



**Pursuit of Excellence**  
Best of the Best Award

## **2026 Best of the Best Award Recipients**

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# Capillas Señoriales Casa de Homenajes, Merida, Yucatan, Mexico

## Santuarios Memoriales: Because Love Never Disappears, It Simply Changes Place

How can a family find comfort in an object?

That question began to emerge at Capillas Señoriales, Casa de Homenajes, as we observed the way many families approached memorial keepsakes. In the memorial shop, families could find reliquaries, locketts, commemorative jewelry, photographs, and different items designed to preserve the memory of a loved one. However, although many people looked at them with interest, the team recognized something important: for these objects to truly support families in their grief, they could not be presented as ordinary products. They needed to feel close. They needed to tell a story. They needed to help families understand that memory is not held only in a single piece, but in everything that allows us to continue feeling close to those we love.

Through our daily work with grieving families, we understood that many people are not simply looking to acquire a keepsake. They are looking for a way to sustain a bond. They are looking for a place to keep what still speaks to them of their loved one: a photograph, a prayer, a letter, a scent, a piece of jewelry, a color, a small sign of presence. Because when someone loves deeply, absence does not erase the need for closeness. It transforms it.

From that reflection, Santuarios Memoriales were born, an initiative created to turn memorial keepsakes into emotional experiences of remembrance, connection, and accompaniment. Inspired by principles of visual merchandising and emotional window dressing, the team developed small scenes inside transparent acrylic boxes, designed to represent the essence of a person through objects, photographs, colors, and personal symbols.

Although the first prototypes emerged as a previous creative exploration, it was beginning in July 2025 that Santuarios Memoriales became an active practice within Capillas Señoriales, Casa de Homenajes. During that time, they stopped being a temporary display and became a permanent tool for emotional support, integrated into farewell tributes and into the memorial experience of families in Mexico and Guatemala.

It was not about showing a product. It was about telling a life. Each display case began to be built as a small emotional universe, where every element had intention and meaning. The team visited stores, markets, and workshops searching for miniatures and details capable of telling a real story: kitchen utensils, flowers, books, candles, small medical items, sewing objects, symbols of faith, decorative pieces, and carefully chosen colors. Each sanctuary was designed as if that person still inhabited that space. As if, inside that small display case, something of their presence remained alive.

When they were integrated into the tributes, something profoundly revealing happened. Families stopped looking only at the reliquaries and commemorative jewelry. They began to pause before the stories those spaces represented. Some people smiled through tears. Others pointed to small details and said, "That was my mom," "That was her favorite color," "That represents exactly who she was." In that moment, the team understood that the initiative had achieved something deeper than improving a display: it had created a new way to connect emotionally with memory.

From that point forward, Coordinadoras de Homenajes, Asesoras Memoriales, operations teams, marketing, and different areas of the organization began working collaboratively. During conversations with families, the team listens for details about the life, tastes, profession, passions, faith, meaningful objects, and everyday memories of the loved one. That information becomes inspiration to create an authentic, sensitive, and personalized sanctuary.

If someone loved cooking, the sanctuary may include small utensils, recipes, or elements that evoke the warmth of the family kitchen. If the person was a doctor, nurse, or teacher, it may include symbols of their vocation. If they enjoyed gardening, flowers and natural colors become part of the visual narrative. If their life was deeply marked by spirituality, rosaries, candles, or prayer elements are incorporated. Each Santuario is built with a clear intention: to allow the family to recognize their loved one not through a general description, but through the details that made them unique.

One of the most meaningful elements has been the integration of personalized reliquaries and lockets featuring the loved one's photograph inside the Santuarios. For many families, seeing that beloved face inside such a small, close, and delicate piece creates a deeply emotional connection. The jewelry stops being only a memorial item and becomes an intimate possibility of carrying a visible part of that person with them every day.

Over time, the project grew in a way the team had not anticipated. Families were not only acquiring commemorative items; many began asking to take the entire Santuario home. They explained that this small space helped them gather, in one place, the most important memories of their loved one. Some families later complemented it with letters, perfumes, watches, rosaries, favorite books, clothing, additional photographs, or small everyday objects that held deep emotional value.

In this way, the Santuario Memorial stopped being only part of a tribute display. It became an intimate space within the home. A place where the family can light a candle, pray, cry, talk, remember, or simply feel accompanied on difficult days. A space where memories stop feeling scattered and find a loving way to remain.

