## TREE OF MEMORIES

Each year for the past nine years, Cobb Funeral Home has provided for the community a Tree Lighting Ceremony for the Christmas Holidays. The program is available for any family who has lost a loved one whether the funeral service came through Cobb Funeral Home or not. It is also not limited to the current year, but can include any loved one who has died. The names of these loved ones are placed on a brass angel and hung on the tree the day before the ceremony. Angels from previous years are given to family members after the holidays and the families are given the opportunity to return the ornament and place it on the tree prior to the ceremony. Many of these families chose to hang the angels themselves. Those who have died during the current year are honored with their name on an angel and automatically being placed on the tree of memories.

Cobb Funeral Home owns a large beautifully landscaped lot next to the funeral home where the tree lighting service to honor the individuals that are passed on is held on the first Saturday evening in December. The outdoor ceremony has been held in all types of weather. Rain, sleet, beautiful, brisk, starry nights all combine to make each service special and memorable. The funeral home provides coffee, hot chocolate, hot apple cider and cookies before and after the service. Families enjoy the warmth of the refreshments but also the warmth of fellowship with those who are there to share because of like circumstances.

A professional sound group has set up for the evening and has beautiful holiday music playing and is responsible for the sound of the entire ceremony. The local cable company is present and films the program to air on the local channel the week before Christmas. They also provide DVD's to the funeral home. Singers and ministers from various churches are invited to participate in the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony the family members are asked to look at the back of their programs which are numbered. The programs are made up with the order of service, names placed on each angel, and words to the

carols that will be sang by the family members in attendance. A number is randomly selected and the individual with that number is escorted to the platform. They are then taken to the tree area and given the opportunity to light the trees for the holiday season that will honor the hundreds of loved ones whose angels are on the trees.

After the lighting, the family members go to the trees and look for the angels of their loved ones, the trees are done in alphabetical sections to make it easier for the families to find their loved ones angel. Refreshments are served across the street in the Cobb Funeral Home Pre need and Monument building. There is a fireplace to warm up to and hot refreshments also. The staff of Cobb Funeral Home takes time to visit and share the moments with those we have served during the year.

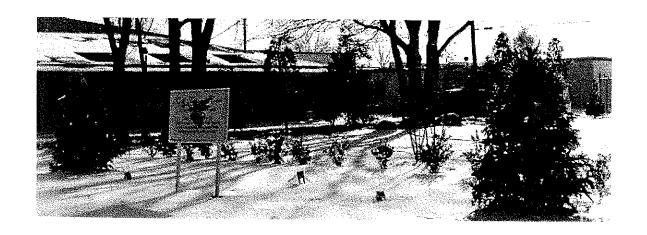
As we develop programs for our clientele, there are always questions in the back of our minds. Questions such as, "Will they appreciate the work we put into this? Does this really help these families or not? Is it just another gimmick to fool the people and make them think we care? Can they tell if we are not sincere? Will we ever know the results of our efforts? I wish

to add the following as a part of this article.

Seven years ago when Cobb Funeral Home first launched the Tree of Memories Ceremony I guess those same questions were going through my mind. The day of the ceremony was a very cold, rainy afternoon and three of us were placing the angels on the trees. Our fingers were wet and cold and being stuck from the needles on the trees. After we finally placed the last angel on the tree I went home to change for the ceremony. On the way back to the funeral home, I stopped by the hospital to visit my mother who was terminally ill with Cancer. When I arrived at her room I found out she had slipped into a coma. Needless to say, I did not get to participate in the program that Saturday evening. My mother died the following day and I went to the funeral home to take care of her arrangements that Monday. After making the arrangements, I was presented an angel with my mothers name on it. I went out to the tree and placed it beside the angel with my fathers name on it. It was a very precious meaningful moment and little did I realize that my preparation of the trees a few days before was

actually for myself and my family. Since then, each service has been one of timeless, treasured memories.

Sometimes we do not know nor understand what significance the ceremonies will have on those whom we are attempting to reach and bring comfort to. However, there are times when we are allowed to feel, to experience, to know that our efforts are not in vain but rather are effective and meaningful to those we come in contact with. Let our programs and services for others always be done with a steadfast, conscious, resolve that we are doing this for ourselves and our own families. Who knows, it just may be for our own.



