

Best of the Best: 100th Anniversary Celebration

Contact: John E. Sullivan

A funeral home in Michigan celebrated a century in service by sponsoring a Holiday Magic Parade and receiving recognition in two Sunday-edition newspapers.

While 11 members of the family-owned business marched on, thousands of people lined the streets and joined to help celebrate this momentous event. At the end of the parade, the firm was greeted by numerous bands, Boy Scout troops, civic leaders and politicians. The mayor presented the firm with the key to the city, while media from Royal Oak interviewed members of the staff to later be featured on the news.

Both newspapers contained "...numerous articles and pictures about the four generations of family that have been involved in the business." Several local businesses placed advertisements in the newspapers that congratulated the firm on their anniversary. The outpouring of positive feedback showed the funeral home that their success was well-deserved and their longevity in the funeral service profession is an achievement within the community and abroad.

The firm is proud of their 100 year success rate and emphasizes to their community that they will be around for a second century of service.



“We have received terrific feedback and the community is much more aware of the contributions our firm and family have made...”

~ Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors – Royal Oak, MI

Best of the Best: Veterans Trip to Washington, D.C.

Contact: John Carmon

Along with the National Funeral Directors Association, a funeral home in Connecticut helped raise funds and provide services for the World War II Memorial and the Registry of Remembrances. After attending the groundbreaking ceremony, the funeral home staff saw the significance of the memorial to those who served.

To follow up with this realization, the funeral home started to "...bring as many WWII veterans to Washington as possible, especially those who may never have the opportunity." The firm has since completed three trips, accommodating over 250 veterans to Washington, D.C.

The two-day trip featured visits to the World War II Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. Knowing the impact of this trip to veterans, the Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery and his staff gave personal tours. In between visits to the memorials, guests enjoyed a program and meals together. Using advertisements and radio-spots, sponsors gained interest in this event and contributed their services by providing snacks and meals.

With two full buses, the staff was thoroughly prepared to handle any situation; a van of EMT's and medical equipment were on-site in case of any emergency.

The funeral home is honored to have created an experience for WWII veterans to validate their services and feels privileged to play a small part in this entire experience.



“The emotional expressions of deep appreciation for this experience were all the thanks we needed.”

~ Carmon Community Funeral Home – Windsor, CT

Best of the Best: A Tribute to the Civil War and Ulysses S. Grant

Contact: Lucille Gump

A firm in Washington typically holds events on Memorial Day weekend. This year's main feature was "A Tribute to the Civil War and Ulysses S. Grant." With anywhere between two and three thousand people attending, the firm's president made it a priority to greet each and every one!

A replica of Grant's coffin and an impressive bust of the infamous general, created by a sculptor, were on site. Also, many volunteers were on hand to answer questions and provide demonstrations related to the era, including how to shoot a canon. Attendees enjoyed displays, documentaries and patriotic décor; this would not have been accomplished if volunteers had not given their time and made generous donations.

Aside from the exhibits, the funeral home had a local brass musical ensemble perform at the tribute. Playing into the theme, the music consisted of patriotic pieces; and if you didn't get enough from the main event, you could have ventured out to the parking lot to see a classic car show. Members from a local car club were on hand to show off their prized possessions.

The firm finds many reasons why events like this are important: "First...we want to be an *event place*. Second, the educational benefits for the families...help children to understand that we don't have to be just a 'sad' place. We are a place of celebration and remembering. Third, the exposure to our beautiful facility surely adds to our business...it is the satisfaction that we have and the fulfillment that we feel as we provide something of great value to all who come."



“We want to be a place for folks to come, have a cup of coffee, visit and learn something.”

~ President Dennis R. Murphy - Heritage Funeral Home & Crematory – Spokane, WA

Best of the Best: Easter Egg Hunt

Contact: Joy Spencer-Spoor

A funeral home in Michigan, believes in "...the value of connecting with the community..." in ways that are not just for bereavement. The firm adds that when they do special activities, they "...break down the invisible wall of fear and anxiety with those who are in need of our funeral services."

