

One Lock Street, Nashua, NH 03064-2238 (603) 883-3401 • Established 1842

2011 Pursuit of Excellence Essay

One of the most unusual requests for arrangements happened several years ago, when a gentleman prearranged his funeral with our funeral home. During the arrangements, the man brought up several concerns that he had. One of the biggest concerns he had was that there would be very little family left following his death and that no one would go to visit his grave after he died.

At the time of the arrangement, to dispel concerns about his lack of visitors following the death, the funeral director made an agreement that someone from the funeral home staff would visit the cemetery and his grave on the anniversary of the death and bring a plant to leave near his marker for at least ten years after he died.

The gentleman died a few years ago now. Each year, a staff member will visit his grave, leaving behind a small plant or flowers.

We were committed to making this concerned person feel at ease with one of the biggest fears that folks would forget about him and no one would visit his grave. Every year, our staff remembers and acknowledges him in this special way. It has become a tradition for us to think about this individual and bring to the forefront his memory.

Not only does it make our staff reflect on the significance of this man's simple request that someone remember him after his passing, it reminds us of the importance that people have in our lives. Relationships while we are living are the things we should cherish most. We should all be so grateful to have someone who has made an impression on us to keep them in our memory. Even more so, we should make every effort to make an impression on someone else. So he or she, in turn, will take our memory with them into the future.





Our flagpole at the funeral home is "Dedicated To All Who Have Passed This Way". This is our way of acknowledging all of the people we have served throughout our history. Some people do not have a special room, building or other place to have their loved one memorialized, so our flagpole is dedicated to those people that lack that special area, but is also for those people like this gentleman so others may acknowledge all those gone before us, who have touched our lives, possibly without ever knowing it.







PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE CRITERIA

I. H. Essay:

Baird Funeral Home strives to provide the optimum in service to the families we serve on a daily basis. As our firm's position statement indicates, 'Personalized Reflections', we believe in personalizing all services to each family.

One of the most unique services this past year would recognize the personalized reflections in the cultures represented. We had the honor of serving a family comprised of both the Philippine and Puerto Rican cultures. In order to respect both sides and needs of the family we held a day long vigil at the church parish hall and an evening mass in the adjoining church. The personalized reflections were captured from the cultural dress, flowers, separate prayer services for the two cultural sides of the family, an open cafeteria allowing for special foods and gathering of the family and friends.



Dersonalized Reflections™

With the positive working relationship between the church staff and volunteers and our staff we were able to utilize the large facilities to accommodate the anticipated number of visitors and space for the family members and friends. The flexibility of both the church and our firm allowed for the nontraditional physical setup as well as the timing of the vigil and mass. It also forced our staff to step back from the structure of details and timing to allow the family and friends within the two cultures to express themselves in their own way and time throughout the day and evening.

Though the circumstances surrounding the death were stressful for the family, the funeral home staff, and the church community the desired outcome was achieved for the sake of the family. This example displays not only our firm's commitment to 'personalized reflections' but also the need and goal to look outside our traditional structured heritage to meet the needs of the families we serve.

Cobb Funeral Home

My Cowboy Friends' Funeral

Many times in the funeral profession, we as directors have the unpleasant and saddened job of burying our friends or family members. Such was the case a few months back when friends came to us asking for care and directions as to what they needed to do. At the time of their loss they had to find within us understandings, direction and guidance as to what would make his service special. Now he was a cowboy through and through. Although he always said he was born in the wrong place and time, we came to a decision to honor his life as the cowboy he was. To some a service such as this doesn't mean a lot but to us it truly was something special. You see, we live in a flat, rural area that produces rice, corn, beans and cotton. There are all kinds of tractors, combines, pickers and other machinery. He was a farmer by trade but longed for the mountains and trails of the west. The highest "mountain" we have around here is an Indian Mound. However, that has since been replaced by the landfill. So began the funeral service of a flat land delta cowboy.

