



Pursuit of Excellence

2026 Innovative Ideas Essays

Military and Veteran Programs

Baker McCullough Funeral Home and Cremation, Savannah, Georgia

Baker McCullough Funeral Home and Cremation, Garden City, Georgia

Ride for the Brave: A Community Partnership to Prevent Veteran Suicide

Baker McCullough Funeral Home partnered with Save the Brave, a national 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to preventing veteran suicide and supporting military veterans, to bring the “Ride for the Brave” awareness campaign to our community. The program was led by Major Scott A. Huesing, USMC (Ret.), bestselling author of *Echo in Ramadi*, who completed a 3,000-mile motorcycle ride from Temecula, California, to Savannah, Georgia to raise awareness and funds for veteran suicide prevention.

Rationale Behind the Program

The idea was driven by a recognition that veteran suicide remains a critical issue affecting families and communities across the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, thousands of veterans die by suicide each year, and prevention efforts require both professional resources and strong community support. Major Huesing launched the ride after the death of a close friend and fellow veteran, using the journey to emphasize that those affected by suicide are not statistics—they are friends, family members, neighbors, and community leaders.

As a funeral home that regularly serves veterans and their families, we recognized the importance of supporting initiatives that promote mental health awareness, peer connection, and community engagement. We saw the ride as an opportunity to extend our mission of compassionate service beyond the funeral home and into proactive community outreach.

Program Description

The Ride for the Brave campaign included a cross-country motorcycle ride through nine states during the summer, with scheduled stops to meet local supporters, veteran organizations, motorcycle groups, and community members. Baker McCullough Funeral Home assisted with the Savannah-area event by helping coordinate local logistics, promoting the event through community channels, and supporting outreach efforts to encourage attendance and donations.

The program combined fundraising with public education. Riders and supporters traveled together for portions of the route, creating opportunities for conversation about post-traumatic stress, depression, substance abuse, and the importance of seeking help. The campaign’s goal was to raise \$100,000 for Save the Brave’s veteran support programs.

Benefits to the Funeral Home and Staff

Participating in the program strengthened our relationships with veterans, military families, and community organizations. Staff members gained a deeper understanding of the challenges many veterans face and experienced the value of community-based prevention efforts. The partnership also reinforced our funeral home’s commitment to serving veterans with dignity, compassion, and ongoing support.

Benefits to Families and the Community

The event increased awareness of veteran suicide prevention resources and encouraged open discussion about mental health. Community members had the opportunity to meet veterans who were willing to share their experiences, helping reduce stigma and foster support networks. Funds raised through the campaign directly supported programs designed to assist veterans and their families.

Partnership Roles

Save the Brave organized and led the national campaign, provided educational messaging, coordinated riders, and managed fundraising efforts. Baker McCullough Funeral Home served as a local community

partner by assisting with event coordination, promotion, outreach, and hospitality for participants and attendees in the Savannah area.

Innovation and Impact

What made this initiative especially innovative was its use of a cross-country motorcycle ride as a mobile platform for mental health awareness and community engagement. Rather than relying solely on traditional fundraising methods, the program created personal connections in every community it visited. The combination of storytelling, veteran fellowship, public events, and charitable fundraising generated meaningful conversations and demonstrated how funeral homes can play an active role in addressing important community issues beyond end-of-life services.

Through this partnership, Baker McCullough Funeral Home helped support a program that honored veterans, strengthened community awareness, and contributed to the ongoing effort to prevent veteran suicide—one mile at a time.

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes, Pennsauken, New Jersey

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes, Camden, New Jersey

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes hosted our first Annual Memorial Day Wall of Honor event. This gathering was created with the intention to recognize and remember the veterans we had the honor and privilege to serve throughout the year 2025 in addition to celebrating Memorial Day and honoring military members who have died while in the line of duty. This event was held on May 17th, 2026, at the Falco, Caruso & Leonard Pennsauken Funeral Home at 1 PM with the ceremony being held at 1:30 PM. The significance of the date of this event was to close out the end of Armed Forces Week which is held from May 11th to May 15th, and it followed Armed Forces Day, which is held on the third Saturday in May.

