I.H. Pursuit of Excellence Essay

Since opening the doors of their first location in Hammond in 2006, and a second in Ponchatoula in 2011, Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home has served hundreds of families, and given back to the community in many ways. The rural cities of Hammond and Ponchatoula, nestled between the much larger cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans, are full of culture and Cajun flare. Dubbed as an outdoorsman's paradise, the area is known for its outstanding boating and fishing, hunting, fairs and festivals, and strawberry farming. Primarily a lower middle class community, the residents of Hammond and Ponchatoula are no strangers to hard work and financial struggles.

As a member of The Tangipahoa Voluntary Council on Aging Board of Directors, Martha Mckneely Thompson is reminded often of the hardships that many of the area's elderly citizens face everyday. Due to her passion for volunteerism and a knack for bargain shopping, Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home's Santa's Senior Workshop was created. Martha's 83year old grandmother, Jeanette Brown, was her inspiration for the workshop. Ms. Brown's family has tried to convince her that her presence is the greatest present of all, yet she insists on giving Christmas gifts to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren every year. Like many other elderly people, her generous heart is much bigger than her budget and she spends the entire holiday worrying about her finances rather than enjoying the season. The idea of the Santa's Senior Workshop is to alleviate the financial and emotional stress that the elderly face during the holidays.

At the end of November, the staff of Brandon G. Thompson Funeral Home visited the Ponchatoula Senior Center and explained the concept. The seniors were asked to make a list of the people they wanted to give a gift to. They were shown pretend money that they would use to "buy" a variety of items, which were donated by the funeral home, and a few examples of what we would be available. The funeral home staff contacted the Ponchatoula High School Key Club sponsor, who was excited to have the members help with such a heart warming project. Early in the morning of December 8, 2011, the funeral home staff, Brandon and Martha Thompson's children, and local high school students transformed the Ponchatoula Community Center into a winter wonderland, complete with Christmas music, decorations, an extensive gift wrap station, and most importantly a gift shop! Each volunteer wore a Santa or Elf hat to add to the excitement. Approximately 40 senior citizens participated in the event and were each given twenty dollars in pretend money to shop with. Items were priced at one, three, five, or ten dollars and the participants shopped for people of all ages, from infant great grandchildren, to fellow elderly friends and spouses.

After choosing the perfect items for their loved ones, the seniors proceeded to the gift wrap station. They had the choice of wrapping their own items or to have the high school students do it for them. Overwhelmingly, most chose to have the students tackle the job, but they did enjoy choosing the gift wrap, bags, bows, and tags. They seemed to appreciate the assistance with gift wrapping as much as they did the gifts! Each participant's gifts were placed in large red Santa sacks to take home with them.

The spirit of Christmas was abundant as the funeral home staff helped serve lunch to the senior citizens, who were happily chatting about their gifts and Christmas plans. Several of the participants explained that the thing they loved about this event is that it did not make them feel as though they were being treated as children, which is often the case, with other projects, crafts and garnes. The funeral home staff loaded the sacks full of gifts into the Tangipahoa Voluntary Council on Aging transportation vehicles and said goodbye to our new friends. Seeing the joy on the senior citizens faces was a great reminder of what the spirit of Christmas is really about, helping others. It is true that it is better to give than to receive, but helping others give is even better!

Pursuit of Excellence Essay James Funeral Home, Sam James Huntersville, NC

The community we serve is just North of Charlotte in a suburb called Huntersville, NC. Huntersville is a very affluent area and was named by Forbes as the number two city in the country to relocate too. We are positioned on a lake, surrounded by strong industry and have a plethora of community activities and organizations. Saying all of that, the poor are still among us. James Funeral Home is very involved with a place called the Serenity House in Mooresville, NC. I actually sit on their board and our staff are asked to attend their events—from fundraising galas to their Soup on Sunday fundraiser. Our whole staff is excited about this not-for-profit hospice organization that runs a small hospice house for those to come and live their last days, weeks and months that have no funds. Other hospice house's in the area are beautiful and the care is great but require some sort of payment or insurance to allow a long stay. The Serenity House is dear to our hearts because of the service it offers families. It is also just outside of our immediate service territory so most of their patients do not end up at our funeral home upon their death. This is not a move on our part to gain business, but to show the world we live in how much we care about them. We are not just concerned that humanity is memorialized properly but that they die with the dignity they deserve. We are so proud of the Serenity House and the work that they do. I am currently working with the board to begin a second house. Tomorrow we are going to look at an existing building in Davidson to see if it will be our second home. As Scripture says, "the poor will always be with you." We want to make sure that in life and in death, that the "least of these" are cared for.

You may visit serenityhousenc.org. I have attached a newsletter as well as a photo from one of the Serenity House's fundraising events we attended.