Having the service in our funeral home it had a western theme with wooden casket, cowboy boots naturally, western attire and the well taken care of hat. All the bearers were dressed in their matching western attire and friends and family received a very moving service, as his son did his eulogy. Many friends there were also dressed in attire to honor him. You would have thought they were at the local saddle club or barrel racing or anywhere else they could gather with their horses for a good time. Our burial would take us to a little country cemetery that is the highest point around. Talk about your mountains? We processed to the cemetery from the funeral home for about 10 miles. At the turn to the cemetery, everyone except the hearse and bearers went to the gravesite. The hearse and bearers continued on to the deceased's' home place about a mile away. There, we placed the casket, covered with a horse blanket in an old buckboard wagon pulled by two white horses with the bearers riding in the wagon. The wagon was escorted by four horses in front and four behind to the cemetery. The family and friends stood watching them riding down that gravel road for as long as it took. There were no complaints, no wishing they would hurry up. There was just a solemn respect by all who was there. The committal, folding of the blanket and presentation to the family were all done from the back of the wagon.

As a funeral home we had performed one of the requirements that we as funeral directors are supposed to do for every family we serve. We had carried through with the wishes of his family to show honor and respect to a man whose life had touched many. A lot of lessons came from that service. I saw young people respectfully uncovering their heads, the drawing close of family and friends and my staff emerging with a different outlook toward funeral service by what they had seen. Many questions were asked about the personalizing of a service. My friend? Yes he was, but he knew that at one time, he was just a tiny seed who grew to become a friend to all who knew him. Such was the life of this Cowboy.

A FITTING TRIBUTE TO A MAN WHO LIVED LIFE TO ITS FULLEST

In March, 2011, Eggers Funeral Home directed a unique memorial service for Barney Barnwell. One would just have to know Barney to appreciate him. By carrying out his wishes and those of his family, we were honored to know the man called "Barney".

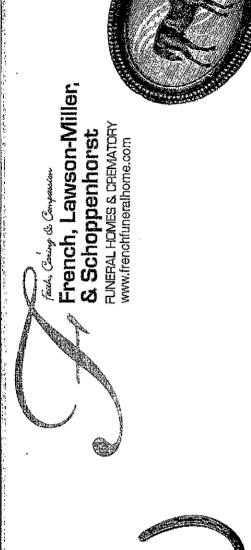
He lived on Plum Hollow Farm in Campobello, South Carolina, where he shared his gifts of the Arts and his love of Bluegrass and Southern Rock Music. His band opened the Farm regularly for Music Festivals and Moonshiners Reunions. People felt comfortable enough to be themselves when they were with Barney. He had the gift of hospitality and was an entertainer, both in life as in death.

His funeral was no exception. Barney loved God's creation and was often found with Possum "George", his pet possum, in tow. He also had a pet deer named "Willard". He loved life, and it was on Plum Hollow Farm where his life was honored and celebrated. Barney remains on his Farm as he was buried there in an all wooden casket so that he will always be a part of his Farm which he loved so well.

There were many tributes to Barney, live music and entertainment. People spent the day enjoying themselves as Barney would have wanted. We know that many of the requests that the family had may have seemed far-fetched to some, but we, at Eggers Family of Funeral Homes, meet families where they are and strive to fulfill every desire of the deceased and his or her family.

Some may have frowned on the Confederate Coat he wore, the Stars and Bars Rebel flag which draped his casket, or the antique peach flat which served as the funeral coach. Others may not have approved of our Funeral Directors and Staff in blue jeans and boots, but that was Barney's desire and his wishes and plans were carried out to perfection. Although the service was a first for Director, Jody K. Yarborough, he handled it as a true professional and held the Staff to the same excellent standards which we meet and our community has come to expect from Eggers Funeral Home.

Funeral Service is just that - service - and that is what we pursue and provide at Eggers Family of Funeral Homes, no matter the circumstances.



taken time to discuss with his wife some of his final wishes. Two of Mr. Bischoff's wishes were to be between the funeral home and the church. His family and friends followed behind on foot while Mr. for many years. His last request is what made this situation unique. Mr. Bischoff's final wish was to help of a local couple who has a team of mules and a wagon. Ironically, they had been on mule trips member of the Annunciation Catholic Church which is located two blocks East of our funeral home Bischoff was carried to the church for the funeral mass. Following the Mass Mr. Bischoff was again traveled around the mid west riding mules. Although Mr. Bischoff's death was unexpected he had travel to the church via mule and wagon. This request took a community effort. We enlisted the hitched team of mules. With the help of the Brazil Police Department U.S. Highway 40 was closed cremated and to have his services at the Catholic Church. Mr. Bischoff and his family had been a service, a moment of prayer then the pallbearers carried Mr. Bischoff and his casket to a wagon in the past with Mr. Bischoff and were eager to help. We began Mr. Bischoff's service with the amily, pallbearers, and close friends gathering at the funeral home. There was a short rosary placed on the wagon and we processed back to the funeral home from which we all dismissed, Major Bischoff died August 12, 2010. He was a member of a local group of Individuals who