The family of each veteran we served in 2025 received an invitation inviting them to gather at the Pennsauken Funeral Home. The invitation mentioned the significance of Memorial Day while also stating that we will be honoring their loved ones. It also mentioned that each family will be presented with a commemorative paver engraved with their veteran's name, dates and branch of service as a token of gratitude.

We understand the sacrifice veterans make when making the decision to serve and protect our country is unmatched. Their bravery and commitment to our country is something we should all be grateful for. Although we, at Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes, are proud to have been called upon to serve every family that entrusts us with their loved one's services, we are especially proud to serve these brave men and women and their families. The stories that are shared with us of their veteran throughout the funeral planning are some of the most incredible stories we have heard. With this event, we want to ensure that the families realize the impact they have made on us and how eternally grateful we are for not only being trusted with their loved ones' services, but for the sacrifices their loved ones have made for our country and our freedom.

The event opened with The Happy Bagpiper, Thom Moore, to play outside as families entered the funeral home. He played a medley of patriotic songs, such as America the Beautiful, God Bless America, Yankee Doodle, and more. This was a beautiful start to the event as many families could reflect on the music that holds meaning to Memorial Day. As they entered the chapel of our funeral home, they were surrounded on the projector screens with scenes of the American flag waving in the breeze and overhead shots of various military branches. Some examples include US Air Force planes flying through the sky, an Army helicopter preparing to take flight, and Navy, Marine Corp and Coast Guard vessels floating on the water. Inside they were also met with instrumental versions of more patriotic songs playing over our sound system. In the front left corner of the room, we had on display the American flag as well as the flags of the six branches of the military. We utilized the casket lighting in both the ceiling and on the floor to make sure the flags were all illuminated nicely, with the American flag being elevated slightly by a table to help it oversee all the branch flags. This also created a nice background for families to take pictures in front of at the conclusion of the event, which many families did.

On the other side of the room we had on display the commemorative pavers for each family that RSVP'd to the event. The pavers were a concrete hexagon that had the veteran's branch of service, name, and the year of birth to passing engraved. We purchased the pavers from Lowes from the outdoor garden section so that if the families choose to keep the pavers outside, they will be durable enough to survive any harsh weather. We chose the six-sided paver to symbolize the six branches of the US military; Army, Marine Corp, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, and the newly established Space Force. We had Cooper Vault and Monument Company engrave the pavers with the same techniques they use for headstones so that again they would be able to survive any harsh elements should the family choose to keep them outside.

The ceremony started at 1:30 PM, opening with one of our funeral directors, Stanley McGraw, welcoming the families and giving a brief explanation of the purpose of Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and Armed Forces Week, while also explaining why we chose to hold this at this time of the year. Next, we welcomed the Pennsauken Township Mayor, Patrick Olivo, to give some remarks on the event.

Stanley continued with the ceremony acknowledging the “Our Flag in Our Community” program that was established in 2014. This program had 3 individual features. The first was the installation of our Flag Drop Box located at the front entrance of the Pennsauken funeral home, so that anyone wishing to respectfully

and properly dispose of a worn or tattered flag could do so at any time. The second was a school based initiative that had local schoolchildren participate in a poster contest highlighting the American flag. The third was the introduction of our community brochure to help educate people on the significance of the flag and proper display and disposal methods. At this event we had on display the proclamation, our portable flag disposal box, as well as the community brochures for families to take. In addition to recognizing Memorial Day and celebrating the 2025 veterans, we also unveiled the newest addition to our funeral home, the Veterans Area. This area was created as a dedication to all veterans. The intention behind this area is to allow families to pause and reflect at this spot dedicated to those who have served. Each element has meaning. The lit candle represents the eternal light of hope for their return, alive or dead. The POW/MIA chair remains empty as a tribute to the Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action who have not returned home yet as they may be gone, but they are never forgotten. The flag holds the honor of having been flown over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. The basket of American flag pins serves as a token of gratitude for veterans and families of veterans. The pins are connected to a flag prayer card featuring Taps and are available for anyone to take at any time.

Also included in this area is our Wall of Honor. This connects to our Memorial Day event specifically because on this wall are the names and pictures of all the veterans we served in 2025. Their obituary picture is featured as well as their military portrait, if available. If no picture was provided by the family, an American flag is shown in its place. Surrounding the pictures on this wall are the six branches of the military. This wall will be updated annually as we continue to host this event. Once the wall is updated, we will provide a printed version to add to our Wall of Honor Book of Reflection, so that the heroes from past years can still be viewed and visited.

