## **President Gerald R. Ford Memorial Tribute**

At a management meeting early in the year of 2006, Bruce Calder the manager of the A. H. Peters Funeral Home in Warren suggested the company prepare a memorial tribute for President Gerald R. Ford in the event of his death.

President Ford had several health issues and at the age of 92, it seemed practical to begin making preparations. Since President Ford hailed from Grand Rapids, Michigan and was a favorite son of the state, it was appropriate to honor his life with a fitting tribute.

Mr. Calder contacted the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids and was able to purchase lithographs of the former president. He also contacted our funeral goods supply company and was able to purchase memorial register books whose covers were made of the "navy" blue material used to make naval uniforms. The books also bore The Great Seal of the United States and were trimmed in silver piping, also from the naval uniform. The pages of the books were patriotic and included cover pages offering tribute for service in the United States Navy.

Jerome Adragna, a licensed funeral director at the Warren funeral home, is a computer whiz. He was able to download the Presidential Seal and also a photo of President Ford. These two images were used to create a memorial folder. The folder also listed the dates President Ford served the country as a United

States Congressman from Grand Rapids, his service as Vice-President and finally as President of the United States.

These items were ready to be used in the event of the former president's death.

On December 27, 2006, the former president died at his home in California having attained the age of 93. It took a couple of days for the funeral plans to be announced, but we started to make our preparations immediately.

Each funeral home would have a memorial register book, a supply of memorial folders, and a large framed portrait of President Ford. Each funeral home was able to borrow an United States Flag and the Flag of the State of Michigan. The flags on standards would flank the registration area. Vigil candles were placed at each side of the portrait and a prie dieu was placed in front. We decided to have the registration available from 10:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. beginning on Saturday, December 30 through Wednesday evening, January 3, 2007, the day President Ford was interred at the Museum in Grand Rapids.

David Kesner, the manager of the A. H. Peters Funeral Home in Grosse Pointe Woods took responsibility for publicity. This proved to be a difficult task because we were sending press releases on Friday, December 29; the day preceding the three day New Year's weekend.

We were able to have a news story in the Macomb Daily on Saturday, December 30. This newspaper circulates in Macomb County, the home of the northeastern suburbs of the Detroit metropolitan area. The Warren funeral home is in Macomb County so this was great publicity for their location.

None of the other media we contacted responded to our press releases. On New Year's Day, Mr. Kesner sent out the press releases once again, hoping it would be a slow news day and the media would show an interest. And they did! The following day, on Tuesday, January 2, WWJ-AM, one of the largest news-talk radio stations in the Detroit market, ran the story repetitively. The ABC television affiliate in the Detroit market, WXYZ-TV also showed interest and sent a news crew to the Warren funeral home. They filmed the outside of the building and also the formal chapel where the registration materials were displayed. There were interviews with several individuals who came to offer their respects and sign the memorial register. The story ran on their 5 o'clock news, the 5:30 pm segment, again at 6 o'clock and the 11 o'clock local news.

The Grosse Pointe News, a weekly newspaper serving the Grosse Pointe area, published the story in their January 11, 2007 edition because the deadline had already passed for the prior week. We agreed to keep the registration available for anyone who wanted to respond after reading the story.

During the event we ran out of stock for the memorial folders, since people were taking several at a time. We originally printed 1000 folders and we had to contact our supplier for more. We dispatched a man immediately to pick up an additional 1000. Secretaries were sent to office supply stores to buy more ink for the laser printers. We mailed folders to those signing the book while we were temporarily out of stock. They were all gone at the end of our event.

The registration book at Warren had 839 signatures and notes of comfort for the Ford family. The book at Grosse Pointe had 356. People drove from afar as 100 miles for the opportunity to participate in this memorialization.