service that our staff as well as myself will remember for many years to come. Unique services such community's willingness to help provide a meaningful tribute to Major. Finally, this will be a Community people who had witnessed this procession spoke about the procession and how meaningful it was to them. Mr. Bischoff's family was also pleased and impressed with the as this are meaningful and give us, as funeral directors, new energy to assist families with specialized services for the families we serve.





Jones : Son

Excellence

Basic Requirements

We serve a small town/rural community through our facility in Richton. Most of our citizens enjoy country-western music on their radios and CDs; if CW is not coming through the sound waves, these residents of "the Buckle of the Bible Belt" are listening to their favorite gospel songs or perhaps heading to a "Sing" at a local church on a Saturday night. Nature is where the most important activities ake place—Friday night football, hunting, fishing, skiing, tubing, boat riding on the lakes, camping out, hiking through the trails of the Desoto National Forest, or aking a two or three-day canoe trip down the Leaf River into the Pascagoula River, ending the trip near the Gulf of Mexico.

Our family has been serving families for over 72 years, and in November 2010 we experienced a funeral service like no other ever held in the history of our company. The daughter-in-law of one of our former full-time employees/now part-time employee had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in August 2009. Through sheer determination to continue living, she beat the odds of "living six months" but did succumb to cancer in November 2010.

Realizing the inevitable outcome of her condition, our staff talked at length with the couple who wanted very much to have an open-casket service in the Meditation Garden of a century old country church about thirty miles away in the midst of a forest. Plans were made, and the Vernal Presbyterian Church agreed that when the time came the funeral could be held in their Meditation Garden—a first for the church. Weddings and other gatherings had taken place there, but no funeral service. The day arrived in November when friends and family would gather to say "good bye" to this very special lady. The casket was placed in front of the wooden cross in the forest sanctuary. Friends and family gathered for the visitation prior to the service. The ladies of the church prepared special breakfast foods and beverages for the guests in the Fellowship Hall of the church, and people were served as they gathered for the visitation and service. As the congregation arrived, each paid respects at the casket. At almost the moment that the visitation was to begin, a bright ray of sunlight pierced the pine needles in such a way to shine directly on the face of this beautiful and special lady. The Lord provided His natural lighting—the lighting that cannot be improved upon.

The church members brought in benches for seating the congregation. A keyboard provided the accompaniment for the chosen hymns. Special music was provided by the birds of the air—and even the sound of a jet passing overhead—almost in tribute to this special life. Countless numbers of those gathered expressed the concluding thought that at first the expectation of a funeral service early in the morning in this Garden sounded somewhat unusual and even a little weird. When the service ended and the procession headed back to the cemetery about 30 miles away, the unanimous feelings were that truly "one is never closer to the Lord than in a Garden." This is probably the first of many funerals that will be held in this very special place.

Lynch & Sons

Essay

Kevin W. Degen, of Birmingham, Michigan, died suddenly August 10, 2010. He was 52 years old. Diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at an early age, Kevin was given little chance to live an active life, but he proved them wrong. While a student at Groves High School in Birmingham, Kevin was recognized for raising the most money in the school's candy sale. In 1975 he raised the most money for the Michigan Heart Fund Cyclathon and earned the "King of Hearts" award for raising nearly \$10,000 dollars during his three year involvement with the charity. He graduated from Groves High School in 1978 as a member of the National Honor Society.

After graduating high school, Kevin maintained his fast paced lifestyle, working full time for The AlliedSignal Friction Materials, Inc, followed by a stint at Danka Services International, and ending up at Plante & Moran, LLP. During his working career, Kevin maintained his love for biking and used his passion to raise money for various charities including the Kenny Foundation for which he raised over \$100,000 dollars throughout the years. In 1996, he was a torch bearer for the Olympic Games in Atlanta. In 1999, Kevin was elected Groves High School Alumnus of the Year.