Following the unveiling of our Veterans Area, Stanley continued with the reading of each veteran’s name from the Wall of Honor, pausing to give reflection for each veteran. The ceremony concluded with thanks being given to each of the groups and companies that helped to make the event possible and the reading of the Sons of the American Legion Chaplains Prayer for the Dedication of the POW/MIA Chair.

Once the ceremony was over, families were invited to our café for lunch that we provided from Mission BBQ. We chose Mission BBQ because of their direct connection with supporting veterans and first responders. Families could take their pavers home at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Hosting an event like this benefits our staff in numerous ways. It is beneficial for our staff to reconnect with families following their services as we care to see how they are doing. We make connections with families, and by inviting them back to the funeral home, it is our chance to check in in person to see how they are coping with their loss. It also gives our staff a sense of pride in providing such a cherished keepsake for families to remember their loved one. The families benefit as well because it provides them with a chance to revisit and reflect on their loved ones’ services, which for some could be an important part of the grieving process. By having them revisit the funeral home, it helps readjust them to the space. One family specifically told us following the service that they were nervous about coming back, but they were very glad that they did as it was not as intimidating as they thought it would be to be back in the funeral home. They also benefit by being able to take home this keepsake to help further remember not only their veteran, but to recognize and honor their veteran’s service to our country. Another family discussed with us how they could already picture the memorial set up they wanted to create surrounding the paver and even asked if they could take one of the table centerpieces home to include in their memorial.

It is our intention to continue this tradition yearly and to improve its functionality and possibly expand to invite not only the families back, but local veterans and their families to treat them to a Memorial Day celebration and lunch provided by the funeral home.

Farus Funeral Home, Duncan Falls, Ohio

Farus Funeral Home, New Concord, Ohio

The staff of Farus Funeral Home has a long-standing tradition of partnering with our local VFW, Philo-Duncan Falls Post 10275 and serving breakfast to veterans in and around our area as a small thank you for their service to our country.

This takes place every August, and we always enjoy being able to show our appreciation to the men and women who served. Hosting a veteran's breakfast is an impactful way to support former military personnel, offering a space where social connection, direct appreciation, and essential resource sharing intersect. This program provides an agenda-free platform where attendees can naturally share service memories, ranging from lighthearted boot camp anecdotes to serious reflections. What started as a simple way to remind our local veterans that they are appreciated, has slowly grown over the years to be a safe space for comradery and sharing resources.

While the breakfast takes place at the VFW meeting hall, the funeral home staff provides willing hands and as well as a cash donation to help cover the cost of the breakfast itself. We volunteer our time; preparing, cooking, serving, and cleaning up after. The funeral home staff helps to prepare a full hot breakfast buffet, including eggs, bacon, sausage, hashbrowns, pancakes, and toast. Matt and Steve usually help in the kitchen, sometimes arriving as early as 4am to get started. Caylen and Kathy help serve food and clean up, both during and after the event. Sue helps serve coffee, water, and juice. This will be Paula's first year attending.

This is a benefit to the funeral home as it allows us talk to and support our community in an informal way. As well as allowing the community to get to know our staff outside of the funeral home and give them an opportunity to ask questions or have conversations maybe they wouldn't normally feel comfortable with.

The community appreciates knowing our veterans are remembered and honored more than just during special holidays. The communities we serve are both very proud of our veterans and of America as a whole.

This year, we are upping our donation and the number of staff we are sending to the event. We are also starting to advertise earlier and on more platforms in hopes of increasing the attendance. The VFW is posting flyers and has reminders on their Facebook and the local radio. We are also going to be sharing information on our social media pages and on the local tv news station.

Memorial Funeral Home, San Juan, Texas

This past May, we partnered with the Alamo Chamber of Commerce and the City of Alamo to present their annual Memorial Day Ceremony which is held at St Joseph Cemetery. Every year we attend this ceremony and for many years have sponsored the wreath that is placed at the grave of the veteran being honored.

