

In 2008, we launched our Heartley Bear Project in honor of funeral director Paul Hutchison's grandfather, Hartley Alden. We wrote last year of the overwhelming success the project had become. In 2009 we held four events, the third one in September, the fourth in October. So far we have held two events this year, one in March 2010, one in June 2010 and we will host a third in October 2010. We have committed to host three events each year in the future, mailing invitations to the families we have served and placing open invitations in our local newspapers and on our website.

The Heartley Bear Project has not only grown, but has become an even greater ministry to our community than we ever imagined. In 2009 we began seeing families come in to make bears before a loved one has passed. They then put those bears on display at the funeral for friends to enjoy. In 2010 we started seeing bears made from the clothing of one spouse being set in the casket of the now deceased widow(er), knowing we would be sharing the event with the family one more time. It has been incredible to see families bring in photos of their Heartley Bear at the cemetery "visiting the grave of a loved one", watching a Minnesota Vikings game, or sitting nearby as Christmas presents are opened. Many families have found their bear to be a constant presence of their loved one.

Since winning NFDA's Best of the Best Award, we have fostered funeral homes in Minnesota, Indiana, Arizona, and Texas in beginning their own events. Waid Funeral Home in Merrill, Wisconsin held their first event in 2009 and will also continue to host them regularly. After being approached by Joan Schroeder, LSW, a Grief Coordinator at Lakeview Hospital in Stillwater, Minnesota we have begun the process of partnering to bring our Heartley Bear Project to kids and teens in grief in our community and surrounding areas. Ms. Schroeder facilitates a six week grief support group for children and teens and with our assistance would like to host an event at our funeral home, specifically for these children and their families several weeks after they have ended their support session. Helping children with their grief is a priority for all of us at Mattson Funeral Home & Cremation Service.

Our volunteers have been our greatest champions. We always feel humbled and blessed at the turnout we get. When a sewer is unable to make it, she will bring in her machine, so it is available for somebody to use, and it always does get used. We have had families who came to sew a bear, only to arrive as volunteers at the next events. The Project grows both physically and emotionally. The community is coming together to share their grief in a manner they have never done before. Our volunteers have given us so much support that we found a way to honor them in return. In June 2010, we presented each volunteer that has ever helped at a Heartley Bear Event with a charm bracelet, holding a bear charm. We give another bear charm for every five events the volunteer has assisted with.

Community recognition of the Heartley Bear Project has grown as well. In 2009, Mattson Funeral Home & Cremation Service was asked by the Margaret S. Parmly Nursing Home to provide two Scandinavian Heartley Bears to be auctioned off for a fundraiser. Two "Svensson" bears were auctioned with all proceeds going to the nursing home. In addition to this donation, funeral director Susan Hutchison was asked by the Fairview Lakes Hospital Auxillary to host a table at their annual A Table to Remember fundraiser. The theme for her table was the Beary Best of Friends. Susan invited eight of the Heartley Bear volunteers to join her at her table which was decorated with Heartley Bears and was used to promote and honor the project and those who have made the event such a success.

The Heartley Bear Project has been an enormous success in healing the grieving. It has taken on a life of it's own. Talking about the Heartley Bears is now an integral part of our arrangement conferences with families. The momentum of the Project's growth, keeps us thinking as to how we can share it with more people who will benefit from it. Our local television station, LATV, spent the day with us at our June 26, 2010 Heartley Bear Event and is putting together a program to air in July 2010. Finally, the Heartley Bear Project gained the

national recognition through the help of the National Funeral Directors Association and their members. The continued recognition in printed materials as well as having the project featured on the National Funeral Directors Association web news program, I Want My NFDA TV, has led us to the most recent project of processing the development of a Heartley Bear website and possible Facebook page.