRANCIS HOME

By: Joseph E. Pray

Pray Funeral Home, Charlotte, MI

Photos by: Tim Burke

It was a beautiful sunny blue-sky morning. I stood beside the family under the heat of the sun. In front of them was the casket of their Uncle Francis Flaherty. The hills of the cemetery surrounded the family sheltering them from the rest of the world. Hundreds of local community members stood on the hillsides in support of the family and in tribute to the fallen hero.

The crowd remained motionless as an emotional silence blanketed the cemetery and all who were present. A growing thunder could be heard approaching in the distance. The noise grew until the silence was shattered by three Navy F-18's from the Jolly Rogers Squadron VFA-103 (3xxFA-18F) and one from the Gunslingers squadron VFA-105 (1xFA-18E) out of Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Virginia flying above the treetops.

I wondered how the sense of shock and awe of the aircraft screaming over our community affected those in the

surrounding area. Was it anything like the sense of surprise the sailors and service men and women of Pearl Harbor experienced on the fateful day of December 7, 1941?

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was the reason why we were gathered in our local cemetery 80 years later. The lives of many sailors and soldiers ended that day, including the life of Ensign Francis Charles Flaherty.

Francis grew up in our community of Charlotte. He didn't have an easy life, his parents both died when he was a small boy. Despite that he excelled in high school. His fellow classmates remembered him as an all-American boy, member of the football team, and a member of the Yearbook staff. He went on to graduate from the University of Michigan and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. In December 1940 he received his dream assignment aboard the Battleship U.S.S. Oklahoma in Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor is attacked

As the Japanese Zeros screamed over the harbor, the soldiers and sailors of Pearl Harbor raced to their posts. Among them Ensign Francis Charles Flaherty took his position in one of the gun turrets of the Oklahoma, ready to defend the United States of America. The Zeros dropped numerous torpedo bombs into the harbor and eight of them had pierced the armored hull of the U.S.S. Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma started taking on water rapidly and was rolling over on its side. As the klaxon horns rang out the abandon ship signal, the heavily armored turret that was designed to protect the sailors was quickly becoming a dark watery tomb. Francis refused to leave his post. Grabbing a flashlight, he trained it on the exits as the water rose, helping his men escape certain death. Francis did not survive.

Francis was awarded the Medal of Honor Posthumously for his heroic actions.

Recovery

It wasn't until 1943 when the Oklahoma was finally raised that the remains of 430 unknown sailors were recovered, Francis among them. They were interred in the national cemetery known as the Punch Bowl in Honolulu under a marker inscribed "U.S.S. Oklahoma Unknowns." In 2015 the Office of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency contacted surviving family members of Ensign Francis Flaherty for DNA samples to help identify Francis. On September 30, 2019, Francis had been positively identified.

It was decided by the family to bring him home to rest with his parents. A small group of veterans and historians formed to help with Francis' return. I immediately offered the services of our family and staff. That's when I heard the misconception that many people have today, that the government or, in this case, the Navy, was "going to take care of everything." I assured the committee that the Navy would get him home and send the personnel to complete the honors, but there would be many details to coordinate through the funeral home. As the arrangements progressed, I realized what an understatement that was.

Coordination with the Navy

Military Funeral Honors for a Medal of Honor Recipient involved more elements than most other Honors. Over the course of the arrangements our staff coordinated plans

between eight offices in six bases around the country. The homecoming and funeral of Francis Flaherty was to be conducted in three parts.

1. Arrival in Michigan through the Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids.
2. The graveside funeral and Military Honors.
3. A memorial program sharing the story of Francis Flaherty with the family and community.

The first contact was with US Navy Mortuary Affairs. They held Francis' remains and coordinated the transfer of Francis to Michigan. They explained that the physical remains of Ensign Flaherty were skeletal remains. They would be wrapped in a wool Navy blanket and placed in the casket. A Navy uniform would be placed over the remains in the same position as if he were wearing it. It would be complete with his medals and a second Medal of Honor around the neck of the uniform. The family had the choice of keeping the Medal, which they decided to do.