The books were personally delivered to the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. From there, they will be sent to the Ford family in California and will finally be held at the Presidential Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



## I. Basic Requirement

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## The Death and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln March 23, 2007

On March 23, 2007 our funeral home had the pleasure of presenting a very special individual to our community. Several years ago, I had seen Todd Van Beck give a presentation to a funeral directors group on The Death and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln. My wife Joan, and my staff discussed the possibility of bring Mr. Van Beck to our community to discuss one of the grandest funerals our country would know for many generations to come. After several months of planning we were able to bring Todd Van Beck to our community for a day of education. We wanted it to be a three part project. One, to educate the high school students about the assassination of Lincoln as well as the events leading up to the assassination and his funeral. Two, involvement of the community so they could feel a part of the project. Three, involving the clergy since I knew that Mr. Van Beck was known for many facets of our funeral service as well as having great relationships with clergy.

In the planning process we had to first see if Mr. Van Beck could come to our small town, and if the cost would be prohibitive for our small firm? Knowing that Todd grew up an hour away from our town, where his mother and dad continue to live, was a help. I also know Todd well enough to know that he always wants to spread positive information about our profession so, I took a chance. I called Todd and he accepted our proposal to come to Shenandoah, Iowa for the day. We then picked a date that would work with Mr. Van Beck's schedule, and procured a place to have the presentation. In our town, we have the Gladys Wirsig Auditorium connected to our high school, which seats 300 people and has a nice stage and sound system. The next step was to get the community involved. The two organizations that came to our minds were the Public Library and our local Shenandoah Historical Society. I met with two of the leaders of the organizations and asked if they would like to be part of this project, at no cost to them. I was asking for their help in bringing people to the program and their ideas on how to promote this project. Next we needed to get the word out to the public. The two representatives from the library and the historical society, myself, and staff, came up with a plan to advertise without cost. We created and placed display bulletins in businesses, we asked the banks to put a bookmark type advertisement in their monthly statements, we asked the local newspaper to interview Todd and to do an article, and then we asked the local radio to do a live interview.

Since we knew we wanted to involve the high school, I went to the superintended and asked if they would consider having Todd put on an abbreviated program the morning before the evening presentation. They agreed and it was decided to have 10-12th grades participate and that they would invite other high school students from two of the smaller systems in our area.

So the plans were made the advertising was out, now it was waiting for the day to arrive. On the 23rd of March at 11 a.m. Mr. Van Beck gave his first presentation to about 175 high school students. It was a shortened version of the talk and slide show that would be in the evening. For 55 minute he kept them spell bound they listed with intensity and at the end of the time had some very good questions, and if you have been around students as of lately you will know that it was an accomplishments.

We knew that one of Todd's strengths was clergyman relations since his education was in funeral service and he was also a graduate of a seminary. It had been decided that at noon, we would have lunch for local clergyman. We sent invitations to our local clergy and invitations to two funeral homes from two close by towns. Mr. Van Beck was excited to talk to them and have lunch. The clergyman arrived for lunch at 12 noon which was sponsored by the funeral home. After lunch I introduced Todd and he took over with stories and comments about clergy and the funeral. All the while, I was thinking that the luncheon may go an hour. It was two hours later as the clergy left thanking our staff and myself for such a good lunch but an even better program.

The evening had arrived and we were apprehensive. With the help of the library, historical society and my staff, we felt we had gotten the word out, but would anyone really be interested in the events leading to the assassination and funeral of Abraham Lincoln? Todd was here,

the handouts were ready and the people did come. The auditorium was almost full and as people came in, the thanked us for putting on such an event. I introduced Todd and the program was underway.

Being such a professional and knowing the subject matter so well, he kept the audience mesmerized for two hours and fifteen minutes. At the end of the evening it was a joy for us to have put this on for our community and those who attended could not praise Mr. Van Beck enough.

It was decided by the funeral home to have a free will offering at the end of the evening presentation We raised over \$1000.00 in free will donations which was divided between the Greater Shenandoah Historical Society and the Shenandoah Public Library.

Every year we try and think of one community project that the funeral home can do. We do this not only because of out involvement in the Pursuit of Excellence, but also for the good of out community and those we serve. Each year it gets more and more difficult, but every year and idea does appear!