



Pursuit of Excellence

2026 Innovative Ideas Essays

Community Outreach: Senior Citizens

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Windsor, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Avon, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Granby, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Suffield, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, South Windsor, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Vernon, Connecticut

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Hartford, Connecticut

File of Life Program

This year our firm was invited to take part in a community outreach program at the Simsbury Public Library on Tuesday June 9, 2026. The program was about the File of Life, also known as Vial of L.I.F.E. (Lifesaving Information for Emergencies). The File of Life allows individuals to have their complete medical information readily available in their homes for emergency personnel to reference during an emergency. It also provides the patient's medical information when the patient is unable to speak or remember it. File of Life programs are commonly used by senior citizens and promoted by senior center organizations, fire departments, and other community organizations. This year, Carmon Community Funeral Homes was asked to be a presenter because this program added end of life issues, which are not normally associated with the Vial of LIFE, hence the new term, File of LIFE.

This program was attended by sixty-five people, and several presenters from the community. The presenters included the Simsbury Police Department, the Simsbury Volunteer Ambulance Association, McLean Hospice, and Carmon Community Funeral Homes. The presenters discussed their involvement with end-of-life issues and had time for questions after each portion of the event.

The Simsbury Police spoke about the procedure to follow when a death occurs at a home. They also discussed and explained the legal end of life directives as well as when emergency care should be provided. The police also have the responsibility to inform the Medical Examiner's Office of a sudden death. The speakers also explained what happens regarding pronouncement or presumption of death.

The Ambulance Association explained their responsibilities for providing life saving measures in the absence of a clear legal directive. The ambulance association works in conjunction with the Police Department.

McLean Hospice explained their protocol when a person passes away at home under their care and doctors' orders. The hospice presenter explained how they prepare the deceased for the funeral home as well as their responsibilities regarding completion of the death certificate.

John Carmon explained the role that funeral directors have when someone dies at home whether they are called by the ambulance, the police, hospice, or the family. John explained the steps that the funeral home takes when the local police and ambulance call when someone has passed away. He also explained the role of the medical examiner's office and the connection that the funeral homes makes. He continued with the role and response of the funeral home when a hospice nurse calls to report that someone has passed.

Regardless of who calls the funeral home, John explained that we will respond to the place of death usually within an hour with a team of two professionals to bring their loved one into our care and that our funeral directors can be reached twenty-four hours a day every day of the year. John explained that the person calling, family included, would be asked several questions by the funeral director responding. These questions and answers would help our staff to be prepared for any special needs such as if the location is on the second floor, or the approximate weight of deceased so we could bring appropriate staff. John continued to let people know the steps the funeral home takes when arriving at the home so people would understand how this process works. The family would be given all the time they needed before the loved one's body is removed to our care and would be welcome to be with us during this

transfer if they wished. If appropriate, the family would be asked if a final prayer is important. He then described to them the process the funeral homes takes when making the transfer. The deceased person would be placed on a special cot with a pillow and clean white linens and covered with a quilt or if a veteran, the American

Flag. They would be asked if they preferred the face not to be covered if appropriate. We would remake the bed and offer to launder any linens and return them if desired. A rose with a "Remember Me" laminated poem is then left on the pillow, as going back to that empty bed can be difficult for the caregiving members of the family. A discreet van would be used for residential areas or long-term care facilities so as not to upset other residents. The funeral director would ask if any jewelry could be removed or if taken it would be placed in our safe and bar coded. We would then carefully bring the deceased into our care to the transfer van. Our most important mission is to provide the most caring and compassionate care during this difficult time.

Additionally, the funeral director would provide the phone and contact information for the funeral home and ask when they would like a call to set up an appointment to meet. If the family has any questions or concerns, they may call us any time of the day or night on any given day.

John then explained the importance of talking with family members about wishes for final arrangements. Having funeral prearrangements is very helpful for families. John shared the brochure, "Having the Talk of a Lifetime" (Funeral Service Foundation). This brochure explains how to have a meaningful conversation with family about end-of-life decisions. The brochure is designed to allow families to connect on a deeper level by sharing meaningful stories and memories. These talks are designed to be held anywhere. It provides concrete tools to remove the awkwardness of discussing end-of-life wishes and personal legacy.

This program directly benefited our local community. Attendees were able to learn about the importance of having a plan in place for end-of-life. It is equally important to communicate end-of-life wishes as it is to have the File of LIFE completed. Attendees were also educated about what actually happens when a loved one dies at home and what to expect with the funeral home arrives.

This program directly benefited our staff by providing this information to the community. Having a well-informed community will allow the funeral directors to have more open communication. People will understand the process and will feel more comfortable reaching out to our staff with questions.