# D'Esopo East Hartford Memorial Chapel Pursuit of Excellence – Best of the Best

# **Memorial Tree of Angels**

#### An Idea is Born

In January 2007 we began a new program which enables the families that we serve to stay connected to their loved ones and also to us, as their funeral service providers through the first year following the death. Our staff had met in early January and all had expressed the wonderful comments we had received for having a live tree during the holiday season in our lobby. It was a symbol to all who entered our facility that a special season of light was upon us and it brought comfort to those present because it was simple and tastefully adorned with tiny white lights. We decided that we could keep that message alive all year by replacing the live tree with an artificial one, and commemorating the lives of all the families we served throughout the year by placing the name and date of death of the person on the tree.

### Tree of Angels

We have someone on staff who makes a wooden cutout in the shape of an angel and paints them either pink (for females) or blue (for males). They are approximately five inches tall and have a tag for hanging on the tree. Staff members write the name and date of death on each angel and family members are invited to place the angel on the memorial tree prior to calling hours or services. Sometimes a grandchild is asked to "do the honors", other times, the entire family will gather around the tree, say a short prayer together, and place the angel. All families have been grateful to us for the symbolic tribute we have provided in which they can participate. The angels remain on the tree all year in our funeral home until our Holiday Support Program takes place in December. At that time, we hold a Holiday Support Program and Service of Remembrance and families we have served during the course of the year (as well as the entire community) are invited to attend. Families can take their angel off the tree at that time and bring it home with them. For those attending who have not used our funeral home, additional angels are provided that can be personalized at that time and taken home. The good will generated by this simple but meaningful program is priceless. A picture of our Memorial Tree of Angels is placed in the local paper prior to the Service of Remembrance to inform everyone of our symbolic gesture of commemoration.

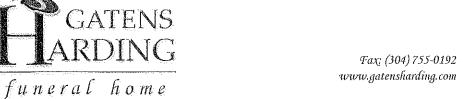
### Memorial Day

For the past 6 years we have hosted a Memorial Day Program at our Darwin Chapel in remembrance of all Veterans and loved ones. All attendees are given a small flag and carnation in memory of their loved one. The program consists of a welcome and invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Each year we have a different keynote speaker to present different points of view of the military and the sacrifices made by our fathers, sons, brothers, neighbors and friends. This is followed by another hymn and taps are played while each attendee releases a balloon.

This year we wanted to also honor the most recent of our veterans who have lost their lives in the Iraq War. We played a video in the chapel prior to the start of the program called "The Last Goodbye", by J.K. which featured pictures of the United States Soldiers of the Iraq War; their funeral and memorial services, their families and the grief of other soldiers as well. It was accompanied by music, "Black Hawk Down" by Moby. We felt that this was a way to honor the memory of our most recent veterans and emphasize that Veterans Day is not just about the Veterans we lost in World War II.

The attendees remarked how much the video moved them and how much they appreciated that we had honored the Veterans of the Iraq War. The funeral home accomplished what we had tried to do, which was provide a moving and meaningful program to honor our Veterans and loved ones on Memorial Day.

The photographs that follow are a few of photographs in the Video, "The Last Goodbye" by J.K.



Tel: (304) 755-1361 Chad R. Harding, Owner/Licensee-in-charge

# IE. Basic Requirements (Innovative Program)

The program hosted by Gatens-Harding Funeral Home along with Haven of Rest Memory Gardens and Crematorium on May 26, 2007 titled "Patriot Festival" was quite an accomplishment. We feel it is very important that we pass on to future generations the benefits of this great nation, our heritage, and patriotism. Gatens-Harding Funeral Home invited everyone to take part in this enjoyable event where various child-friendly activities inspired patriotism and heritage in everyone present. Even though we wanted this to be an educational time for the children we also wanted the families to have a pleasurable experience.