Since 2023, we have been asked to honor Donaciano "Chano" Garza, father of our funeral home owner, Velma Sue De Leon. Although we appreciate the sentiment and are honored to be asked, we have respectfully declined. Mr. Garza was a prominent Alamo citizen who served on the city commission as commissioner and mayor pro-tem. However, he is not buried at St. Joseph Cemetery and we feel that the Memorial Day Ceremony should honor someone who is buried there.

This year we were once again asked if we would like to honor Mr. Garza. After much consideration we decided that we would prefer to participate in the ceremony but have a veteran who was buried there honored. One of the chamber board members suggested having Velma be the keynote speaker at the event. She gladly accepted.

Velma, Leon, and the staff of Memorial Funeral Home attended Alamo's Memorial Day Ceremony. We were able to visit with families of veterans buried at the cemetery and had time to listen to the brother of the veteran being honored. It was touching to hear him speak about his brother, telling stories of how they grew up together, the time they spent traveling up north to pick potatoes with their family, how his brother joined the military and was proud to serve, and how he came back, studied, and became an educator and administrator in our local school district, PSJA ISD.

Velma was honored to speak at this ceremony for several reasons. She grew up in Alamo, a small town where growing up, everyone knew each other. In 1967, Hurricane Beulah struck the area and her parents, along with their siblings, prepared meals for those who had lost electricity and did not have enough to eat. Her father, Donaciano "Chano" Garza, was part of the first group of Hispanic men who served on the city commission.

Through her father's service and her mother's endless support, Velma was taught since a very early age the importance of public service. In 1994, Memorial Funeral Home was established and she, along with her husband, Leon, took that role to a different level, serving Pharr, San Juan, Alamo, and the neighboring communities.

Many of the persons buried at St. Joseph Cemetery have gone through Memorial Funeral Home, some on more than one occasion. And although they are going through a difficult time, they have come to trust us to care for their loved ones and consider us family.

Velma was honored to participate in this year's Memorial Day Ceremony. As much as she was grateful that they wished to recognize her father, it was very important to her to be able to speak to those in attendance, to thank them for the service of their loved ones and to honor their service in the United States military.

Monte Vista Funeral Home & Memorial Park, Johnson City, Tennessee

Operation Gratitude Battalion Buddies – 9/11/2025

September 11, 2025, was a contemplative and meaningful day at Monte Vista Funeral Home & Memorial Park as staff, community members, and participants gathered in observance of the National Day of Service through an Operation Gratitude Battalion Buddies event.

The day began early that morning as members of the Monte Vista team gathered together in the memorial park at 8:46 a.m. to lower the American flag to half-mast in remembrance of the lives lost on September 11, 2001. Staff members paused together to reflect on the historical significance of that day and the lasting impact it continues to have on our nation, our communities, and the families who lived through it. That quiet moment of remembrance gave even deeper meaning to the service project that followed.

Throughout the day, team members from every area of Monte Vista Funeral Home & Memorial Park came together in a shared effort of compassion and community outreach. Funeral directors, office administrators, family service counselors, cemetery staff, maintenance personnel, and support staff all participated side by side in assembling Battalion Buddies for Operation Gratitude, an organization dedicated to supporting military families across the country. These stuffed bears are distributed to children of active-duty service members, many of whom are experiencing the uncertainty and emotional challenges that come with military deployment.

The event also incorporated participation from Monte Vista's recurring LIFT support group meetings, which serve as an ongoing resource and support system for widows and widowers within the community. Members of the LIFT group joined staff during the event, bringing additional warmth, perspective, and encouragement to the day's activities. Their involvement reflected the broader mission of Monte Vista to continue caring for families long after services have concluded by creating opportunities for fellowship, healing, and connection.

As tables filled with bear "skins," stuffing, camouflage jackets, and handwritten notes, the activity quickly became more than simply assembling teddy bears. It became an opportunity for conversation, remembrance, and shared purpose among staff members, volunteers, and LIFT participants alike. Stories were exchanged about family, military service, childhood memories, and the importance of small acts of kindness during difficult seasons of life.

In true Monte Vista spirit, the room was filled with both reflection and laughter as each completed bear was given a nickname before being added to the growing collection prepared for shipment. Team members spoke about treasured stuffed animals from their own childhoods and reflected on the comfort those simple items can provide during moments of fear, loneliness, or uncertainty.

