

# *Lentz Funeral Homes*

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## 2009-10 Pursuit of Excellence Essay

This year our funeral home started a program to help children understand the funeral process. In the past we had books and DVD's for families to take home. We wanted to take this a step further. In October 2009 we hired Alona Berte to help with visitations. She had over twenty five years of experience working with children. I asked Alona if she would be interested in conducting a class for children during the visitation. She was receptive of the idea and wanted to help.

I had researched children's programs and found one called the STAR class. The STAR class tells a story about the death of a loved one and the funeral service that is provided for them. We read this story to the children and answer any questions that they have. They are asked to decorate a star that can be placed in the casket. They can write a message or simply just decorate the star. We then give them a picture frame with a photo of their loved one and allow them to decorate it. The picture frame is theirs to take home. We also provide them with a glow in the dark star with the message: Put this STAR in the light, Before you go to bed tonight, Under your pillow it will glow, Lift it up and you will know, That someone loves you so. Finally we give the children name tags with their names to wear during the visitation.

We have found that the best time for this class is when the family first comes into the funeral home for the visitation. The children attend the class while their parents have their first viewing. The class takes about a half hour and when they are finished we bring

the children to their parents for their first viewing. When they go up to the casket with their parents they can then place their star in the casket. We have had a lot of positive feed back from this program. The Algona Upper Des Moines newspaper wrote a story about the STAR class and included photos of children participating in the class.