The innovation of Santuarios Memoriales lies precisely in transforming the relationship between families and memorial items. Instead of presenting isolated products, the program integrates them into a narrative and emotional experience. This allows families to understand the symbolic value of each piece and find new ways to live with grief, honor memory, and preserve the bond with their loved one.

For families, the benefits have been profoundly human. The Santuarios offer a physical space to organize memory, channel emotions, and sustain remembrance with beauty and meaning. In the emotional disorder that absence often leaves behind, having a concrete place where memory can dwell brings calm, support, and closeness. It also allows different generations to participate in remembrance: children, grandchildren, parents, and siblings can place objects, tell stories, and keep the presence of their loved one alive within the home.

The project has strengthened a culture of personalization, listening, and sensitivity. Coordinadoras de Homenajes and Asesoras Memoriales have developed a deeper perspective on the details that truly connect with families. The team no longer sees memorial items only through their commercial function, but through their ability to provide emotional support. This has strengthened the institutional purpose of serving with humanity before and after the farewell, and has generated greater integration among areas such as operations, the memorial shop, marketing, service, and family experience.

Although the project was born within Capillas Señoriales, Casa de Homenajes, its development has been possible thanks to the collaborative work of different internal teams. Creative and operational areas contribute to the search for elements, visual construction, logistics, and care for details. Asesoras Memoriales accompany families in choosing the reliquaries, lockets, and commemorative items that best represent the bond with their loved one.

The program has evolved significantly. It has been integrated more consistently into tributes, the personalization of pieces with photographs has been strengthened, the variety of themes has expanded, and its implementation has extended to locations in Mexico and Guatemala. To date, Capillas Señoriales has created more than 1,000 personalized Santuarios Memoriales, each designed to tell a different story.

But perhaps the greatest achievement is not the number of Santuarios created, but what they have revealed about grief. Families are not only seeking to preserve objects. They are seeking to preserve bonds. They are seeking spaces where love can continue to take shape. They are looking for a way to feel that, even though the person is no longer physically present, their story still has a place in the home, in memory, and in everyday life.

Santuarios Memoriales are innovative because they turn a memorial item into an experience of connection. They transform a display case into a story. An object into presence. A photograph into companionship. A small transparent box into a space where love finds a new place to remain. Because when someone leaves, love does not disappear. It changes place. And sometimes, what a family needs in order to begin living with absence is precisely that: a place where memories can stay.

## Funeraria San Vicente S.A., Medellin, Colombia

### Beyond the Clinical Boundary: Funeral Transition Rooms as a Model of Excellence, Humanization, and Social Commitment

“Show me how a nation cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical precision the tender compassion of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”  
(William Ewart Gladstone, 1994)

- Rationale behind the idea.

A person's death demands to be treated with dignity and respect during every aspect of the process, which requires the full attention and care of the professionals providing support. People often say that their preferred place to die would be their home; however, most deaths in the modern world occur in hospitals, primarily due to an aging population, advances in medicine, the complexity of chronic diseases, and care needs that exceed community resources. Death in a hospital setting presents an institutional paradox: on the one hand, medical practice is oriented toward preserving life; on the other, the fast-paced nature of the clinical environment often reduces postmortem care to a purely administrative procedure devoid of warmth, leaving families vulnerable and adrift in a maze of paperwork at their most vulnerable moment.

As Thomas Lynch (1997) points out, “the dead do not care about the service or the words spoken about them... but to the living, the dead matter.” This reminds us that funeral work is not merely a logistical task, but a fundamental pillar of emotional well-being and social dignity. Excellence in our sector is achieved when we transcend the cold reality of clinical death and facilitate farewell processes that are dignified, ethical, professional, and deeply human.

Given that early rituals can positively impact the mental health of the bereaved, while their absence increases the risk of grief-related disorders, San Vicente Funeral Home has developed and established Funeral Transition Rooms in hospitals in Medellín, Colombia, responding to the critical need to humanize this setting.

- Detailed description of the program, service, or activity.