In addition to assembling the bears, participants also completed handwritten gratitude postcards to accompany each one. These notes contained words of encouragement, appreciation, and support for military families receiving the Battalion Buddies. As the cards were written, conversations turned toward the military bases and communities where the bears might eventually arrive, along with hopes that they would bring reassurance and comfort to children missing loved ones serving overseas or away from home.

The event served as a reminder that meaningful service often comes through small but heartfelt gestures. A room filled with teddy bears, handwritten notes, caring staff members, and supportive community participants became a reflection of the compassion and dedication that define Monte Vista Funeral Home & Memorial Park.

At Monte Vista, serving families extends far beyond funeral and cemetery services alone. Through outreach opportunities like Operation Gratitude and continuing programs such as the LIFT widows and widowers support group, the staff remains committed to fostering care, connection, and healing throughout the community. It was an honor for everyone involved to participate in an effort that

demonstrated kindness and gratitude to military families, many of whom may never personally meet those

who took the time to support them, but who will hopefully feel the love and appreciation behind every bear delivered.

Oliverie Funeral Home, Manchester, New Jersey

Oliverie Funeral Home, Jackson, New Jersey

Honoring Our Nation's Symbol: A Community Flag Retirement Initiative

At Oliverie Funeral Home, we have always believed in the power of service, not only to the families we care for but to the community we call home. This past year, we launched a new initiative aimed at honoring the service and sacrifice of our veterans while also addressing a surprisingly overlooked need: providing a respectful, accessible option for the proper retirement of worn and tattered American flags.

The idea was born out of several conversations with local veterans and families who shared a common concern: they had old or damaged flags but did not know where or how to dispose of them properly. According to the U.S. Flag Code, flags that are no longer fit for display should be "destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning" (U.S. Flag Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8k). Unfortunately, many community members, especially the elderly or those without access to local veterans' posts, found this difficult to do. Recognizing this gap, we saw an opportunity to serve our community in a new, meaningful way.

To bring the project to life, we partnered with a local veteran and skilled woodworker, who handcrafted two beautiful, weather-resistant wooden boxes designed specifically for the purpose of collecting retired American flags. These "flag retirement boxes" were installed in front of both of our funeral home locations, making them easily accessible year-round.

The benefits of this program have been far-reaching. For our funeral home staff, the initiative has become a source of pride, another way we demonstrate our core values of respect, service, and community leadership. It has also created meaningful conversations with families, many of whom express gratitude for having a designated place to retire the flags of loved ones who served.

For the community, the boxes provide a tangible symbol of patriotism and respect. Veterans and non-veterans alike have used them, often leaving notes or stories behind. We've received heartfelt messages from residents who felt relief in knowing their flags would be treated with the dignity they deserved.

Our funeral home maintains the boxes, and we work in partnership with our local American Legion post to ensure that the collected flags are ceremoniously and properly retired during their scheduled flag-burning events. This collaboration has deepened our relationship with local veteran organizations and reinforced our shared mission of honoring service.

Though the program is ongoing, we plan to host an annual Flag Retirement Ceremony at our facility, inviting community members to witness and participate in this honorable act.

At its core, this initiative is about more than just a box, it's about continuing to serve, to listen, and to honor those who have given so much to our country. We are proud to offer this meaningful program and believe it embodies the spirit of innovation, community partnership, and reverence for tradition.

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

Placement of American Flags on the Graves of American Veterans.

After World War II, and every year afterwards, Allegheny County Veteran Affairs Department has issued American flags and flag holders to cemeteries, funeral homes and veterans groups and associations. The purpose of these flag holders and flags was to denote and honor any veteran's grave. Additionally, the flag holders designate the war in which a veteran served, or if peacetime, it designates "American Veteran". Historically, those veterans groups along with other community service groups like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts would place those flags in the flag holders of those veterans graves, in time for Memorial Day.

The cemetery in our community that we visit for burials the most is All Saints/Braddock Catholic Cemetery. For years and years, the North Braddock Amvets has borne the responsibility for placement of these flags for Memorial Day. However, being an aged group with diminishing numbers, those proud veterans admitted that they could not place flags in the hilly, elevation changing cemetery. However, they didn't shirk their responsibility. The AMVETS called upon our funeral home and asked us to place those flags this year. Although we have helped the AMVETS in the past with this endeavor, we never took on the sole responsibility of placing the flags.