After much thought and preparation the festival featured: STARZ puppet team, music by Dale Harper, balloon launch, free ice cream, 21 gun salutes and folding of the flag. STARZ puppet team is a group from a local Church that consists of thirteen elementary age children and three adults. They have state of the art equipment and performed a forty-five minute puppet show titled "United We Stand". To follow, Dale Harper (a local well-known vocalist) sang, "God Bless America" and "America the Beautiful". Following the singing, all guests were supplied a balloon to launch as taps were played. To conclude the service the American Legion Post 187 conducted the 21 gun salute along as well as the folding of the flag. Throughout the day free ice cream, bottled water, and prizes were given out to the guest.

Over 600 flyers were distributed to all the children of the surrounding schools. To encourage the community to attend the event, weekend vacations were awarded to the group and leader with the most children attending. We also awarded the class and group with the most individuals attending with a pizza party and swimming passes to an area pool.

As we served the community an educational, exciting day, we heard many positive responses regarding the funeral home and their good-will to conduct these types of service. Many families were encouraged that a funeral home would care so much about their families to provide this service to the community.

### 2006 - 2007 PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

#### CATEGORY I - E

# PARTNERING Submitted by Lucille Gump

"Humility comes as we realize that 'no man is an island', that no one individual has all the talents, all the ideas, all the capacity to perform the functions of the whole". This quote is from Stephen Covey's "First Things First Every Day".

How true this is, not only for an individual, but for a business as well.

**Partnering**, joining with others to make an event come together, is the experience of Heritage Funeral Home as each year we have the privilege of **partnering** with others to make our big event of the year get even better. The Spokane community which we serve has come to expect great things from our Memorial Weekend spectacular.

This year our unusual *partnering* with the Elvis Presley Fan Club and Douglas Younger, Elvis Tribute Artist, brought back so many memories for Elvis lovers. A young lady at the event said, "Some people say that Elvis is still alive. He's not, is he?". The reply was, "He's kept alive in people's hearts because they still play his music and talk about him. No one is really gone until they are forgotten. The memories keep him alive to those who cared so much about him."

That fit in so well with what we share with families at the death of a loved one. Memories are a gift of God. Share the stories and talk about the person. Physically the person is gone, but the memories keep that one alive in the heart.

As folks came into our facility during the Memorial Weekend, they were greeted by Dennis Murphy, President of Heritage Funeral Home and by Virgie Finch, Paula Davis or Karen Rambo who invited them to put the name of a loved one on a 'In Loving Memory' tag and hang it on the lighted tree. They were then given a package of seeds to plant in memory of their loved one. There were 632 tags on the tree.

The next stop was at our ever-growing Veterans Display and then the phenomenal display that the Armed Forces and Aerospace Museum personnel provided.

Down the hall, we had display boards and books showing what we have done in previous years.

(continued on next page)

Heritage Funeral Home and Crematory - Spokane, Washington

## 2006 - 2007 PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

### Partnering (continued) Category I-E

Now, folks moved into the Heritage Hospitality Room, which had tables covered with Elvis Presley tablecloths. Elvis banners hung from the ceiling. Not forgotten however, was the real reason for Memorial Day. Our reception table was decked out with Red, White and Blue. Our server had an absolutely marvelous, engaging smile as she served punch and cookies to 3000-3500 folks over the weekend. On each table was a sign asking people to take time to write a note to a service person serving in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere in the world. The response was overwhelming. Sergeant Ashworth came to pick up all of the notes and was arranging for them to get distributed. Those were sobering moments for many. As we read some of them, many of them written by children who added their own bit of art, it brought tears to the eyes.

The next area had glass cases filled with Elvis memorabilia, provided by the local fan clubs. Marvin Carr, Carr's one of a kind in the world Museum, brought in one of Elvis' cars and a life size figure of Elvis standing by his car.

Inside the chapel was a replica of Elvis' casket surrounded by magnificent floral displays donated by local florists. One arrangement was designed like a big guitar with a picture of Elvis in the center and another was designed like a big musical note.