We provided a list of all the services that we offer as well as our General Price List. John spoke about the support programs that we offer through Mary's Place, our center for grieving children and families. We provided the dates for our upcoming holiday program, Handling the Holidays as well as the dates for upcoming Prearrangement luncheons. John left a folder of all our services, GPL, including Support Programs and Groups, Mary's Place, our center for Grieving Children and Families and our dates for Handling the Holidays programs and Prearrangement Luncheons.

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, New Haven, Connecticut

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, Bloomfield, Connecticut

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, Hartford, Connecticut

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services believes that funeral service extends beyond providing care at the time of death. As a community-focused organization, we are committed to creating opportunities that promote healing, connection, education, and understanding among the families we serve. In the summer of 2025, July 15 and July 29, Howard K. Hill Funeral Services hosted the Bridging the Intergenerational Gap Program on three separate occasions. The purpose of this initiative was to bring together individuals from different generations to foster meaningful conversations, strengthen community relationships, and create a greater appreciation for the experiences and perspectives of others.

The rationale behind the program stemmed from a growing concern about the disconnect that often exists between younger and older generations. In many communities, opportunities for meaningful interaction between age groups have become increasingly limited. As a result, misunderstandings, stereotypes, and social isolation can develop. Through our daily interactions with families, Howard K. Hill Funeral Services recognized the importance of creating a space where generations could come together, learn from one another, and build stronger relationships. We understood that strengthening these connections contributes to healthier families and more resilient communities.

The Bridging the Intergenerational Gap Program was designed as an interactive community engagement experience. Each session brought together youth, young adults, parents, and senior citizens in a welcoming environment that encouraged open dialogue and participation. Attendees participated in guided discussions, storytelling activities, icebreakers, and community-building exercises that promoted mutual understanding and respect. One of the most impactful aspects of the program was the opportunity for participants to share their personal experiences. Older adults discussed life lessons, family traditions, career journeys, and historical events they had witnessed firsthand. Younger participants shared their perspectives on modern challenges, technology, education, and their hopes for the future. These conversations helped participants recognize common values while gaining a greater appreciation for the unique experiences of each generation. Howard K. Hill Funeral Services coordinated all aspects of the initiative, including planning, promotion, facilitation, and event management. Staff members served as hosts and facilitators, ensuring that each event was welcoming, engaging, and productive.

The program provided significant benefits to both the funeral home and the community. It strengthened Howard K. Hill Funeral Services' visibility as a trusted community resource and reinforced our reputation as a leader in community engagement. Staff members gained valuable insights into the needs and concerns of the families they serve while building stronger relationships with community members. Most importantly, the program positively impacted participants by reducing barriers between generations, encouraging empathy, and fostering meaningful connections. Seniors felt valued and heard, while younger attendees gained wisdom and guidance from those with greater life experience. The initiative also helped combat social isolation and encouraged a stronger sense of unity within the community.

The Bridging the Intergenerational Gap Program exemplifies Howard K. Hill Funeral Services' commitment to serving as more than a funeral provider. By creating opportunities for dialogue, understanding, and relationship-building, we continue to serve as a cornerstone of community healing and a catalyst for positive change. This innovative program demonstrated the power of bringing people together and highlighted the important role funeral homes can play in strengthening the communities they serve.

Joiner-Anderson Funeral Home & Crematory, Statesboro, Georgia

Thompson Strickland Waters, Joiner Anderson Chapel, Sylvania, Georgia

At Thompson-Strickland-Waters Funeral Home and Joiner-Anderson, service to the community extends far beyond our doors. One of the most meaningful ways we connect with those we serve is through our monthly cupcake program and our annual donut/cookie giveaway. What may seem like a small gesture—a box of cupcakes, a donut, or some cookies and a few moments of shared conversation—has become a powerful expression of care, remembrance, and human connection.

Each month, our team prepares and delivers cupcakes to nearby care facilities, ensuring that every resident celebrating a birthday is recognized. For many of these individuals, birthdays can be quiet occasions, sometimes marked without the presence of family or frequent visitors. By showing up consistently, we help transform what could be an ordinary day into something joyful and memorable. A simple cupcake, paired with a smile and a moment of acknowledgment, reminds residents that they are seen, valued, and not forgotten.

This program is not only impactful for the residents but also deeply rewarding for our staff. In a profession often centered around loss and grief, the opportunity to participate in moments of celebration brings balance and renewal. It allows our team to engage with the community in a setting filled with warmth and gratitude, reinforcing the heart behind what we do. These visits often lead to meaningful conversations, shared stories, and genuine relationships that extend well beyond a single visit.

For the public, the cupcake program reflects our commitment to being more than a funeral service provider—we are active participants in the life of our community. Families see firsthand that our care does not begin or end at the time of need; it is ongoing, intentional, and rooted in compassion. Nursing home staff and administrators have come to rely on and look forward to our visits, strengthening trust and partnership between our organizations.