To include a lighthearted activity in their schedule of events, the funeral home successfully completed their 73rd annual Easter-egg Hunt. With hundreds of children in attendance, all 8,000 plastic eggs were full of goodies and tickets for prizes such as new bikes and MP3 players. Among the "egg-hunters" were colorful clowns and an Easter Bunny. A local restaurant even lent their bee mascot to pass out dinner coupons!

Activities were in full-swing on this bright, spring day. Baby animals such as lambs and chicks were available for petting, a cartoonist gave autographs and a deejay spun children's music during hula hoop contests. A familiar face, Ronald McDonald, was busy telling jokes, performing magic and teaching kids a lesson or two. Community high school students even played a part by painting bunny faces on children.

Since this event has occurred year after year, the firm sees its benefits. "A by product of the event is the relationships that are furthered with those who volunteer their time and energies for the occasion. The whole festivity inspires a sense of hope and celebration and eases the intimidation and mystery that is often associated with this business."



When the founder of the funeral home "...began the Easter Egg Hunt activity many years ago, his main goal was to ease the burden of fear and uneasiness children have towards funeral homes and the loss of a dear loved one."

~ Spencer Family Funeral Home – Athens, MI

Best of the Best: Veterans Memorial Program

Contact: Frank Patti, Jr.

A funeral home in New Jersey refers to veterans "...as selfless, unwavering, steadfast, unsung heroes and the 'greatest generation.' They are the veterans who have secured for us life and liberty." The firm's staff has dedicated much effort and resources to honoring veterans.

Continually adding more benefits to their veterans program, the firm's memorial has "...taken on a life of its own in the spirit of honoring veterans and being patriotic within the community..." Six elements currently comprise the program:

- **Veterans education of death benefits for both veteran and spouse**
-Emphasizes the various benefits due to veterans and the importance of pre-need contracts
- **Pre-qualification at New Jersey Veterans Cemetery and promotion of Arlington National Cemetery**
-Informs veterans about burials in a veterans cemetery and for those who qualify, burial at Arlington National Cemetery
- **Veterans Service Card record distribution and retention**
-A card for veterans that lists vital information, including where the veteran has filed their discharge
- **Veterans assistance in securing DD-214 discharge papers**
-Offers a free website or consultation that assists veterans in getting duplicate copies of their military records
- **Dr. Frank A. Patti Memorial**
-A military tribute to Dr. Patti, a highly decorated Naval Commander who served during WWII and a reflective environment for other veterans
- **Unit flags**
-Recognizes the unique pride associated with the individual branch that the veteran served in



"The positive feedback from the community for our presentations, our help in obtaining lost records, our dedication to the memory and uniqueness of veterans...and recognition of the individual branches of service, has definitely been noticed."

~ Patti Funeral Directors, Inc. – Fort Lee, NJ

Best of the Best: Healing Activities for Children and Teenagers

Contact: Robin Kilpatrick Fincher

A firm in Louisiana created a three-day program that was a "...hands-on approach to grief recovery through the medium of art." Recommended for children between the ages of 5 and 18, the activities were designed to help them work through grief issues. Not only did the funeral home send invites to all the families they had served during the year, they also advertised in local newspapers.

Three professional counselors were on hand to address issues and answer questions. Among the activities:

- Children laid down on the floor and drew a heart-like shape around their body. Children were then given band-aids to place over their heart, which encouraged sharing about the loss of a loved one.
- Children and teens were given a construction paper heart to tear into little pieces, representing how their hearts were broken by the loss of a loved one. The children and teens then glued the heart pieces back together to form a "mended" heart and placed the name of their loved one on the heart.
- Children and teens were given strips of paper representing a "graffiti" wall and they were encouraged to write down their thoughts and feelings about things that bothered them since their loss. Messages included, "Mom and Dad are sad," and "My friends treat me differently." This encouraged discussion about their loss and how to address the feelings.
- The conclusion of the program consisted of memorial picture frames; children and teens brought in pictures of their loved ones and made frames that would remind them of the happy memories.