The BIG event was Douglas Younger, Elvis Tribute Artist. We had him scheduled for a concert on Saturday afternoon of the weekend. He was an amazing impersonator who showed great respect for the fact that he was performing in our chapel. His more Gospel presentation *wowed* the crowd. He was such a hit that we invited him to come back on Sunday and Monday to perform again, which he did. On Sunday, he again kept a low key on what he sang. A big hit was how he would move about the crowd, kneel down to a person in a wheelchair or move into a pew and put his arm around someone and sing directly to them. Occasionally he would put a scarf around someone's neck when he was singing. Lots of tears were shed. But on Monday, he was told to break loose and sing other Elvis favorites. He did! Boy, did he! He brought down the house! What an event that turned out to be!

The annual band concert, performed by the Spokane Brass Works, was held on top of the hill by the Lofty Cross of Inspiration which overlooks the City of Spokane, was attended by those who brought their lawn chairs, blankets and picnic lunch. Ice Cream was served to all. The band plays patriotic numbers, reminding us of why we are celebrating Memorial Day.

So, you see — *Partnering*, inviting others to come join us, has provided another grand Memorial Weekend event for the residents of our great City of Spokane. This event honors those who have gone before us, who have made a difference in the world in which we live.

Heritage Funeral Home and Crematory - Spokane, Washington



3331 Taylorsville Road · Louisville, Kentucky 40205 · (502) 451-4420

Over the years the Owners, Management, and staff of Highlands have focused their attention on trying to offer more that just a "funeral" to our families. We strive to make the families feel more comfortable celebrating the past life of their loved one, than grieving over the present. Comfort is a large part of healing the heart and soul. We found reflecting on past joyous memories as a helpful tool in aiding in the grief process. Christmas seems to be a time when most people feel overwhelmed by the feelings of depression and grief with the passing of a loved one. In turn, we host the "Light a Candle of Love", a remembrance program, that is offered to family and friends who have lost a loved one in the past year.

In early November, we begin sending out invitations to family and friends whom which we have served in the past year. We offer a positive program, filled with music, refreshments, and a chance for those who have lost a loved one, to reflect on past memories. When those in attendance arrive we ask them whom they would like to remember during the celebration. Names of the deceased are placed alphabetically and read during the service. This is not limited to only family and friends that we have served in the past year, but to the public. We have families that still come, that attended our first "Light a Candle" program five years ago. This year we had approximately 200 guests.

A local floral designer arrives the morning of the program to decorate for the event. Poinsettias, Casablanca lilies and soft white lights are placed preciously throughout the chapel. Risers are set for the musical entertainment, and staff prepares fresh fruit, for the chocolate fountains. Staff members also bake fresh cookies and goodies to accompany the orange sherbet punch that is offered as part of the refreshments. Small candles are wrapped in ribbon and foil and given to each family member as a memento of the celebration. Literature about "Grief" is also provided to those in attendance.

This year, the program took place on Tuesday, December 5, 2006, in our chapel. The topic of the program was "Positive Living". Bob Mueller, of

Hospice of Louisville, was our guest speaker. In his portion of the program, he spoke about ways to accomplish and live a healthy and positive lifestyle after the death of a loved one. He encouraged the guests to grieve, but provided them ways to focus the grief in a positive way in their everyday life. His compassion and honesty really carried through in his deliverance to the audience.

Music was provided by Peter McHugh, the former concertmaster for the Louisville Orchestra, with accompaniment by jazz pianist, Steven Crews. Guests enjoyed the musical duet.

At the conclusion of the program, refreshments are offered to the guests. It provides a time for staff to see and speak with past families served and guests to enjoy time and share thoughts and feelings with others. Several letters of thanks are received in appreciation of the program throughout the year. This program is always a joyful success and a delight for the funeral home and staff.

## I. Basic Requirements - E



Our Innovative Program:

In 2006 we implemented plans to host our first annual Holiday Gathering of Remembrance. Held on Saturday, December 9, 2006 at our Pekin chapel, the gathering was well received with more than 300 in attendance. The event included live holiday music, refreshments and a special gift for each family served.