Kevin received numerous awards throughout his life including the 1988 Academy Awards for the Handicapped, the Special Award from Governor Michael Dukakis, the 1993 Hometown Hardies Hero and JC Penny Golden Rule Award, and the 2001 RARE Foundation Award.

To accommodate such an important funeral, we at Lynch & Sons made special arrangements to ensure Kevin was given the tribute he deserved. We knew Kevin's funeral would be too large for his home parish, St. Columban, so we arranged to have his Funeral Mass celebrated at nearby Holy Name Parish, where Paddy Lynch serves as the Director of Youth Ministry. Strangely enough, Holy Name is the church wherein Kevin was baptized as a baby.

We also knew that a large number of the people attending the funeral would be Kevin's fellow cyclists. Thus, to accommodate them and pay tribute to Kevin's legacy, we made arrangements with the local police to assist us with a unique procession, in which over 300 cyclists followed the hearse to White Chapel Cemetery in Troy. In order to keep everyone safe and give Kevin's final ride the attention it deserved, Woodward Avenue, home of the famous Woodward Dream Cruise and one of the busiest roads in metro Detroit, was temporarily shut down for the procession.

Always a sign of inspiration to others, Kevin's three-wheeled bicycle rode atop the hearse for all to see. Please visit the following links and watch the DVD to learn more about this special man and this incredible funeral.

http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?Site=C4&Date=20100816&Category=NEWS&ArtNo=8160804&Ref=PH&Params=Itemnr=1

http://www.myfoxdetroit.com/dpp/news/local/mourners-remember-disabled-cyclist-kevin-degen-20100816-mr

http://www.wxyz.com/dpp/news/region/oakland_county/bicycle-tribute-for-oakland-county-man-who-overcame-personal-challenges-to-help-charities

http://www.wishmich.org/kevindegen

Pray

The Life and Times of Barbara "B.C." Collinsworth-Johnson

Barb, or "BC" as her students, family, and friends knew her was a vibrant teacher who endeared herself to her many students at Charlotte High School throughout her many years as the CHS Speech and Drama teacher. She was known by all as a person who was always supportive and positive about the possibilities of others even in spite of her own physical challenges. Barb's passion for teaching her students was her reason for life. She often drew her strength to fight through her health challenges from the support from her students and friends.

The conversation and arrangements about Barb "BC" Collinsworth-Johnson's funeral started years before she ever though she would ever die. The conversation came to light first when Joe E. Pray was a student of hers in Speech Class at Charlotte High School. The comments were often flippant comments ranging from a minimal cremation to a flamboyant celebration. The next chapter in her "pre-planning" came years later when J. Tyler Pray (Joe E.'s son) was a student in BC's Speech class. He gave a moving speech on the value of the funeral which encouraged more comments about her wishes for a meaningful service.

The year before she died, BC and her Brother James Hile came to Pray Funeral Home to talk about how they might celebrate this wonderful person who had been stricken with Lou Gehrig's Disease shortly before her retirement. Jim wanted Barb to give us her ideas and wishes before she became incapacitated to the point where she could no longer speak.

One of her wishes was to have a purple casket as that was her favorite color and major color in the decoration of her home. Another of her ideas was to hold the service at Charlotte Performing Arts Center because she had helped on the team to design and build it. Another of her wishes that she shared with a laugh, was to have popcorn and pop served in purple cups.

After Barb died in December 2010, Joe E. and Tyler Pray met with her brother Jim to talk about the service and implementing the ideas that Barb had mentioned and other thoughts the family and friends had come up with. These other thoughts included:

- Many of BC's students had kept in touch with her over the years. The walls of
 her house were covered with pictures of BC and her students at various plays and
 class productions that she and her students had created over her teaching years, as
 well as shots of BC and her students as they had come back to visit, or as they had
 reached milestones they wanted to share with BC.
- She loved directing plays and watching her students develop skits.
- She was an avid Michigan State Fan

A few days after Barbs passing, the visitation rooms at the funeral home were transformed with large displays of pictures of BC and her family, BC and her students and favorite snapshots from her family. The large caricature that had been painted of BC

years earlier was displayed by the Royal Purple Metallic custom painted casket that was adorned with her initials on the foot of the casket in lime green, her favorite colors. During the visitation the funeral home staff asked specific individuals to take a few moments to share their thoughts and remembrances about BC in the library adjacent to the visitation rooms where the funeral home's videographer was recording these for inclusion in to the keepsake version of the services known as Pray's Remember A Life Well Lived Video.