Over time, these monthly celebrations have helped build lasting relationships with local families and care facilities. Familiar faces become friends, and simple acts of kindness grow into meaningful connections. The cupcake program serves as a reminder that honoring life can take many forms—not only in times of loss, but also in moments of joy.

Our staff also delivers donuts and cookies to public safety, hospice staff, and our local hospital annually. This is a small way of giving back to those who work along side us throughout the year and maintain professional relationships moving forward.

Through this initiative, Joiner-Anderson and TSW continue to uphold a mission of service, compassion, and community presence—one cupcake, one smile, and one birthday at a time.

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Stamford, Connecticut

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Greenwich, Connecticut

Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher & Son Community Funeral Home, Monroe, Connecticut

One of the ways our funeral home strives to serve the community is by creating opportunities to bring people together through simple acts of kindness. Our Valentine's Card Collection was developed as a community outreach program to brighten the lives of homebound community members while encouraging people to spread compassion.

The idea behind the program was simple. Many individuals in our community are unable to leave their homes due to age, illness, or other circumstances. While Valentine's Day is often associated with family, friendship, and connection, we recognized that some homebound individuals may not receive a card or visit during that time. As a funeral home, we understand the importance of human connection and supporting people through all stages of life, not just during times of loss. We wanted to create a meaningful way for our community to remind others that they are remembered and valued.

To launch the program, we placed a mailbox on the front porch of our funeral home and invited community members to create handmade Valentine's cards and drop them off. We promoted the project on our Facebook page as well as a local community Facebook page, encouraging families, schools, scout troops, and anyone interested to participate. Our post invited people to spend a cold winter weekend making cards with paper, scissors, and glue before delivering them to the collection box at the funeral home.

We received thoughtful, handmade Valentine's cards filled with encouraging messages and creative artwork. One of the highlights of the program was the participation of a Girl Scout Troop, whose members created heart-themed cards to help spread Valentine's cheer. Once the collection was complete, we partnered with a member of a local church to deliver the cards to homebound members of our community, offering a simple reminder that they were remembered and cared about.

The program benefited our funeral home by strengthening relationships within the community and demonstrating that our commitment to caring extends beyond the families we serve during funeral arrangements. Staff members enjoyed participating in a project that reflected our mission of compassion and service. The program also generated engagement on our Facebook page. Both the invitation to participate and the follow-up post received excellent visibility, helping us connect with people who may not have otherwise interacted with our funeral home. It reinforced our role as a community resource dedicated to serving others.

The greatest benefit, however, was to the community itself. The project gave participants an easy and meaningful way to perform an act of kindness for someone they had never met, while homebound recipients received thoughtful reminders that members of their community were thinking about them. Although a handmade Valentine's card is a simple gesture, the impact of knowing someone took the time to create it can be meaningful.

This program was made successful through the participation of local residents and organizations. Our funeral home planned, promoted, and coordinated the project by providing the collection site, organizing the campaign, and collecting the cards. We partnered with a member of a local church who helped identify homebound residents and coordinate delivery, ensuring the cards reached people who would appreciate receiving a simple reminder that someone was thinking of them. This partnership helped us connect with individuals who might otherwise have been overlooked and ensured the project reached those it was intended to serve.

The success of the Valentine's Card Collection demonstrated that meaningful community outreach does not have to be large or complicated to make a positive impact. With a simple collection box and a community invitation, our funeral home was able to bring people together to share kindness with

homebound neighbors. The program strengthened community connections and demonstrated a model that could easily be adapted by other funeral homes looking for a meaningful way to serve their own communities. Through this effort, our funeral home was able to extend comfort beyond our walls and remind people that compassion is not limited to times of loss. It is something that can be shared every day.

Lindley Funeral Homes, Chillicothe, Missouri

Lindley Funeral Homes, Braymer, Missouri

Lindley Funeral Homes, Hale, Missouri

Lindley Funeral Homes, Tina, Missouri

Lindley Funeral Homes, Laredo, Missouri

Nursing Home Birthday Celebration Program

For the past year and a half, we have had the privilege of visiting Morningside Center Nursing Home each month to help celebrate resident birthdays. What began as a simple gesture of providing cupcakes has grown into something much more meaningful. Each month, we bring cupcakes, spend time visiting with residents, and focus on creating an atmosphere filled with warmth, laughter, and genuine human connection.

Our goal has never been to promote our business or seek recognition. Instead, we strive to make the day special for the residents. We understand that many nursing home residents may have limited opportunities to interact with new people outside of their daily routines. By bringing friendly faces, engaging conversations, and positive energy into the facility, we hope to provide moments of joy and companionship that brighten their day.