Jones Wymn 7H

I. Basic Requirements

conducted by the funeral home. (Participants are encouraged to describe a program/service other than a personalized funeral H. Villa Rica Chapel Essay: Submit an essay (250-word minimum) describing an innovative program, service or activity

We live in a unique area in which our community service and involvement overlaps due to the county lines overlapping with the city limits. Our funeral home is one of the oldest businesses in our community. The West Georgia Community is part The Communities that our Funeral Home Families serve are both very different, and at the core, still very much the same. beliefs, from traditional religious views to very non-traditional ones. However, we always strive to be the first among the other funeral homes in our area to provide new options that offer value to our families. Dana Jones Wynn's leadership of the Bible Belt and is also one of the fastest growing suburban areas of Atlanta. Residents embrace a wide range of ability is truly unique and continues to serve as a great example for other businesses in our community.

community service, outstanding leadership, outstanding character, or just something special they have done for others. We provide for and honor over 500 senior adults with a free meal and free door prizes. This year we have taken this honor to We have always believed that giving back to our community was far better than putting an ad in the paper. Giving back is a Each year our funeral home family works hard to provide a senior citizen picnic. This senior citizen picnic is designed to want this to create positive energy and help others, as well as create positive word of mouth for our Funeral Home Family. continued to be awarded the prize each month, we have revised this honor during this year. Now we honor outstanding passion of ours, and we now want to award other outstanding senior adults who share in our same passion for the great senior citizen who participates in the most community service. However, since it seemed that the same senior citizens a new level to offer more. Each month we provide a new "senior citizen of the month" award. This award goes to the community in which we live.





I. Basic Requirements - (h)

<u>Innovative Essay</u> Nancy's Remembered Arrangements

Our community is a semi-rural town of 6500 residents located 60 miles southwest of the Chicago. We are one of two funeral homes in the community and serve an estimated 75 families annually out of this location. As the years have gone on we have begun to see less and less flowers being sent to families for visitations and funerals. This trend has even lead to our operations eliminating a formal flower car, which in past years went out on every funeral. One of the main reasons we felt was causing this trend was the single limited exposure of the floral arrangements. Individuals expressed that the flowers were only going to be seen for the limited hours of the services, and then they were either thrown out or laid on the grave, being disposed of within a few days.

We were approached a few years back from a local retired florist, who resides in an active retirement community in the neighboring town. Her inquiry was what we did with the flowers families didn't want. She expressed an interest in utilizing funeral flowers following the services to conduct floral arranging classes at the activity room of her community. She also indicated that she had approached all of the other local funeral homes and no one was interested in working with her. It was this simple inquiry that has evolved into Nancy's Remembered Arrangements.

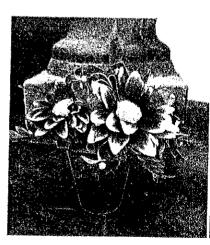
How Nancy's remembered arrangements works is by our staff initially inquiring with the family in which we are serving - as to what their wishes are for the cut flowers following the services. We give them the option to transport the flowers to the cemetery, deliver them to the residence along with the plants and vases or have them donated to Nancy to be utilized for her Remembered Arrangements program. More often than not families are very interested in the Remembered Arrangements program and extremely pleased to see the arrangements not go to waste.

Once the cut flowers are transported to Nancy, they are then disassembled by many of the residents of the retirement community - and everything possible that is reusable is recycled. Aside from the flowers and greens, the ribbons, oasis foam and even mache is repurposed in most cases. Nancy then provides instruction to those eager to learn - in floral arranging and design. Everyone works together to make arrangements in sizes ranging from shot glasses, to tea cups, to full size mache baskets. Depending on the amount of flowers and number of arrangements created - the determination is then established of where to share the blooms. The small arrangements are distributed to Meals on Wheels, which then accompany meals taken to home bound shut-ins. Pending on the day, small arrangements are also taken to one of the various hot senior meals that are held 3 times a week throughout the county.

Our county has a Community Nutrition Network, which provides low cost hot meals at various locations. In this case the arrangements are placed on the tables during the meal and then raffled off at the end of the meal, for the seniors to take home and enjoy. Larger arrangements are taken to senior citizens in the community that may be out of commission due to illness or may be experiencing hard times without close family in near proximity. In cases where there is an over abundance of flowers, we work with Nancy to disassemble the arrangements and then transports them to one of the local skilled care facilities. Here Nancy gives flower arranging classes and shares flowers with residents room to room. We have also taken a cart throughout the entire facility with the loose flowers in buckets - allowing the residents to pick their own flower(s) of choice for their room or apartment.

