



## Pursuit of Excellence

### Remembering A Life Award

### 2026 Richard Myers Pinnacle Award Recipient

**Reeves Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory, Coal City, Illinois**  
*Reeves Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory, Gardner, Illinois*  
*Reeves Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory, Morris, Illinois*  
*Reeves Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes and Crematory, Wilmington, Illinois*

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#### **Restoring the Sound of a Community: Bringing the Bells of St. Rose Back to Life**

**For generations, the ringing of church bells has marked many of life's most significant moments. They** celebrate weddings, call the faithful to worship, announce times of prayer, and accompany families as they gather to honor loved ones through funeral rites. In Wilmington, Illinois, a rural community of approximately 8,000 residents located sixty-five miles southwest of Chicago, the bells of St. Rose Catholic Church had served as the community's soundtrack for nearly 170 years.

As a lifelong Wilmington resident and funeral director, those bells hold special meaning for me. As a student at St. Rose School, our classrooms would pause in prayer whenever the funeral bells began to toll as a funeral procession arrived at the church. In sixth grade, I began serving as the parish organist, and one of my responsibilities was operating the bell system. The familiar morning call to Mass, the carillon concerts at 9:00 a.m., noon, 3:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m., the solemn tolling for funerals, and the joyful swing bell for weddings became woven into the fabric of daily life for our entire community.

Around 2020, however, the aging bell system became inoperable. For more than a decade, the bell tower remained silent, and an important tradition quietly disappeared.

In 2025, as St. Rose Parish prepared to celebrate its 170th anniversary, the pastor approached our funeral home seeking assistance in raising approximately \$18,000 needed to restore the historic bells. Because Reeves, Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes has long believed that funeral service extends beyond the walls of our facilities, we viewed this not simply as a fundraising opportunity, but as a chance to restore an important symbol of community identity.

Rather than conduct a traditional fundraising campaign, we developed an innovative project utilizing equipment already employed in serving our families. Our funeral home regularly uses laser engraving technology to personalize urn nameplates, memorial keepsakes, plaques, and other commemorative items. We designed custom bell-shaped Christmas ornaments featuring a laser-engraved image of St. Rose Catholic Church and offered 180 limited-edition ornaments in exchange for a suggested \$100 donation toward the bell restoration project.

The response exceeded every expectation.

Within a remarkably short time, every ornament had been spoken for, fully funding the restoration of the St. Rose bell system. As donations continued, the project expanded beyond its original goal, allowing the parish to restore the historic bells at Immaculate Conception Church, the second worship site within St. Rose Parish.

Our funeral home continued its involvement by designing and producing the permanent dedication plaques recognizing those whose generosity made the restoration possible. On June 27, 2026, the restored bells were formally dedicated, although they had already begun ringing across the community several months earlier following completion of the restoration.

The impact has been extraordinary.

Today, the restored bells once again announce the hours, accompany funeral liturgies, celebrate weddings, and provide the familiar sounds that generations of residents remember so fondly. Our funeral home is located only eight blocks from St. Rose Church, and hearing the bells ring at 9:00 each morning, often as our staff is preparing a funeral procession, serves as a meaningful reminder of the sacred work we are privileged to perform.

The benefits extended well beyond the successful fundraising effort. Our staff found great pride in contributing their talents to a project that enriched the entire community rather than simply supporting funeral service. The project showcased how resources developed within funeral service, such as personalization, craftsmanship, and memorialization can creatively serve broader community needs. It also strengthened relationships between our funeral home, the parish, and residents throughout Wilmington, regardless of religious affiliation.

The parish provided leadership by identifying the restoration need, overseeing the repair project, and coordinating installation and dedication activities. Reeves, Fruland & Baskerville Funeral Homes conceived the fundraising concept, designed and laser-produced each commemorative ornament, managed promotion and distribution of the ornaments, created the dedication plaques, and helped bring the vision to completion.

Perhaps the greatest measure of success is one that cannot be quantified. After more than fifteen years of silence, Wilmington once again hears the bells that have marked life's celebrations, sorrows, and moments of reflection for generations. Families attending funerals hear the familiar tolling that once again accompanies their final farewell. Residents pause when the carillon plays across town. Children are growing up hearing the same sounds that their parents and grandparents remember.

Sometimes innovation is not about creating something entirely new. Sometimes it is about using the talents, technology, and compassionate spirit of funeral service to restore something priceless that a community thought it had lost forever.