Coordination of the honors details

For the Military Funeral Honors, we contacted Command Navy Mid Atlantic in Norfolk, Virginia. A family Casualty Assistance Officer out of Battle Creek was assigned to oversee the Honors Teams. A Navy Petty Officer from a Naval station in Kalamazoo met with our local committee to coordinate the Honors Teams for both the Plane Side Honors when Ensign Flaherty arrived in Michigan and at the funeral. The Honors Teams came from four different departments and stations. The Flag Team, the sailors that would act as casket bearers and fold and present the flag, came from naval stations throughout the state of Michigan. The rifle detail and

musician to play taps came from Great Lakes Naval Station in Illinois. Because Francis was a Medal of Honor recipient a Flag Officer, Rear Admiral Jeff Spivey, out of Florida would be in attendance to present the flag.

The family had also requested a flyover during the Funeral Honors. They had been referred to file forms with the FAA, however after completing and submitting the forms, the particular FAA department realized it wasn't their jurisdiction. After further investigation, and calls to our congressman, we received a call from Command Naval Air Force Atlantic, also in Norfolk, Virginia to coordinate the Flyover team from the Jolly Rogers Squadron out of Oceana Naval Base in Virginia.

The Flyover required an exact timeline for the graveside service to be sure the planes would pass over at precisely the right moment. This required timing each element of the graveside down to the second. The plan was shared with the Ground Control Officer who would be at the cemetery to communicate with the flight lead as to when to make the flyover pass.

Thirty Naval personnel were involved in the Funeral Honors. Interestingly enough, the different departments didn't appear to be coordinating as a group until we started pulling them together through joint communications.

The arrival

We contacted authorities at the Grand Rapids airport for the arrival of Ensign Flaherty in Michigan. A local State Police Trooper arranged for two cars which we coordinated to escort us on the 60-mile trip. We also contacted our local police to help with traffic once we reached town. A local committee member had arranged for The American Legion Riders, a local group of veterans, to escort us back as well.

The day of arrival in Grand Rapids went without a hitch, the family members and Navy personnel gathered with the American Legion Riders and State Police escorts at the designated gate to the airport apron. It was humbling to be escorted onto the terminal apron to watch the commercial passenger jet land and taxi to the gate. As the group of Navy, family and police followed the funeral coach into position for the transfer I glanced at the faces staring out the windows of the aircraft and the terminal building, wondering what they were thinking. The flag draped casket appeared at the opening of the baggage hold and slowly progressed down the conveyor to the Navy casket bearers waiting at

attention. I had a lump in my throat and was glad I was able to help this family with this homecoming.

The day of the service

The morning of the funeral the Navy teams gathered at Maple Hill cemetery early to practice. Since we were concerned with the possible numbers of guests from the community that would attend, we stationed five staff members (including our seven-year-old grandson) at the cemetery to direct traffic, guide the public to parking areas and direct them to the designated viewing areas on the hills surrounding the gravesite.

Before we left the funeral home, we presented the second Medal of Honor to the family. To our surprise there was no known protocol for presentation of a second Medal



of Honor, so we developed a short simple ceremony and asked Rear Admiral Spivey to present the Medal to the family.

The Navy casket bearers carried the flag draped casket to the coach and the procession departed for the cemetery with family in limousines and automobiles being led with over 250 American Legion Riders and police.

Prompted for months by our social media outreach and contact with local news, community members lined the streets with flags and banners of thanks for Ensign Flaherty's sacrifice for our freedom. Our local Fire Departments suspended an enormous flag over the entrance to the cemetery. The family expressed surprise and appreciation to the community who surrounded them along the path to and at the cemetery.

The graveside funeral began with Admiral Spivey addressing the family about the bravery of Ensign Flaherty. Rev. Fr. Dwight Ezop of the local Catholic Church that Francis had attended as a young man celebrated the Catholic funeral rite.

The family was guided back to the limousines and the procession departed for the third part of Ensign Flaherty's services, a memorial program held at the VFW Post 2406 next door to the cemetery, where Admiral Spivey presented the Medal of Honor flag to the family. The Medal of Honor flag is a square flag with a sky blue background holding 13 gold stars and bordered by gold fringe. State Senator Tom Barrett presented a proclamation of the designation of the main street route through town as the Ensign Francis Flaherty Memorial Highway. Don Colizzi, a local Medal of Honor historian, shared the story of Francis Flaherty and his final

The Military Honors began. The flag was lifted and held taut over the casket by the casket bearers. The rifle squad presented the three-volley salute with exact precision. The musician blew Taps, and the American flag was crisply folded and turned over to Rear Admiral Spivey who pivoted and presented it to the oldest surviving family member. Then there was a brief pause of silence.