Aside from orchestrating and providing a great deal of the transportation of the flowers to Nancy and for Nancy, pending on the outlet of the arrangements, our funeral home purchases flowers for Nancy to work with, in times where there are no funeral flowers for her to work with. We also financially assist Nancy with incidentals and fuel expenses for her work to be carried out.

In the end, Nancy's Remembered Arrangements makes the family of the deceased feel good about the disposition of the floral pieces received. It provides a hobby and an outlet for one of our active retirement communities, and most of all - it puts a smile on the faces of many, whom may not receive flowers on a regular basis. In years past, it was not uncommon for flowers to be donated and dropped off at nursing homes and hospitals, however Nancy's Remembered Arrangements, takes the donation of flowers to a whole different level. We are proud of the program and how it has evolved to date. Our funeral home is most appreciative to Nancy Boonstra for her dedication, hard work and talent, and we look forward to making Nancy's Remembered Arrangements an ongoing tradition for many years to come.







Spencer's May Day Tea

May Day, with its historic European traditions of dancing around the maypole, crowning May queens and passing out flower-filled May baskets, follows closely on the heels of Easter, a holiday that the Spencer Family Funeral Home in Athens, Mich., has celebrated for many years with a community-wide Easter egg hunt on its grounds.

So it seemed that May Day would be a fitting time for Spencer's to honor some of the volunteers who help the funeral home and the Athens Area Community Foundation with the annual Easter egg hunt, which attracts scores of children from around southwestern Michigan.

On May 1, 2012, Spencer's introduced its first May Day Tea to show appreciation to the many volunteers in the community who helped make the Easter egg hunt possible.

Among the two dozen guests at the tea were members of the Athens chapter of the Red Hat Society, the Classy Lassies. As they have done for the past few years, members of this group filled 6,000 to 7,000 plastic eggs with goodies for the children who descended upon the funeral home grounds the Saturday before Easter.

The inaugural tea, held in the 100-year-old former private residence that has housed the funeral home for the past 80 years, was also attended by other guests who volunteered at the Easter egg hunt.

Some members of the Classy Lassies were wearing the trademark red hats and purple dresses of the Red Hat Society while other guests were decked out in Victorian dress.

Members of Spencer's grounds crew took a sabbatical from their regular duties to serve the guests a three-course meal, which featured chocolate pecan and rum raisin scones, Devonshire cream and fresh lemon curd for the first course; smoked salmon and cucumber sandwiches, open-faced garden sandwiches, rosemary chicken salad sandwiches and tomato and mozzarella salad spoons for the second course; and fruit tartlets, flourless cake, mini-bonbons and petite fours for the final course.

The meal was prepared and delivered by the nearby Fire Keepers Casino.

Each guest received a May basket with a potted flower.

Area historian John Cerva was the featured speaker. He delivered a detailed history of May Day, including the tradition begun in the 1560s by King Charles IX, of France, of giving lilies of the valley to the ladies of his court.

"Everything was done so nicely," said Sharon Applegate, a member of the Classy Lassies. "There was a lot of work and thought put into this tea."

Spencer's plans to continue the May Day Tea in future years as a way to show appreciation to its many volunteers, not just those who help at the Easter egg hunt, but at other events throughout the year as well.

H. Submit and essay (250-word minimum) describing an innovative program, service or activity conducted by the funeral home in the time period previously stated.

Every year at West Funeral Home, we try to come up with new ways to bond and participate within our community. In the past, we have organized events to honor veterans, connect with seniors, and to celebrate our region's rich shared traditions. As our community grows in both size and diversity, we do our best to maintain a legacy of community involvement while also keeping our eye on the future.

West Funeral Home, now in its fourth generation was founded in Casselton, North Dakota in1916. We started out primarily serving that small town and the surrounding rural area. It was in the early 1970s that we opened our second location in West Fargo, North Dakota, a town that has seen constant growth since then. With that growth, we have had the opportunity to serve a wide variety of people from all over the world who have chosen to settle here in the Red River Valley.

This year the unique opportunity of sponsoring and participating in Senior Citizens Day at Red River Valley Fair presented itself. This event took place Monday, July 11, 2011 in West Fargo, ND. We saw this as a great opportunity to interact with seniors in our community and provide a fun atmosphere outside the funeral home setting. Some of the day's activity included BINGO, a taste of North Dakota tasting bee, a lefse making demonstration, a spinning demonstration, treats, a senior citizen's spelling bee and a grandparent's essay reading. Overall, these activities were a great way to create excitement and enthusiasm. We truly enjoyed the opportunity to participate. Throughout the day, we had the privilege of interacting with participants and giving away items such as coin purses, files of life, rain bonnets, note pads, pens and candy.

Ultimately, our goal at West Funeral Home is to reach out to people in their time of need and to let our community know we care about them. We say it with our service, our dedication and our compassion throughout the year.