The Funeral Transition Room is a physical space that transforms—both aesthetically and in terms of care—traditional hospital morgues, which are typically cold, gloomy, and isolated places located near hospital parking lots or laundry facilities; these spaces are now transformed into appropriate and intimate environments and are operated directly by specialized funeral staff, conceived as an ethical extension of non-commercial patient care. The service is governed by a strict protocol based on three essential components:

- Custody and basic preparation: The team assumes custody of the body following medical certification through auditable physical and digital records, performing basic preparation tasks and preliminary aesthetic arrangements in accordance with biosafety criteria.
- The role of the funeral counsellor: A professional trained in psychological and emotional support respectfully engages with the family, providing active listening and transparent guidance on legal and administrative procedures as well as rituals.
- A dignified farewell: A private and respectful architectural design removes the bereaved from the clinical environment and allows for initial visual and physical contact as the loved one is passed into the care of the funeral home staff in an atmosphere of peace and solemnity.

- Benefits provided to the funeral home and its staff.

The management of these rooms brings immeasurable value to the organization and its human capital:

- Professionalization and positioning of the funeral industry: It elevates the status of the funeral director and the funeral industry as the final link in a chain of comprehensive public health care and community social assistance.
- Error control and mitigation: Immediate custody of the body ensures proper legal and administrative traceability, completely eliminating errors in handling or transport, thereby safeguarding the civil and criminal liability of both institutions (the hospital and the funeral home). It also ensures that sensitive processes, such as the issuance of certificates and medical records, comply with the data protection framework (Law 1581 of

2012), safeguarding the reputation of both the hospital and the funeral home. Furthermore, it frees medical staff from logistical tasks unrelated to their primary role, strengthening mutual trust and consolidating an ethical corporate image.

- Sense of Purpose Among Staff: It dignifies the daily work of funeral professionals by offering support during a critical time, which reinforces their sense of purpose, dedication to service, and emotional resilience in the face of work that has a profound human impact.

- Institutional Loyalty: It establishes relationships of deep mutual trust between the medical and administrative staff of the clinics, positioning San Vicente Funeral Home as a leading ethical choice in the sector.

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

The program's social impact extends beyond the healthcare context, restoring dignity to death in the face of bureaucracy and the rush of clinical care:

- Emotional Support and the Grieving Process: The funeral counsellor ensures a compassionate approach and emotional support during the most critical moments to prevent families from feeling abandoned. They also provide educational guidance on the role that funeral rituals play in mental health, facilitating a dignified farewell that positively contributes to the grieving process.

- Protection against predatory practices: They serve as an ethical shield within the hospital, preventing unscrupulous intermediaries from approaching families in crisis or exerting aggressive sales pressure in waiting rooms.

- Democratization of Human Dignity: It serves families with a spirit of social service, regardless of class, creed, economic status, or prior contractual affiliation.

The model ensures that families who have previously contracted services with other companies also receive support from the healthcare institution to say goodbye to their loved one and assistance in contacting their funeral home; that individuals without coverage have free and informed access to transparent and ethical options; and that vulnerable populations receive dignified solutions, such as assistance in dealing with public agencies to access state benefits, and institutional support from San Vicente Funeral Home, which provides an average of 50 donations of funeral services each month, including full logistical and emotional support in the case of stillbirths and newborns who die shortly after birth, advocating that the right to a dignified farewell should not depend on financial resources or administrative limitations—such as the prohibition of Catholic religious rituals for the “unbaptized”.

- Organizational links and synergies.

The program's viability is based on synergy with clearly defined institutional roles:

- Role of the hospital: It acts as a partner by providing suitable physical infrastructure within the medical complex, immediately reporting deaths, and delivering the required clinical documentation to the authorized funeral home, thereby allowing medical staff to focus on caring for living patients.

- Role of San Vicente Funeral Home: It assumes full operational, financial, and legal responsibility for the facility, handling the provision of biosafety supplies, technical maintenance, the provision of qualified staff, traceability, and strict compliance with data protection regulations (Law 1581 of 2012).

- Program evolution and improvements over the past year.

This program is constantly evolving to meet technological and social demands. Over the past year, the following substantial improvements were implemented to optimize user experience and efficiency:

- Digitization of traceability: The program transitioned from manual records to a secure digital system that generates real-time custody logs, ensuring precise monitoring and documentation of the status of cadavers, thereby strengthening the legal robustness of the process.

- Data protection update: Staff were recertified under Law 1581 of 2012 to ensure the secure delivery of death certificates and medical records in light of increasing global cyberattacks.