We took special care to rearrange the chapel to change the look and feel of the room from a funeral home setting with rows of chairs facing forward to an elegant banquet room with round tables throughout. We booked a local harpist and had her positioned at the front of the chapel playing live Christmas music during the afternoon event held from 2 to 4 p.m. Along the side of the chapel we positioned several rectangular tables for the caterer who brought a variety of beautiful and delicious desserts.

Our intent was to provide a special gathering that would bring families together and offer a special way for them to remember their loved ones during the holiday season. It was truly heartwarming to witness the fellowship and sharing that took place in our chapel that afternoon. On opposite sides of the chapel, we positioned television screens that showed a DVD slide show. The slide show looped as families paused to pay tribute to their respective loved one's photo and name, arranged alphabetically. Our staff decided against a formal service for fear it would be received as depressing. We also didn't want to compete with several of our local churches that already conduct holiday memorial or "Blue" Christmas services.

As each family left the chapel we invited them across the lobby to our parlors to receive a special commemorative candle as our gift. Along with the candle we included a timely pamphlet entitled "Coping with Grief during a Holiday." We prepared the more than 350 commemorative candles throughout the year and had the name and dates of the deceased along with his or her picture placed on a seasonal background. For weeks we received requests for additional candles, which we provided at a cost of \$20 each.

For any family that wasn't present at our gathering, we hand delivered their customized candle and holiday pamphlet to a local next-of-kin. We prepared a special card that simply stated that the candle was our way of letting them know that they were in our thoughts during this holiday season. One family, in particular, was overwhelmed that we would travel the miles to their country home to deliver such a gift. This part of our holiday program was a very positive public relations effort and the task wasn't as cumbersome as first thought. We divided the candles by area in town (or by rural area) and made use of our funeral assistants to make the deliveries. Our part-time staff found the task to be personally rewarding as families were very gracious and appreciative of our effort.

Following the event, we placed the remaining desserts on Christmas trays and delivered them to our area long-term care facilities as an added public relations endeavor.

As we are quickly approaching another holiday season, we have already begun planning for our  $2^{nd}$  Annual holiday gathering and have already "saved the date."

# Smith-McCracken Funeral Home

63 High Street, Newton, NJ 07860 Robert E. McCracken, Manager N.J. Lic. No. 3640

Tel: 973/383-4600 Fax: 973/383-1479

# The C. Edward McCracken **FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**

The Newton Memorial Hospital annual *Festival of Lights* was a holiday tradition that began 15 years ago when the late C. Edward McCracken, former owner of Smith-McCracken Funeral Home, sought a way to brighten the holidays for hospital patients and their families.

Mr. McCracken approached a local tree farm and arranged for Spruce trees to be planted along the driveway entrance to the hospital. Approximately 40 trees were initially planted and the community immediately embraced this idea to create a joyous festival during the holiday season. Strings of lights were sold for \$25 a string and/or a full lighted tree could be purchased for \$200. Lights were given in memory of or to honor loved ones. Some purchased lights simply for the beautification of the hospital property for the Festival. On the third Saturday of November, the festival began with a reception held in the hospital cafeteria for everyone who donated a string of lights or a full lighted tree. The reception included light refreshments, followed by everyone gathering in front of the hospital to watch the lighting of the trees when the "switch" was turned on. The event netted approximately \$12,000.

The event is not only a tremendous fundraiser for the Hospital, but serves as a great holiday event for the community.

Initially, Smith-McCracken's involvement was through the purchase of several full lighted trees. Our involvement now is as the event sponsor, which involves a \$3500 donation to the event. Brochures for the event are distributed through the funeral home so that families can memorialize or honor a loved one.

This year's event was held on Saturday, November 16, 2006, and included a wonderful reception of hors d'oeuvres in the hospital lobby. Following the reception, a bagpiper led everyone out to the front lawn of the hospital, where a soloist sang "Let There Be Peace on Earth", followed by "The Star Spangled Banner", which was then followed by a half hour fireworks display...a truly spectacular way to begin the holiday season!

From the initial \$12,000 profit fifteen years ago, the Festival netted over \$69,000 for the Newton Memorial Hospital Foundation at the 2006 Festival of Lights.