Earlier in the day Joe E. Pray had met with the stage and lighting crews at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center to review the final draft of the script and lighting plan for the celebration. Easels for the enlarged pictures and the director's chair were arranged on the stage along with the risers for the choir and the set-up for the jazz brass quintet. The lights were adjusted, set and tested for the desired effect, and the sound levels checked for the eulogists and musicians. And the video system checked to make sure the funeral home's video was compatible with the system.

Early the next morning Barb's casketed body was transported to the Charlotte Performing Arts Center along with the enlarged photos and floral arrangements, popcorn cart, marquis posters. All were set on the stage, ready, and retested before the family and the eulogists arrived.

As the family entered the glass atrium lobby of the Charlotte Performing Arts Center, a pianist played classical music to greet the guests and fill the space with a pleasant ambiance. As each person arrived they were presented with a purple button bearing the drama masks and the initials B.C. for the guests to wear, and the custom memorial folder emblazoned with the caricature of Barb superimposed over some of the posters from the plays she had produced in the style of a Broadway Playbill that you would have from most Broadway plays. Her life story was set up as "Acts" within the memorial, with the participants introduced as the "Cast of Characters" on the back page.

The gests were invited into the auditorium where they viewed the gleaming purple and green spotlighted casket on the left side of the stage surrounded by coordinated floral arrangements. After the guests were seated in the auditorium, the house lights were dimmed, and the music "Celebrate" by Kool and The Gang blasted over the auditorium speakers. The stage curtain parted revealing a dark stage. As the music continued a single spotlight illuminated the single purple director's chair with Barb's initials embroidered on the back in lime green suggesting that Barb was present in spirit at the celebration of her life and how it had touched everyone she knew.

As the song the first segment of the three part living album video was shown on the large screen suspended over the auditorium stage. The pictures told the story of Barb growing up and progressing through college.

At the video's conclusion the image of the marquee poster illuminates the large screen and more spotlights are brought up to illuminate the five large pictures of Barb with friends, family and students presented on easels on stage. Joe E. Pray , the Master of

Ceremonies for the celebration, and one of BC's former speech students, stepped to the podium as the alumni choir assembled from 40 of Barbs former students entered the risers on stage in the shadows under the direction of the retired Charlotte High School Choir Director.

Mr. Pray's opening remarks shared how Barb had touched the lives of so many through her teaching and her personality. The choir sang one of Barb's favorites "On Eagles Wings", a song which relates how some people are so supportive to their family, friends, and even strangers.

As the choir finishes, the spotlight brings the first eulogist from the left of the stage to the podium where one of Barb's cousins shares her memories of Barb. As each of the eulogist's concluded their thoughts, the spotlight brings the next eulogist to the podium. Following the family eulogists the second segment of the Living Album Video shared Barb's years as a teacher.

Barb's Co-workers and former students followed the video with their remembrances at which time the third segment of the Living Album video shared Barbs retirement and her story of struggle with Lou Gehrig's disease.

Our Hospice Chaplain shared his remarks about Barb and her positive personality as the Brass Jazz Quintet silently entered the stage in the shadows. They followed the chaplains remarks with a New Orleans style version of the "When the Saints Go Marching In".

The final eulogist, Barb's brother entered the stage from the front row and shared his remembrance of his sister, her vision for her students, and her vision for the auditorium in which the ceremonies were being held. Jim concluded his memories by telling of Barb being a big fan of Michigan State University, and requested that the MSU fight song be played to honor that memory. As the Fight Song blared through he speakers, the guests were surprised by the appearance of the MSU Cheerleaders running down the aisles, and the MSU Mascot Sparty stepping on stage from behind the curtains! The crowd came to their feet and joined in the song, pumping their fists above their heads at the appropriate times during the song as any good MSU fan would.