That is when the distant rumble broke the silence and quickly became a deafening roar as the four F18 Super Hornets screamed into view above the treetops. The noise and the sight brought surprise, tears, and smiles to the crowd that watched as a lone aircraft broke formation and climbed toward the heavens. We all watched in awe as the pilot guided his airship toward the heavens. Just before he disappeared into the clear blue sky, he performed a roll of the aircraft as if saying "I just saw Francis in the heavens!"

As the F18's disappeared over the horizon, the silence remained for a few more moments as the crowd reflected on all they had seen that morning.

hours on the U.S.S. Oklahoma. The program closed with comments of thanks from the family for the community's help in bringing Francis home.

Among the impressive Military Honors, and the tributes given to Ensign Flaherty that day, we witnessed the core values of what we seek to achieve in funeral service—a family reunited, a community joined together in solemn remembrance, and sure proof of a grateful nation welcoming a hero home.

Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services Traverse City, Michigan

Honoring our local veterans is something our funeral home strives to do on a daily basis. We have the privilege of assisting hundreds of families of veterans each and every year in the Traverse City area. On top of assisting with funeral arrangements, our funeral home engages and services the local veteran community in a number of other ways as well.

More specifically, in partnership with the Senior Center Network our funeral home has sponsored a Hometown Heroes event for many years. Previous iterations of this event have included a bus tour of local monuments, special community presentations and a luncheon at the Coast Guard Air Station. Finding new and innovative ways to celebrate our local heroes would typically be enough of a challenge under normal circumstances, but as we have all experienced, the pandemic has forced us all to adapt and overcome various obstacles.

Rather than allowing our local veteran's sacrifices to go unacknowledged for even for just one year, we retooled our usual Hometown Heroes event to be a drive-up event in which 150 veterans received a complimentary grab-and-go lunch, gift bag and special outdoor presentations for the veterans to enjoy as they drove through the event grounds. Each gift bag also contained letters of appreciation from local school children, which led to the communication between numerous children and the heroes that populate their community; for this experience, the benefit to both parties cannot be overstated.

In the spirit of finding creative new ways to provide tangible benefits to veterans and the community at large, our funeral home began collaborating with a regional veteran-oriented publication, Gather Veterans Magazine. This magazine reaches a broad audience in Northern Michigan and highlights the stories of service men and women, as well as connects veteran-owned businesses, non-profits, events and support groups. Each bi-monthly issue features an article written by our Veterans Benefit Specialist on staff, Brandon Lohr. The topics of these articles include the recognition of Traverse City's very own Funeral Honor Guard, highlighting their efforts to conduct hundreds of services per year, as well as a personal profile on "Honor Guard Mom" Flo Volkening, who is a pivotal member behind the scenes of our veteran community. Other articles have focused on the importance of funeral preplanning via obtaining the important discharge documents that are pivotal for veterans related benefits and services; an article highlighting the veteran members of our Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home work family and the value they add to the workplace; a story of a local veteran being reunited with a long-lost friend who he served with, among others; these are just several examples of the ways we engage with the veteran community and Gather Veterans Magazine gives our funeral home the unique opportunity to share those incredibly rewarding experiences with their readership.

Our local veterans are such an important part of our work and the value they add to our funeral services is exceeded only by the value they add to our community. We are very proud of the work we have done to honor those who have offered to make the ultimate sacrifice and will continue to innovate new and exciting ways to acknowledge our very own Hometown Heroes.

Robinson Funeral Homes Easley, South Carolina

Robinson Funeral Homes and The American Legion Post 52 held their annual event to honor all the veterans that we have served throughout the year on Veterans Day, November 11, 2021 at 11:00 AM. This year, it took place in front of the newest mausoleum added to Robinson Memorial Gardens.