“The program was successful...and most parents agreed that the program had created an opportunity for children and teens to open up and share their loss experience.”

~ Kilpatrick Funeral Homes – West Monroe, LA

Best of the Best: The “Heart Tradition”

Contact: Robert Rosson, Jr.

A firm in Mississippi continually tries to “...maintain, adjust and extend...” their services to families. The firm goes above and beyond by treating families as if they were their own.

In order to recognize family members of the deceased, the funeral home has created embroidered red heart “stick-ons” that are provided during visitations and funeral services.

“The heart is traditionally a symbol of love, and red, a symbol of power and trustworthiness. In life, the love, power and trustworthiness of family serve as a reminder of a special bond...”

When people are going through the loss of a loved one, there is an array of feelings and memories. The funeral home feels these red hearts are symbolic, as they are a way to remember the warm feeling of being with family, especially through the most difficult times.

The hearts may be especially beneficial for friends and family that are not from the Oxford area. “The presence of the hearts aids in remembering and recalling the forgotten times [they] have shared with family.” Not only have the hearts been beneficial to friends and family, but the visibility they give to the families has been helpful to the funeral home’s staff; “Many times we receive phone calls for specific family members during visitation, the heart aids in our quest to find the recipient of the call.”

“The hearts have emphasized to families that the love and organization we can provide at the time of their loss is one more way to reassure [our] devotion and commitment...”



“The addition of the hearts has encouraged the families we serve to expect more.”
~ *Waller Funeral Home – Oxford, MS*

Best of the Best: Tribute to Lincoln and the Civil War

Contact: Sharon Brockhaus

A funeral home in Indiana has long celebrated the past by giving tours of their historic building. Even after a fire destroyed the original building in 1983, to continue this tradition, the firm "...embarked on another walk through time by bringing a replica of President Lincoln's coffin to Columbia City for the public to view."

With the help of a local historical society, the firm was able to expand their tribute of Lincoln to incorporate the Civil War and the history of embalming. Volunteers dressed in period clothing and artifacts included tents, rifles, mess kits and portraits of local citizens that served in the Civil War. Since Lincoln was said to have started the funeral industry into motion, much of this event focused on the history of embalming. An additional feature for the public to view was a "...portable embalming table from the late 1800's and a body removal basket."

Men and women dressed in period clothing performed demonstrations that included dancing, marching and musket shooting.

The highlight of the event: a volunteer from the Lincoln Museum dressed like the former president, complete with stovepipe hat and beard! "Mr. Lincoln" gave "presidential pardons" and even held press conferences so visitors could ask questions.

The funeral home got the community involved by advertising with the local newspaper and partnering with the local school district, emphasizing the areas of history and social studies. Over 400 visitors enjoyed this event admission-free, making anyone with a limited income able to enjoy museum-quality exhibits.



We "...received the benefit of learning a little bit more about the history of our profession, enabling us to better share our mission with those we serve."
~ DeMoney-Grimes Countryside Park Funeral Home – Columbia City, IN

Best of the Best: Tribute to Veterans

Contact: Christopher Wooldridge

A funeral home in Illinois describes a hero as "...any past or present, active or reserve member of the United States Armed Services."

The firm is accustomed to providing military funerals; however, the staff wanted to give a "personal tribute" to the *families* of the veterans. To accomplish this, the firm takes meaningful steps towards creating this personalization.

First, an inquiry is made to the family about the deceased's military service. "The flag of the branch of service in which the deceased served is immediately flown under the United States flag at our funeral home."

Next, a plaque embossed with the seal of that branch of the armed service is placed in the cap panel of the casket or on a distinctive display. After the service has concluded, this plaque is given to the family.

As a finishing touch to this tribute, the staff sends an informative postcard to the family. "The card is inscribed with a picture of the military flag which is being flown. The postcard contains the history of the flag."



“Although our tribute to our veterans is small and inexpensive, it expresses our gratitude that the individual had made to protect our freedom and way of life.”

~ Targhetta & Wooldridge Funeral Home – Brighton, IL