CATEGORY I-E

2007

PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

## An Innovative Program: Welcome to Bailey Funeral Home's Annual Memorial Tree Lighting Ceremony

Since 2001, Bailey Funeral Home has been annually hosting and conducting a Memorial Tree Lighting Ceremony for the bereaved families and friends of the loved ones that we have been honored to care for. We continue to feel that this is an innovative program because we continue to improve upon the ceremony. Many parts of the ceremony have remained consistent for all the ceremonies, which we consider an annual Bailey Funeral Home tradition. Yet in other areas of the ceremony we have made improvements or additions. Although one inherent problem is that we never know how many people will be attending, therefore, our ceremony is held outdoors to accommodate up to 300 people.

For the families, it all begins in late October or early November when we mail them a personalized invitation along with a booklet "How to Survive the Holidays". The family may then invite as many additional family members and friends to this ceremony as they wish. By bringing everyone together and acknowledging their loss with others, who share the same feelings, we believe that this would be cathartic and help them through holidays, often the most difficult time. On the day of the tree lighting the staff arrives early to set-up our stage, microphone, DVD monitor, chairs, tables, catered food/beverages, bring the tree outdoors and print the programs. We wait until the last minute to print the programs in order to include those that pass away close to the day of the ceremony.

One of the innovative ways that we've improved our program would be the inclusion of a personalized memorial DVD. We create a DVD memorial slide show of all the loved ones we have served through the year. If we do not have a photograph we then display a dove with the name of the loved one. The DVD is set to peaceful music and played on a large outdoor monitor. We are very proud of providing this DVD slide show and it is evident to us that the families are touched by the visual tribute!

As people gather for the ceremony, family and friends are greeted and beckoned to come forth and view the DVD, which is continuously played, in tribute to their and others' loved ones. The funeral home staff members and their families hand out specially prepared programs for the tree lighting ceremony, and accommodate those guests who need to be seated in chairs, which are limited. Because our ceremony is held outdoors, usually in early December, we try to keep the ceremony brief and ask those invited to dress warmly. A local clergy person is invited to participate and provide words of comfort in the opening of the ceremony. The funeral directors then read the names aloud of those loved ones being honored and remembered that night. At the conclusion of the names being read aloud, the memorial tree is illuminated, by remote (another improvement), and a moment of silence follows. The moment is softly broken as a heartfelt rendition of "Silent Night" is performed by a musician and vocalist. The ceremony concludes and each family is then invited up to the front to receive the personalized ornament made in memory of their loved one and personally handed out by the funeral directors.

We provide the ornament, in addition to holding the ceremony because we felt that the families would need to go away with something from the evening aside from a memory, something tangible and personal that honored their loved ones. For those who may have lost infants, they also receive special teddy bear angel beanie babies. If family and friends are unable to attend the ceremony, they may still take home the ornament since the tree is displayed until New Years Dayin our central hall area adjacent to the chapels.

When all the families have their ornaments, they are invited to share in refreshments of hot chocolate, hot cider, cookies and brownies which we have set up on tables outdoors under our portico area. Many families do stay and we have a chance to see and speak to them again. Many of the families know each other in town, and will stay longer to share in the evening that united them.

Every year, the staff of Bailey Funeral Home looks forward to the culmination of our annual tree lighting ceremony. We prepare for it through the year by entering the names of the deceased, next of kin, address, etc. into a database that we can use to generate address labels, name labels, invitation, etc. for personalization. We also create a special database of photos to create the DVD. The personalization of the ornaments usually starts in late August and it is not unusual to hear Christmas music in our office area during the late summer as we prepare the mementos. The actual tree is updated and checked to make sure everything is up and running. Samples of past ornaments (angels, hearts) are placed on the memorial tree to symbolize and remember our past ceremonies and those honored. In fact, it is not unusual to have families attend a second year in a row, although they may not have suffered another loss.

We are proud of this tradition that began in 2001. It is one of the ways that Bailey Funeral Home has the ability to give back to the community in a heartfelt and meaningful way that goes beyond the funeral service for the families that we've served. Our reward is the warm and genuine appreciation and thanks that we receive every year. That alone reinforces our annual commitment to them and their loved ones.

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Annual services of remembrances are not unique or innovative however when a firm constantly looks for new ways to conduct these services and they continue to grow because they meet a real human need it is worthy of note. Our family firm has held services of remembrance for over 23 years and they have grown from one service which was attended by 65 people to three services held over a two week period that were attended by close to 600 people.