It was not a long discussion for us to reach the decision to absolutely take on this challenge. There are hundreds of veterans' graves spread throughout the cemetery and there is a separate veteran's section. On May 15, our crew gathered with the flags that were supplied to the AMVETS from Allegheny County. Our group consisted of 2 Licensed Funeral Directors, Paul Borgony and Joe Strednak; 2 Mortuary Science students at Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science, Emily Gorski and Zak Dallesandro who both work part time with our funeral home; and members of our parttime staff, Johnathan Eisenman, Jack Kaczmariski, Riley Kostandinu all of whom are college students; Layla Rocco, a high school student; and A.J. Davis, a recent college graduate. They combed the cemetery, along with some cemetery personnel, searching for empty flag holders. Flags were then placed in the flag holder and that holder was straightened out as needed. Some of the veterans' graves did not have a holder but were identified as a veteran's grave by the government provided marker or an inscription on the headstone.

It was a fulfilling day for all, especially those young folks. Although the purpose of Memorial Day is to honor those who gave their lives for our country, our crew was exposed to a very patriotic practice in honoring all of our heroes. Our crew made sure that those veterans were not forgotten.

Robinson Funeral Home – Downtown, Easley South Carolina

Robinson Funeral Home – Powdersville Road, Easley, South Carolina

Duckett-Robinson Funeral Home, Central, South Carolina

‘Driven to Serve’ Auto Show: Honoring Service, Celebrating Community

Robinson Funeral Homes hosted its first car show at its cemetery, Robinson Memorial Gardens, as part of our ongoing commitment to community engagement and service. The event brought together Upstate South Carolina families, veterans, businesses, and civic organizations for a day of remembrance, celebration, and giving. With 69 registered vehicles, over 200 attendees, and support from more than 30 local companies and organizations, the event raised over \$3,000 for the Upstate Warrior Solution, a local veteran organization. This innovative outreach effort not only supported vital causes but also redefined our cemetery as a place of community connection.

As a funeral home, our calling is to serve with compassion, dignity, and respect - values that extend far beyond the walls of our facility. In recent years, we have made it a priority to reach out to our community in new and meaningful ways, finding opportunities to connect, support, and celebrate life together. From this desire, the idea for the ‘Driven to Serve’ Auto Show was born. We sought to host an event that would bring people together in a positive environment, honor those who have served our country, and demonstrate that our cemetery can be a place not only of remembrance but also of unity and celebration.

Choosing to benefit the Upstate Warrior Solution felt deeply appropriate to our mission. Veterans embody the values of service, sacrifice, and honor - principles that align closely with our own. By raising funds and awareness for veterans, we hoped to give back to those who have given so much for our freedom, while also strengthening our ties within the community.

The event took place on October 11, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. at Robinson Memorial Gardens, which was transformed into a lively, family-friendly venue filled with community pride. The event attracted 69 registered vehicles, ranging from classic restorations to modern sports cars and custom motorcycles. Each vehicle reflected the personality and passion of its owner, creating a vibrant display that drew more than 200 attendees throughout the day.

The show featured a full lineup of activities designed to engage guests and raise funds for our chosen cause. Participants and visitors enjoyed raffles, games, and delicious food provided by four local vendors, each contributing to the friendly and inviting atmosphere. The support from local businesses was extraordinary - over 30 local companies and organizations donated more than \$8,000 worth of prizes for our raffles, allowing us to raise a significant total of over \$3,000 for veterans.

Adding to the day's impact, the Blood Connection, a local blood donation bus, was onsite throughout the event. They provided attendees the opportunity to give the gift of life through blood donation. This addition aligned perfectly with the day's theme of service and giving back.

We were honored to welcome the Easley Police Department, who showcased their distinctive Pink Breast Cancer Awareness patrol car, and the local American Legion Post 52, who played a special role in the event. The Legion members not only connected with attendees but also selected the recipient of the Veterans' Choice Award - one of more than 20 awards presented during the show. Alongside traditional categories like Best Classic and Best Modern, we also introduced creative awards such as “Rust in Peace” and “FrankenRide.” Additional honors included Upstate Warrior Solution's Choice, People's Choice, and the coveted Best in Show, ensuring that every participant had an opportunity to be recognized.