The nursing home staff work tirelessly to care for residents, often balancing numerous responsibilities. By assuming the financial responsibility for the cupcakes and helping organize the celebrations, we are able to relieve staff of one small task while still ensuring residents are recognized and celebrated on their birthdays. It is our way of supporting both the residents and the caregivers who serve them every day.

Over time, residents and staff have come to recognize and look forward to our monthly visits. The relationships that have developed are genuine and rewarding. We have learned that sometimes the most meaningful gift is simply taking the time to sit, listen, share a story, or offer a smile. In an environment where loneliness can sometimes be a challenge, these moments of personal interaction can have a lasting impact.

To make the celebrations even more engaging, we have incorporated BINGO activities and, during the summer months, provided individually packaged ice cream treats. These activities encourage participation, conversation, and fellowship among residents while creating an enjoyable break from their normal routine.

At the beginning of this year, we expanded the program to include StoneBridge Chillicothe Nursing Facility. Each month, we provide approximately 80 cupcakes for residents and staff. We begin by gathering in the dining area to sing "Happy Birthday" to those celebrating, followed by time spent visiting and sharing conversations. For residents who are unable to attend, we personally deliver cupcakes throughout the facility to ensure they are included in the celebration.

While many residents know us through previous interactions with their families, we do not use these visits as an opportunity to discuss our funeral home. If residents or family members ask who we represent, we answer honestly, but our focus remains entirely on them. We never want anyone to feel influenced or obligated. These visits are about friendship, kindness, and community.

The greatest reward for us is knowing that we have brought a little happiness to someone's day. We do not participate for public acknowledgment, awards, or thankyou's. Seeing a resident smile, hearing a story from their past, or watching them enjoy a birthday celebration with friends provides all the gratitude we need.

This program reflects our belief that caring for people extends beyond the services we provide. It is about being present, building relationships, and contributing to the well-being of our community. Through these

monthly celebrations, we hope to remind every resident that they are valued, remembered, and worthy of celebration.

Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Traverse City, Michigan

We are always striving to help educate our community about our funeral home (Perry Hannah's former retirement home) our caring staff, programs such as our bi-annual Holiday Open House and the many benefits of funeral pre-planning. We enjoy giving back to our community and sharing our expertise on so many topics ranging from local history to the value of making funeral prearrangements. What a perfect opportunity to educate and join the NMC Campus Day fun!

Our activity was education and relationship building in nature. Peg, Nicole and Brooke served as speakers for NMC Campus Day on May 8, 2026. There were 44 classes on various topics that students age 55+ could chose from during three sessions. Peg had 20 students in her class. Nicole and Brooke had 7 students. Peg attended two other classes too including the National Cherry Festival's 100th anniversary (Peg introduced the speaker the organization's Executive Director Kat) and NMC at 75: A Legacy of Innovation and Community. During that time she met many new people and helped spread "cherry cheer" too as a National Cherry Festival Foundation Board member.

Benefits to the funeral home and staff were many such as Peg appeared on the cover of the NMC Extended Education and Training Summer 2026 catalog. Her photo was everywhere even inside the bathroom doors on campus HA! Countless people commented, "I saw you on the NMC program book cover" which translates to top of mind awareness when funeral service is needed. Who do you call when a loved one passes away...the people you know and trust like the Jonkhoff family who has served our community for three generations!

Benefits to other staff members were various in nature. Nicole and Brooke were able to share the many benefits of planning one's funeral in advance of need. Evan helped scan new photos for Peg's presentation. Kyle helped tweak the power point presentation and even made sure the AV was good to go on the morning of the presentation.

Two of Peg's neighbors (Sandy and Carol) were in her class and they so enjoyed. Sandy won the Perry Hannah book as her birthday was the closest to the class date. Local history author, Marty MacLead was also in Peg's class and shared a bit of local trivia too. Her email and thank you card that includes the wish to help with this year's Holiday Open House is attached. Peg also inspired Andrea to become a local history tour guide and gave her a guided tour of the funeral home a few weeks later.

We partnered with NMC who hosted this continuing education event with staff members participating as instructors and class participants too. NMC was so appreciative of our unique programming opportunities and emailed an attached thank you.

This was an ongoing program pre-Covid, but started again last year. We have presented these two program before but both were tweaked. For example, new never before seen photos of the late Perry and Ann Hannah's daughter Claribel and her husband George Gardner were shared along with a beaded cape that was recently gifted to Peg.

Our area is a huge retirement destination so programs like these help create awareness for newcomers and reinforces top of mind awareness for locals too. Caring relationships and giving back to our community are so important to our funeral home and this is just one opportunity to help make a difference in the lives of so many!