We have chosen the period around Memorial Day to hold our services of remembrance. Veterans services and activities around Memorial day that center on veterans is certainly appropriate but it is also a time many visit cemeteries, especially in our area of New England to plant flowers and visit gravesites. It seemed that those mourned who were not veterans were almost second-class or really didn't count as much. This of course is not the way people feel but still all the activities centered on remembering the "veteran" who died. It was also less busy a time than December when many other services are held and the longer daylight hours were more comfortable for older people to travel.

We serve a diverse area in culture, ethnicity, and religion so our services have had to take on an "inter" faith feel and tone. This has been a challenge in many ways but the results have been most gratifying. We have been able to use the common denominator as the "significance of the person who died" and incorporate that with a blending of faith communities to create a true community based event.

The essence of the service is the reading of the name of someone whose family wishes to have remembered. They may also submit a picture to be scanned and viewed on a large screen as part of the service or just mounted on a remembrance board. A long stemmed carnation is also placed in a vase to build a beautiful bouquet of life in conjunction with the reading of the name. We previously lite a candle but this became logistically impossible. The importance of hearing a persons name read aloud for the world to hear cannot be emphasized enough; recognizing the value and significance of that person.

The service itself has several parts that all involve both members of our staff, clergy from diverse areas, participants from grieving families, special musicians, and a speaker with an uplifting message of hope. We have been fortunate to be able to rotate the services from church to church even synagogue to synagogue. We have clergy from the African-American and West Indian community, Catholic priests, ministers from every denomination, and Rabbis. Yes, all together. Traditionally we have a minister, priest, and rabbi, coupled with a musical folk group, a special musician, Black Baptist choir, or bell choir. We also involve seven

individuals who assist with a responsive reading that recognizes the loss of different groups from our lives like, parents, children, spouses, brothers and sisters, the unborn, friends or lovers. A candle is lit for each group and this has proven to be a very powerful part of the service. The clergy bring their own spiritual gifts and talents. A rabbi enjoys playing the guitar and leading the congregation in a Hebrew song of healing. The significance of this occurring in the sanctuary of a huge evangelical black Baptist church is heart-warming. Also, the speaker who has helped us for the past several years is a wonderful man who's daughter died several years ago in an automobile accident and he relates his journey of mourning and healing by turning his grief into love. An articulate man with a deep spiritual background, he is able to clearly give a message to hope in a ten minute presentation. Lastly, our family and staff read the names, thank all for the privilege we have had to serve and invites all to a reception of refreshments and fellowship following the service. It is important to coordinate and keep the service to one hour or less.

The benefits and appreciation of those who participate are extraordinary. It is not uncommon for up to a dozen family members to attend together. Interestingly, we have even had members of a family come who chose to have no services at the time of their loved one's death. We feel this is just another important extension of our work and supports our holistic approach to funeral service. It also provides just one more opportunity to really listen to those we serve to make sure we are constantly providing relevant and meaningful services that meet the needs of those we serve and not our needs or egos. Yes, to coordinate these services, offer honorariums to the participants and houses of worship, and provide publicity, mailings, and refreshments costs several thousand dollars. We need to now offer three services to cover our service area and make the travel to a service easier for older folks. The benefits to those we serve and their appreciation answers why this is important. It is a privilege for us to bring these services to our area.

It could be for you too.

John C. Carmon



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September 11th is a date that remains in many of our minds. For this generation, it would be somewhat like what December 7<sup>th</sup> was to a generation or two ago, depending on your age.

As the year anniversary of that fateful day approached, Evergreen planed a memorial service. We asked for religious, military, public safety, veteran and youth participation. We were overwhelmed with the response. We had participation from numerous clergy, the Boy Scouts, high school coral groups, law enforcement, military and veteran organizations. Not knowing what the response would be, we planned for the event to be held on the front lawn of the mortuary instead of inside. This also seemed to reflect back on the openness of where the twin towers once stood, the void in the Pentagon and the open field in Pennsylvania. At the right time, candles were passed out and lit in rememberance and the spark of rememberance the events on 9/11 had on us all. The media was more than helpful in getting the word out and the response was heartwarming. Over the years, we added to the invitations for participation. The second year, a invintation was made to the FBI. The first year, we never thought of them. Not only were they grateful for the invintation, they sent the head agent in charge. He also was one who had experienced loss thru association and was quitre involved in the following investigation.

To take the sting out of such a remembrance, we also provided donuts, water and soda for all in attendance. With the success of this event, Evergreen will continue to memorialize that day and give the community a chance to reflect on the lives that lived and the lives that past as a result of that event.