After the closing remarks by the Master of Ceremonies, and the closing prayer by the Hospice Chaplain, the Kool and The Gang's song, "Celebration" again played through the speakers as Sparty and the MSU cheerleaders led the family and friends out to the auditorium lobby where they were given popcorn in purple cups that had been popped in the lobby in Pray's popcorn cart. They then proceeded into the School cafeteria for the luncheon that had been prepared for them, where they continued to share the stories of Barbara "BC" Collinsworth-Johnson.

In the days following the service, the videographer combined the video images from the visitation, and the interviews of Barb's family and friends with the family photos and video of the service itself into a wonderful shortened version that shared the essence of Barb's personality, life and her meaning to others. The family chose to share copies of

this 5 minute version with family, special friends in the form of a Video Thank You that was sent out to those who were so helpful in their time of loss.

Southern Utoh

GINO: Man's Best Funeral

On January 5, 2011, Cedar City police K-9 dog "Gino" was killed after being hit by a vehicle just days before the fourth anniversary of his handler's near-death in an episode where handler Jason Thomas was gunned down by a man who was later sentenced to two consecutive terms of five years to life in the Utah State Prison for shooting Thomas with a 12-gauge shotgun.

Officer and handler Jason Thomas credits Gino with providing the inspiration to return to work after being so reluctant to do so after the shooting,

Southern Utah Mortuary was quick of *offer* the Cedar City police department its full use of resources and staff to honor the remarkable work of this K-9 and to make the service much more than a standard burial of a police dog — but to make it a premier community event which honored not just the work of Gino, but the contribution of **every** police and law enforcement K-9 in the state.

The mortuary donated every service free of charge to the police department, including handling the cremation of Gino, the production of several hundred full color programs. The event was held in the largest room in Cedar City's Festival Hall and by the beginning of the program, it was standing room only.

To that end, Southern Utah Mortuary produced a full program (attached as a .jpeg document to this entry), which included two local elementary school choir musical selections, a poetry reading and most importantly, a large collection of some 25 police dogs from around the state who offered a joint salute of their own to close the ceremony. (A video attachment is included as part of the documentation of this entry and *really* should be viewed – it is truly remarkable!)

 $http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpVEubq5pTI\&feature=player_detailpage$

While the concept of having a funeral service for a law enforcement or police K-9 is not of its own nature, wholly unique or inaugural, we wanted to make sure that Gino's memory will live on because of the impact he made here. He was a link between the community and the Police Department in building a bond of trust, friendship an honor especially with the students throughout our valley

Southern Utah Mortuary owner and Funeral Director, Todd E. Boyer, CFSP, delivered the primary speaker at the event and delivered the following remarks:

"Please allow me to first thank Chief Allinson, Jason and the department for this opportunity to say a few words this afternoon in tribute to the life and service of Police Service Dog Gino.

Gino belongs to a distinct and honorable class – a brotherhood really. It is a proud history of a canine trained to assist its handler or owner in time of genuine strife and conflict and remain steadfastly by his side. In fact, the modern day police dog is far from modern at all. And the last thing it is – is "just a dog."

As far back as the 5th Century B.C., mankind can find a solid link between itself and use of dogs for a variety of reasons – among them – hunting, hauling and guarding. Romans used dogs for both war and internal control. When the British arrived in Jamestown in the earliest days of this country's modern history, they came with their four-legged companions and even Benjamin Franklin was quick to see their use in keeping the peace and protecting the population.

But perhaps the best tribute to a dog is a great American story. Former U.S. Senator Vest was once a simple trial lawyer in Missouri and in September of 1870 was trying a case in which he represented a client whose hunting dog, a foxhound named Drum (or Old Drum), had been killed by a sheep farmer.

During the trial, Vest stated that he would "win the case or apologize to every dog in Missouri." Vest's closing argument to the jury made no reference to any of the testimony offered during the trial, and instead offered a eulogy of sorts. Vest's "Eulogy on the Dog" is one of the most enduring passages of purple prose in American courtroom history and while only a partial transcript has survived, I'm not sure of anyone who could quite pay tribute to our four-legged partners and friends as he did when he said, "

Gentlemen of the jury: The best friend a man has in this world may turn against him and become his enemy. His son or daughter that he has reared with loving care may prove ungrateful. Those who are nearest and dearest to us, those whom we trust with our happiness and our good name, may become traitors to their faith. The money that a man has, he may lose. It flies away from him, perhaps when he needs it the most. A man's reputation may be sacrificed in a moment of ill-considered action. The people who are prone to fall on their knees to do us honor when success is with us may be the first to throw the stone of malice when failure settles its cloud upon our heads. The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog."