- Expansion of the portfolio of social solutions: Partnerships with state-run charitable banks were strengthened, reducing the wait time for authorizations for subsidized funerals from 48 hours to less than 6 hours within the Transition Room itself.

The implementation of Funeral Transition Rooms demonstrates that excellence in our profession is achieved when logistical efficiency is combined with deep social sensitivity and ethical standards. By transforming the hospital environment into a space of comfort, safety, and legal accountability, this program protects healthcare professionals, honours the memory of the deceased, and provides support to families during their most vulnerable moments.

## **Holman-Howe Funeral Homes, Lebanon, Missouri**

### *Allee-Holman-Howe Funeral Home, Camdenton, Missouri*

At Holman-Howe Funeral Home we are developing a culture of ever present self- improvement and development of better ways to tell our story. We also are committed to connecting to our market with the latest technology with media that is innovative and current. As traditional sources such as newspaper and radio decline, we have sought out opportunities to share our story and promote our brand digitally.

Our community has moved forward with an aggressive digital provider called Lebanon Now. They not only provide content for social media but they have expanded to do live news and special interest production. The response has been impressive and it has been well received by the community.

We were approached by Lebanon Now to create a production featuring our business. Since our firm is one of the oldest continually operated businesses in the area it seemed a natural to explore the history of our business. After much thought, the title of the documentary was selected as "THE HOME". This seemed appropriate as it reflected warmth and stability and followed the history of the funeral home starting in a residential "home".

Much care and detail was given by funeral home staff who researched archives, files and photos beginning before the funeral home opened and included the history of the original builder and significant owners pre-funeral home. We used the internet and other sources to delve into interesting side stories that would make the production more than just a narrative about a funeral home. Much care was given to develop a script that was creative and clever and yet told our story including photos and graphics. We included stories that had been passed down through the generations and it was rewarding to verify the accuracy of what we had been told through research.

Holman-Howe is unique in that we have several historical items that reflect our history. In our production, we featured our collection of antique model funeral cars and ambulances, our fleet of antique funeral cars which are used regularly on request as well as numerous funeral memorabilia reflecting the profession as a whole. Many of these items were presented and discussed and the response was overwhelming.

We also featured many of the new and innovative services that go into the production of a "personalized" service. Focus was given to the background of everything we do from the preparation room to production of digital video and custom service programs which are personalized for each service.

The actual production of the broadcast was always interesting given the practical facts of working around services, weather and making sure every line was accurate and well presented. Ken Howe and his son, Taylor tag teamed topics which were edited and then through production general narration was added to make the production flow. Great care was given to set the stage and create a level of drama to keep it interesting. The Lebanon Now team edited and tweaked the narrative and put together a production in which we all could be proud! We were astonished that our community was so interested and the view numbers were phenomenal!

Although it was a time consuming project, we feel it was landmark accomplishment for our team to put together. We were flattered that Lebanon Now viewed our company worthy of the time and effort and they were very impressed with the community response to the final production.

## Jefferson Memorial Funeral Home, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

### Lanterns of Love

Jefferson Memorial Funeral Home is thrilled to announce the establishment of a new annual memorial service being held at our funeral home known as Lanterns of Love.

Lanterns of Love is a gathering dedicated to honoring the families affected by Pregnancy and Infant Loss and remembering their angels. All proceeds of this memorial service directly benefited The Still Remembered Project; a local non-profit organization committed to providing grief resources and support to families navigating through such a loss. After seeing the major impact this had on the families who attended and the peace and sense of community it offered to those struggling with this specific grief, we have committed to holding this event each October, as October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month.

The event began by offering time for families to gather and participate in decorating their memorial lanterns in honor of their lost loved ones. In addition to the decoration of memorial lanterns, some of the additional crafts that were offered to families included memory rock painting, to either keep or leave at the reflection pond; designing their own buttons to signify who they walk in memory of; and creating memory bracelets to wear and share. We also had booths set up with helpful grief resources and information provided by the funeral home and members of The Still Remembered Project.