We start planning the ceremony in early September. Letters are mailed out to all the families that we have served at all three locations during the last year that has lost a veteran inviting them to attend. The families are asked to RSVP so that we can better plan the event. Early that morning we set out over a hundred chairs in front of the mausoleum. It was raining that morning, but the chairs were under a covered area at the mausoleum. We also made sure that anyone who had to stand was secured with an umbrella in case they were not able to stand under the covered area. We had a few staff members positioned at the cemetery to guide folks to location and help them get parked so that no one was blocking another attendee from leaving. There were approximately 150 people at the event.

There was a local musician, Leland Browder, from the American Legion playing Patriotic Music as people were taking their seats. The event started with the American Legion Post 52 Color Guard posting the colors. The Sergeant of Arms, Tom Williamson, then lead everyone with the Pledge of Allegiance. The Men's Quartet from Easley First Baptist Church followed with the National Anthem. The pastor from Easley First Baptist Church, Rev. Dr. John Adams, then provided the invocation. The service continued with the MIA/POW Empty Chair Ceremony. The ceremony continued with recognition of guests by the American Legion Post 52's Commander, Jarrel Alexander followed by the Signing of the Armistice presentation by Adjutant, Gary Hinton, who then introduced the guest speaker, Major Jason Ross, Commander for 2nd Battalion/First Civil Support Brigade for SC State Guard part of the SC Military Department. After the speaker, there was the Placement of Wreath presentation by the President of Auxiliary #52, PJ Williamson. Next, all the veterans' names that we have served in the past year were read to honor each one individually. The service was concluded with TAPS by American Legion Post 52, Bugler, Sam Gillespie followed by a Benediction by Rev. Dr. Adams.

This annual event was important, not only to the company, but to the community as well. Everyone was pleased to be able to have and go to events again and the excitement really showed with the attendance amount. The benefits this annual event has for the company is the exposure of, not only the funeral home, but also the cemetery and the Coffee Corner. Refreshments were provided by the Coffee Corner, which is the coffee shop located in Robinson Funeral Homes-Downtown.

Tetrick Funeral Services Johnson City, Tennessee

Tetrick Funeral Services in Johnson City, TN has always been very pro-veteran in community service and outreach of initiating inventive ways of showing our appreciation and gratitude to someone who has served their nation by serving in a branch of the United States military.

The opportunities to show our gratitude, respect, and appreciation to a veteran of the greatest generation are quickly fading as the last of that generation passes away. As they depart from this earth, however, the Services held provide an occasion to honor their sacrifice, dedication and service while also giving lasting memories to their loved ones. These opportunities also serve as an avenue of having a teachable moment to a younger generation of people who are not aware of the sacrifices made out of love these patriots had for their country and for protecting the freedoms of the citizens of the greatest nation in the world.

Recently Tetrick Funeral Services had the occasion and opportunity to provide a display of recognition and gratitude to a World War II veteran and local business owner who worked hand in hand with the fire department in promoting fire safety.

After high school graduation in 1945, he enlisted in the US Navy serving as a Machinist's Mate on the USS Bennett Destroyer during World War II. This veteran was awarded the Victory Medal and American Theatre Medal. After the war, he started a sprinkler company that he ran for over forty years. During that time, he was President of the Tennessee Fire Sprinkler Association and for five years he worked cooperatively with numerous fire prevention agencies in the State of Tennessee.

Because of his close association with the fire departments and fire fighters, his family wanted opportunity to honor their loved one with tangible evidence of his care and respect for fire fighters. Because Tetrick Funeral Services has chosen to go the extra mile in serving these gallant men and women at the time of death; the Johnson City Fire Department was contacted and a ladder truck was requested to be on display in the funeral home's parking lot at the time of the funeral service. Even though the fire department was a ladder truck short at the time of the request, Johnson City Fire Department Station #5 provided a ladder truck with the ladder extended flying an enormous American flag for the hearse and family to drive under as they processed from the funeral home parking lot to go to the cemetery. Rolling Thunder and Patriot Guard Riders stood at attention as the veteran's casket, draped in the American flag, was placed in the hearse. The motorcycle escort led the way to the cemetery, stopping traffic as needed and ensuring the dignity of the procession.

His family was greeted at the cemetery by a row of American flags lining the drive as we approached the gravesite. Military honors were conducted by Veterans Honor Guard DAV #39.