What a blessing to see such history and that kind of loyalty and commitment has extended to us here in Cedar City today.

Watching Jason interact with Gino was the perfect demonstration of what a well-trained, top-notch police dog really is – not a piece of equipment or a pet – but a partner.

And Gino was not just a partner to Jason, but a partner to our community in the truest sense. His service to the children of this area is really incalculable. In fact, just looking at the subtle watermark on the inside of your program today, you may be able to discern that every single set of eyes in that crowd of school-age children is fully transfixed on Gino – who with head slightly bowed, seems to keenly understand that the moment was meant for gentleness and restraint.

It's important too to recognize the real amount of effort and work Gino put in – and by work, I don't just mean the hours he put with the Jason. I think it is also important to recognize the weeks and months Gino put in in training and preparation for the work he would later do on the force and in protecting our families and community.

I think it is equally important here too – that we pause and pay a tribute as well to Jason's capable and caring training and manner as a handler. In speaking with Jason's fellow officers, each one had nothing

but the absolute best to say about Jason's abilities. One if fact could only seem to muster up one very direct but honest statement: "Jason is the best dog handler I have ever seen."

In reflecting on these brief remarks today, I came upon a recollection of another K-9 officer's work with his dog that brought a smile to my face amid watching Jason, his family and others grapple with this loss. I hope it may make you smile as well.

The officer recalled:

It was the end of the day when I parked my police van in front of the station. As I gathered my equipment, my K-9 partner, Jake, was barking, and I saw a little boy staring in at me. "Is that a dog you got back there?" he asked. "It sure is," I replied. Puzzled, the boy looked at me and then slowly towards the back of the van. Finally he said, "What'd he do?"

Well, ladies and gentlemen, we KNOW what Gino did. Together with Jason, he selflessly served this community, which we know he loved. He was loyal, faithful and true – all the qualities one would be lucky to have in another human being, let alone a partner like Gino.

I would like to take this opportunity, in closing, to present to Jason and the department, a card with a clipping of Gino's hair and his paw print with this simple saying attached to it, "When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure."

This paw print is more than an ink. It symbolizes the indelible print Gino has left – not just on Jason and the Thomas family, but to each of us who knew him and to those he served. And while time may fade ink, it cannot alter nor erase the memory of one we loved and cherished.

Jason -- and all those here today who shared Gino with us -- thank you for his service and his life. It was indeed a treasure."

It was our privilege as a Funeral Home to be called upon to serve the very ones who serve us each day. We all know that the police department no matter where they are, face multiple challenges on a daily basis. Losing Gino—one of their very own- was one of those challenges that they hoped would never happen but as we and the community know, it did. It is our hope as Funeral Service Providers that we were able to help ease some of those burdens and sadness that always accompanies tragedies like this.





H. Anna, age 57, was a talented artist and florist. She loved to draw, sculpt, renew, and create. In fact, Anna had spent much of her career working at a florist shop frequently created arrangements for services at our funeral home. Her family wanted to have a memorial service and reception that showcased art as the focal point. More importantly, they wanted *Anna's* art to be the focal point.

Staff person Donna Kelly went above and beyond her normal duties to help the family achieve their goal. Donna spent 3 ½ hours the day before the service and a couple of hours the next morning helping the family decorate and set up. Throughout the chapel, foyer, and reception room, the group hung and placed Anna's own framed artwork and sculptures. Everywhere you looked, you saw something made by Anna.

Time was also taken to assist the family in creating custom memorial folders to add Anna's own touch to the service. These folders highlighted Anna's life and her passions.

Anna had always dreamed of having her very own art show, but was too afraid to follow through. Her family was extremely pleased that we were able to assist them, and Anna, in finally making that dream come true.

Our staff, and especially Donna, was honored to assist with such a great event. Although our funeral home is in a rural, small town, people do not know everything about each other. Through this service, we were able to show Anna's friends her hidden dream – and maybe, just maybe some of them realized that it's not too late to follow one of their own dreams!