At dusk, we gathered at our cemetery's gates to embark on a memorial walk to our reflection pond located within our cemetery in the section of "John the Baptist." This location was thoughtfully picked in the planning of the event for the recognition of the significance of a baptismal pond in connection to infants. Once we arrived at the pond, a memorial service was held led by several speakers' including local clergy, funeral directors, and members of The Still Remembered Project. At the conclusion of the memorial service, just as it was becoming dark, attendees were invited to have their lovingly decorated lanterns lit by a staff member which they then placed to float in the pond. The lanterns shone throughout the course of the night reminiscent of the Wave of Light, celebrated globally in October to honor and remember babies who have gone too soon before us. The idea of Lanterns of Love blossomed from Allie Caselli, one of our funeral directors, wanting to hold some type of service to honor families who have experienced the loss of a child. As a bereaved mother herself, Allie's idea was to change the stigma around pregnancy loss and how we often see only the recognition of the effects of the loss on the mother. As staff, we recognized that many funeral homes hold bereaved Mother's Day services, but our goal was to create a service that encompasses the whole family, including fathers, in the same way and one that creates a welcoming environment where a family could feel comfortable including their other children. While the idea originated from this location- it quickly proved to be a valuable team effort to make it happen.

Creating Lanterns of Love was a perfect example of how dedicated teamwork and support can be the most valuable part of making a company great. Our funeral directors worked alongside one another building ideas, creating booths and crafts, and perfecting the event with one another. Watching the success of our first year helped them feel sense of accomplishment in their work and commitment to their community. Not only had the event helped them come together for the service itself but it inspired them to become better educated on how to serve families during these unimaginable losses.

However, the greatest benefit this event had was the impact on those who attended. We made a point to extend invitation to anyone in the area, whether they used our funeral home or not. We were surprised to see over 140 people registered to attend the event. Hearing the stories of the people as they arrived was one of the most impactful portions of the night. We had people of all ages attend, families brought their children, grandparents came to support their children, neighbors came just to provide listening ears. Allie was deeply moved by one woman, well into her 80's, who shared she had experienced a miscarriage in her early 20's and she had never had the chance to be recognized as that baby's mother until today. Sitting alongside her as she decorated her lantern, complete with her baby girl's name, will forever stay with her. Another one of our funeral directors recalls how one woman told her that she was there to support her own mother who had a miscarriage in the 70's and never truly recovered from it. She noted that you could tell, without even knowing their specific grief or loss, that people with many different experiences found it valuable and felt seen by it. It was evident that people keep this love, and grief, in their hearts and may have never been allowed a safe place to work through these emotions. At Lanterns of Love, they were provided with a safe space to display the love for their babies they may have never been able to hold.

Not only did this event create a safe space, but it also built community. We watched as guests shared stories with one another, and as guests who were previously unfamiliar with the support of The Still Remembered Project were educated and informed there are groups available to them. Groups that continue to blossom relationships with individuals who have walked through some of life's hardest moments, just as they have. Ultimately what the night illustrated to us was that no one ever needs to walk through grief alone- we care and are here to support one another.

The incredible impact this event had still resonates with us as we serve new families who are familiar with us from their attendance. Additionally, we have been reached out to by both doula and midwife centers in Pittsburgh inquiring about how they can get involved and letting us know they would like to have flyers placed in their locations as the event approaches this coming year.

This year, we plan to add resource-based services to give more grief outlets to families in attendance. We plan to reach out to a local author who writes specifically on the topic of life following infant loss and the grief attached to it. We have also been exploring the idea of contacting alternative grief counselors to set up informational booths such as grief through mediation or gardening.

We are beyond proud to offer such a valuable gathering for our Pittsburgh community and we are excited to see the impact of the event grow with each year to come.

# Spann Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Dickson, Tennessee

## *Humphreys County Funeral Home, Waverly, Tennessee*

Before the Call Comes: The Journey: Resources, Relationships, and the Road Ahead.

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There is a conversation that funeral directors across the country have quietly been having for decades, usually with each other and rarely out loud: the families we serve arrive at the worst moment of their lives almost entirely unprepared. Not because they are irresponsible, but because no one has given them an accessible, low-pressure way to prepare. Legal documents are not in order. Financial plans are incomplete. End-of-life wishes have never been discussed. Hospice is misunderstood or unknown. Grief resources are invisible until grief arrives. And the funeral home, the one institution that knows more than any other about what families face when a death occurs, sits largely silent until the phone rings.

