

**The following essay is from Helke Funeral Home, Wausau, Wisconsin. Any questions, please call John DeLaporte, 715-842-3993.**

Category I  
Basic Requirements

E. Submit an essay describing either an innovative program or innovative funeral service planned and conducted by the funeral home. The essay should describe what the funeral home did, the reasoning behind the funeral home's idea, and the benefits provided to the families and the funeral home.

Maggie is a four year old Jack Russell terrier who for fun likes to sit in people's laps, chase squirrels and run with her inline skating owner, funeral director Carrie Hartleben. For work, Maggie greets and eases the pain of grieving families who are customers at Helke Funeral Home. Maggie does this just by being Maggie, who just seems to know how to make people feel better. Maggie is a certified therapy dog. When Carrie is working, so is Maggie. For the past 5 months, Maggie has been part of the funeral arrangements, visitations and other meetings at the funeral home. John DeLaporte, Manager of Helke's, read about this idea several years ago in a trade journal. After speaking with Krause Funeral Home in Milwaukee that also has a grief therapy dog, he was told that their dog worked wonders in helping a lot of people. Research also revealed that pets of all kinds can help people in many ways: lowering blood pressure, ease strain and tension and cope with depression and loneliness. When Carrie started at the funeral home in February of 2005 and John found out she owned two Jack Russell Terriers, he shared the grief therapy article with her. Carrie thought Maggie would be a perfect fit. Maggie had to first be given a 10 point test by Therapy Dogs International. The test ensures that Maggie is friendly, not distracted by people in wheelchairs, children, food, etc. In order to maintain her membership with Therapy Dogs International, Maggie also has to perform monthly community service outside the funeral home. This may include school, nursing home, or hospital visits. Maggie was eased into her role at the funeral home, and so far, there has been nothing but positive feedback. Of course, not everyone likes dogs, so in that case, Maggie gets to rest in one of her two beds at the funeral home. Having Maggie around has made life a little lighter for the employees at the funeral home, too. It makes it feel less like work and relieves our stress too.