This event was transformative for Robinson Funeral Home and Robinson Memorial Gardens, both in perception and in purpose. Hosting a vibrant community gathering on our cemetery grounds allowed us to showcase our property as a place of life, memory, and connection rather than solely of mourning. It helped foster trust, goodwill, and familiarity among community members who may not have previously interacted with our staff or understood our broader mission.

The partnerships formed through this event - with the Upstate Warrior Solution, the American Legion Post 52, the Blood Connection, the Easley Police Department, and local businesses, food vendors, and charitable organizations - have opened doors for ongoing collaboration. Our participation demonstrated our company's commitment to being a true community partner, one that values engagement, generosity, and shared purpose. The positive publicity and heartfelt feedback we received reinforced our reputation as a compassionate and innovative service provider dedicated to both families and the Easley and Upstate South Carolina communities.

The auto show provided the community with an uplifting experience that blended fun, remembrance, and service. It offered families, veterans, and car enthusiasts a reason to come together, connect, and give back. The funds raised for the Upstate Warrior Solution totaled \$3,241! This will directly support veterans, providing assistance and resources to those who have served. The Blood Connection gave attendees a meaningful way to contribute, literally saving lives through their generosity. They received 14 blood donations throughout the event, potentially saving up to 42 lives!

In addition, the event strengthened local commerce by supporting four food vendors and more than 30 donating companies, helping to showcase the businesses that form the heart of our local economy. Perhaps most importantly, it fostered a renewed sense of community pride and unity - showing that even within a cemetery setting, life, gratitude, and compassion can take center stage.

Our 'Driven to Serve' Auto Show was far more than an automotive exhibition - it was a day of remembrance, generosity, and community spirit. What began as an idea to reach out and make a difference became a celebration of life, service, and togetherness. Through the combined efforts of our staff, vendors, and attendees, we created an event that honored veterans, supported local organizations, and strengthened bonds throughout our community.

We are proud of what this inaugural event achieved and look forward to building upon its success in the years ahead - continuing to serve our community not only in times of loss, but in all the moments that bring people together.

Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors, Royal Oak, Michigan

Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors, Utica, Michigan

Respectfully Retiring American Flags Through Cremation

The American flag is one of the most recognized and respected symbols of our nation. It represents freedom, sacrifice, unity, and the values that generations of Americans have worked to preserve. Because of its importance, a flag that has become worn, torn, faded, or otherwise unfit for display should be retired in a respectful manner. At WM. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors, we are honored to provide proper flag retirement through cremation, ensuring that these cherished symbols receive the respect they deserve.

As a funeral home dedicated to serving families and honoring traditions, we understand the significance of ceremonies that recognize service, patriotism, and remembrance. Many members of our community, including veterans, military families, civic organizations, and local residents, seek a respectful way to retire American flags that can no longer be displayed. We make a point to tell the families that we serve and display this information on our social media, as we try to reach families on many different platforms.

This past year, the Royal Oak VFW has offered to partner and help our families with this program too. We have been working hand in hand.

When a flag is entrusted to our care, it is handled with reverence throughout the entire process. We carefully inspect and prepare each flag before cremation, ensuring it is treated respectfully at all times. The cremation process takes place in a controlled environment and is conducted with the same level of professionalism and care that we provide for each of our families. Our staff recognizes that each flag represents not only the nation itself but also the sacrifices of those who have defended its freedoms.

Providing flag retirement services allows us to extend our commitment to honoring veterans and supporting our community. Many people are unaware of the proper methods for disposing of an American flag and may not know where to turn when a flag has reached the end of its useful life. By offering cremation, we help ensure that retired flags are not discarded improperly.

At WM. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors, we view flag retirement as both a privilege and a responsibility. Through this service, we help preserve an important tradition while providing community members with peace of mind, knowing their flags have been retired honorably. We have met with many widows that are unsure of what to do with their veterans' worn flags, and they are relieved when they discover we provide this service. We are proud to do so and remain committed to upholding the respect that the American flag has earned.