At Spann Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Dickson, Tennessee, we decided to change that. On Saturday, June 7, 2025, we hosted The Journey: Resources, Relationships, and the Road Ahead; a free, five-hour community resource event that brought together eight professional organizations from across the region under one roof, with the explicit purpose of reaching families before the call comes.

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### Rationale: Why This Program Was Needed

Dickson County is a rural Middle Tennessee community of approximately 55,000 residents. Like most rural communities, it has a high concentration of families who lack convenient, accessible pathways to professional guidance on end-of-life planning, legal preparation, and grief support. A 2023 report by the National Funeral Directors Association noted that fewer than 22 percent of Americans have made any funeral prearrangements, and research by Caring.com has consistently found that fewer than one-third of American adults have a will or estate plan in place. In communities like ours, where professional resources are geographically dispersed and where cultural norms often discourage open conversation about death and planning, these numbers skew even lower.

The consequences of this unpreparedness are visible to every funeral professional. Families making arrangement decisions in acute grief, without prior knowledge of their options. Estates left without legal documentation, creating confusion and conflict among surviving family members. Hospice services enrolled too late, or not at all, because families did not understand what hospice offers and when to ask for it. Grief that goes unsupported because families do not know where to turn.

Spann Funeral Home sees the results of this gap with every family we serve. The Journey was our answer to it; a proactive, community-centered effort to put the right information in front of families before they need it urgently.

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### Detailed Description of the Program

The Journey was held on Saturday, June 7, 2025, at Spann Funeral Home and Cremation Services, 1961 Highway 48 North, Dickson, Tennessee, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The event was free and open to the entire public with no registration required.

Planning for The Journey began approximately two to three months in advance, with Managing Director Jacob Beard and the Spann Funeral Home team identifying and recruiting partner organizations, developing the event layout, coordinating logistics, and building a promotional strategy centered on Facebook and digital outreach. Almost the entire Spann staff participated on the day of the event: directing attendees, staffing information areas, preparing and serving food and refreshments, and ensuring that every person who walked through the door felt genuinely welcomed.

The format was a come-and-go community resource fair. There were no required sessions, no scheduled presentations, and no time pressure. Attendees moved through at their own pace, engaged with the organizations and resources most relevant to their situation, and left when they were ready. This format was intentional; it communicates immediately that The Journey exists to serve attendees, not to sell them anything.

Eight professional organizations participated as resource partners, each staffing a dedicated area and providing information, materials, and direct consultation to attendees:

Caris Hospice provided information about hospice and palliative care services, what hospice is, when families should consider it, how to initiate a referral, and what families can expect from the hospice journey. For many Dickson County residents, this was their first opportunity to ask questions about hospice in a calm, unhurried environment.

NHC Home Health provided information about home health and skilled nursing services, helping families understand the continuum of care available to aging or ill loved ones and how to navigate transitions between care settings.

Matthews Aurora Funeral Products and Wilbert Vault Company provided funeral and cremation product information, helping families understand their merchandise options; from traditional caskets and burial vaults to alternative and personalized selections, without the time pressure of an active arrangement conference.

Larkspur Conservation, a nationally recognized conservation burial ground, provided information about green burial and conservation burial options. This partnership was particularly meaningful given Spann's February 2026 Green Burial Council certification as only the second funeral home in Tennessee to earn this distinction, and gave Dickson County families direct access to one of the leading conservation burial providers in the region.

A licensed grief counselor provided attendees with grief support information, resources, and informal consultation, bringing professional grief care into a community setting where it is rarely available outside of a clinical context.

Edward Jones Financial Services provided information about financial planning, estate planning strategies, and the financial considerations families face when a death occurs without adequate preparation.

A local estate planning attorney provided information about wills, powers of attorney, healthcare directives, beneficiary designations, and other legal documents that families consistently arrive at funeral arrangements without having completed.

Spann Funeral Home staff provided information about the full range of Spann's services: traditional burial, cremation, green burial, pre-planning, and aftercare. As well as guided attendees through the Journey Selections Catalog, Spann's newly developed magazine-style service guide.

Guided facility tours were offered throughout the day, and they became one of the most meaningful and talked-about elements of The Journey. Spann staff walked community members through the entire facility, including the embalming room and the on-site crematory, both of which are rarely if ever seen by the families and community members who entrust us with their loved ones. Staff answered questions openly and honestly at every stop, without script and without limitation. For many attendees, seeing the preparation room and crematory demystified a process that had previously existed only in imagination, and replaced anxiety with understanding. Several attendees described the tour as the most impactful part of their day. For a community that places deep trust in Spann Funeral Home, being invited behind the scenes was not just informative, it was an act of respect.