It was a privilege for Tetrick Funeral Services to contribute in a small way to provide a service of honor and dignity for a veteran who defended freedom for us all! The staff of Tetrick Funeral Services has pledged to go above and beyond what they are asked to give the surviving family of a World War II veteran. We have pledged to give an excellent funeral service and to provide a lasting memory that will have every family member leave this facility knowing that their loved one's life has been well honored and respected.

**Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park and Mortuary
Salt Lake City, Utah**

We are honored to support our public servants, veterans and military service men and women who protect our freedom and sacrifice so much in the line of duty. Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park and Mortuary, Valley View Memorial Park and Funeral Home and Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park South Valley understands the unique needs of America's veterans and their families. As a Level Three Founding Community Partner with We Honor Veterans, our staff is knowledgeable in the benefits available to veterans and their families. With respect, integrity and dignity, we walk our families through the steps of creating a veteran's memorial service that truly honors the life and sacrifice of their loved one. We participate in the Homeless Veterans Burial Program, founded in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, local medical examiners, coroners, veterans advocates, and veterans organizations on the belief that every veteran deserves a dignified and honorable burial. Through the program, homeless and indigent veterans who have no family to claim them are identified and provided with proper military burials.

We count ourselves privileged to work with Judy Daybell at the Utah Veterans Affairs Volunteer Department. For the past four years, we have supported the Valentines For Veterans Project. This year alone, our three locations received 1,440 valentines from four elementary schools, three high schools and from countless members of the community. Each valentine was beautifully handmade out of construction paper, using paints, stickers, heart shaped doilies, glitter, ribbons, some even had feathers! They all had kind, heartfelt, handwritten messages, written in crayon or marker. The words of encouragement, support and mostly, thanks for time served protecting our freedoms are touching and mean a lot to the veteran who received the valentine. Once collected, the valentines were given to Judy to distribute to veterans from border to border in the state of Utah to veterans who are living in care centers, assisted living facilities, Veterans Affairs doctors' offices, hospitals and other offices veterans frequently visit.

The staff at Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park and Mortuary, Valley View Memorial Park and Funeral Home and Wasatch Lawn Memorial Park South Valley are proud to be a part of this meaningful event each year; it gives each one of us great pride knowing our local heroes are remembered on Valentine's Day with heartfelt thanks for their service. We look forward to participating in this event ever year.

**Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors
Royal Oak, Michigan**

At Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors, our vision is to be a progressive and innovative leader in funeral and cremation services. This means, not only do we stay informed as staff, but it is also our duty to inform our communities about what is available to them and their families. This is one of the many reasons why we held the 2021 veterans bus tour to Great Lakes National Cemetery.

According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, 589,326 veterans currently live in Michigan. Out of those, 53.7% are aged 65 and over. These seniors are at the perfect age to start thinking about their wishes, talking with their family, and planning. If these veterans can provide their DD214 to show proof of honorable discharge, GLNC is a free option for themselves, their spouse, and a dependent child. On October 7 of 2021, the charter bus pulled up at 9:00 am to take staff and 30 veterans to GLNC. The coolers were packed with water and boxed lunches, and the bus was packed with eager passengers. Normally when we pull up, the visitors will use the facilities and have an opportunity to grab several informational pamphlets inside. A kiosk is available to search for the location of loved ones. Once a member of the GLNC staff comes aboard, the bus starts the loop around the grounds. Visitors have the option to leave the bus to tour the columbarium walls and grounds area. There is time for questions and answers and each guest takes home a folder full of literature and information. It is our goal that the information is then digested and discussed at home with their family and then an educated decision can be made.

As funeral home staff, we benefit from keeping up to date with GLNC. Each year, this cemetery is growing and changing. If we have more families walking in educated at the time of need, it makes the at-need arrangement easier for the family and the staff. Families are left feeling more comfortable with their decision since their next of kin chose their final resting place in advance. The families at large can implement a plan, clearly explain what their loved one wanted and feel proud the decedent's legacy is being honored. We collaborate with local veterans' organizations within the community to spread word of this event each year. Flyers are delivered by our staff and members within the local veteran organizations disperse them within the veteran community. It is a back-and-forth relationship that we are grateful for. We will continue to hold this free event and look forward to the years to come.