Food and refreshments were prepared and served by Spann staff throughout the event, reinforcing the welcoming, unhurried atmosphere the team had worked to create.

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### Benefits to Spann Funeral Home and Staff

The Journey had significant and lasting benefits for Spann Funeral Home and its team. For staff, hosting the event was a source of genuine professional pride, a day defined by helpfulness, warmth, and community connection rather than by grief and crisis.

From a strategic perspective, The Journey introduced Spann Funeral Home to community members who had never walked through our doors, deepened relationships with professional partners whose referrals benefit the families we serve, and established Spann's identity as a proactive community resource rather than a reactive

service provider. The event was the public debut of the Journey brand; the name, the catalog, and the positioning, and gave the entire community a first look at a Spann Funeral Home that defines itself by the full arc of a family's journey, not only by the hours of a single service.

The event also generated exceptional digital reach. The Facebook promotion for The Journey achieved approximately 26,000 views, a remarkable number for an independent funeral home in a county of 55,000 residents, and a demonstration of the depth of community interest in the kind of accessible, practical end-of-life resource event The Journey provided. This digital reach extended Spann's visibility well beyond our existing audience and into households that had never previously engaged with our brand.

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### Benefits to Families and the Community

The most direct benefit of The Journey was straightforward: families in Dickson County had access, for one morning and afternoon, to eight professional organizations covering the full landscape of end-of-life planning and support, legal, financial, medical, hospice, grief, funeral, and conservation burial, in one accessible, free, welcoming location.

For a rural community where these resources are geographically dispersed and where cultural norms often make proactive end-of-life planning conversations difficult to initiate, The Journey addressed a genuine structural gap. Families who attended left with legal resources they had been meaning to pursue. Families who had never considered hospice understood it for the first time. Families who had never heard of green burial left with information about a growing option that Spann is now uniquely positioned to provide. Families who had anxiously avoided thinking about funeral planning had walked through a funeral home on their own terms, in daylight, with refreshments, surrounded by neighbors, and found it far less intimidating than they had imagined.

The facility tours were a community benefit that is difficult to quantify but easy to describe. Many people attend a funeral home for the first time in acute grief, under time pressure, with almost no prior context. The Journey gave community members the opportunity to see Spann's facility on their own terms, ask the questions they had always wondered about, and leave with a fundamentally different relationship to a place that many people find anxiety-inducing. That shift in familiarity has real and lasting value for families when the time comes that they need us most.

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### Partner Organization Roles

Spann Funeral Home served as the sole organizing host of The Journey; conceiving the event, recruiting partner organizations, providing the venue, managing all logistics, developing and executing the promotional strategy, and staffing the event with nearly our entire team. All food, refreshments, and hospitality were provided by Spann.

Partner organizations: Caris Hospice, NHC Home Health, Matthews Aurora Funeral Products, Wilbert Vault Company, Larkspur Conservation, a licensed grief counselor, Edward Jones Financial Services, and a local estate planning attorney, served as resource providers. Each organization was responsible for staffing their own information area, bringing their own materials and literature, and engaging directly with attendees who sought their specific expertise.

No partner paid to participate. No attendee paid to attend. No sales activity was conducted at the event. The only exchange that took place at The Journey was the exchange of information, and the building of relationships, between community members and the professionals who can serve them, and between the Dickson County community and Spann Funeral Home.

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### The Journey as an Annual Commitment

The Journey is not a one-time event. It is a commitment. The community response, and particularly the 26,000-view Facebook reach, which demonstrated that the appetite for this kind of accessible resource event extends well beyond the families who were able to attend in person, confirmed that The Journey meets a genuine and ongoing need in Dickson County and the surrounding region.

Spann Funeral Home intends to host The Journey as an annual event, growing its partner network, expanding its promotional reach, and continuing to refine the experience based on what we learn each year. The name, the brand, the catalog, and the event are all part of a single, coherent vision: a funeral home that walks with the community through the full arc of life's most important decisions, not only through the hours of a single service, but through every step of The Journey.