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#### SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE AND HOPE

In 2003, we held our first annual Service of Remembrance and Hope. [Our staff developed the idea during one of our regular scheduled staff meetings when we were with the former Sipple Mortuary.] We purchased a huge artificial tree that is placed at the front of our chapel. On this tree are ornaments that have the name and date of death of each person who died in the past year. (In 2000, we opened our service to the community by offering to provide an ornament for anyone regardless of the funeral home or mortuary that provided the service.) This is a service provided by our funeral home and is done without any cost to the public. Much thought was given to these three areas: the title of our service, the timing of our service, and the type of our service. More specifically:

- A) The title of the service Our staff felt that most of the families had previously been through a funeral or memorial service for their loved one. We decided this service should be more of a message of hope to the other family members and friends, than that of a memorial to a loved one. This is why we settled on the Service of Remembrance and Hope title;
- B) The timing of the service Most services of this type are held before

  Christmas day. There is certainly nothing wrong with this thinking; however,

  ours is typically held the Sunday evening following Christmas day. Our staff

  felt that most friends and family members are keenly attentive to the close

  survivors until Christmas day. After that "magical" day, most of the friends

  and family members return to their respective homes and go about living their

own lives, without giving personal support to the other members of their family;

C) The type of service – We wanted the service to be a non-denominational service and not related to a particular religion. The last thing we wanted to do was offend a particular family that we had served, or a family we may serve in the future. The order of service includes an opening hymn, a prayer, scripture reading, special music from a local group, the naming of those who are on the Tree of Remembrance, a message of hope, a prayer, the closing hymn, and benediction.

After the service, the attendees are asked to accept their ornament from a member of our staff. They are also invited to partake in the refreshments we have prepared.

Actual planning of the service begins at our staff meeting in August and September when we gather names of potential clergy person's. We contact the selected clergy person shortly after that to eliminate any scheduling conflicts. We provide them with the scriptures and music that will be used during the service.

Next, we begin the process of personalizing the ornaments for the Tree of Remembrance. The first group includes ornaments for those people who were served by our funeral home from December 1<sup>st</sup> of the past year through November 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. Knowing that each ornament if correct and legible is a very time consuming process.

In November, we ask the local media to do public service announcements concerning the upcoming service. This informs others in the community for which we did not handle the service of their family member.

On December 1<sup>st</sup> mail a personal letter to the next of kin for every service we handled during the past year. This letter invites all of the family members and friends to our service. It also reminds them of our offer to provide an ornament for other members of their family who have died. As a friendly reminder we mail a postcard, which is scheduled to arrive one week before the service, to the next of kin.

We make certain the clergy person, organist, and our staff members have communicated with each other to ensure a smooth flow with the order of service. The bulletin is proofed, printed and folded and the refreshments are ordered during the final days before the service. The refreshment table is arranged and the final assignments are given during the last couple of hours before the service.

Our preparation for the next year's service begins with our first staff meeting following the Service of Remembrance and Hope. All of the staff are asked to share any positive or negative feedback they may have from the service. We focus on every detail from the message and music presented, the availability of parking, the placement of our staff, to the refreshments offered. These comments have helped us "fine tune" our service.

This has been a very positive service for our funeral home. We have received a large number of "thank you" notes from families. We have also received media coverage through the local newspaper and the local ABC and NBC television affiliates after the service.









#### Category I E.

On October 7, 2006, Hinman-Tanner Funeral Home held its First Annual Pet Remembrance Service. We felt it was time for us to honor the family members that are often never memorialized. One of our missions is to be a resource to the community in time of loss and so this is simply a natural extension of that. For many people, their pets are just like family, and for some, a pet might be the only family they have. We wanted not only to memorialize the pets that have died but also to celebrate the joy that animals bring to our lives. We met with our local clergy, Rev. Joyce Schroer, and discussed the need for such an event. We also consulted with our local vet clinic and with a representative from the Humane Society. The local newspaper called us for an interview when the received the press release since nothing like this had been done before in our area.

The weather on the day of the service was beautiful so we decided to hold the event in the open grass area next to the funeral home. The Humane Society had a representative and information available on pet adoption. Special activities also took place for the children that attended. Several people attending brought their pets with them. The first part of the program consisted of a memorial service for pets that have died and a blessing of pets that are still with us. The second part of the program was a demonstration by Cindy Forster, a local dog trainer on some helpful techniques for dog owners. Finally the Humane Society did a short program. Everyone had time to speak about their pet. The afternoon ended with cookies for the humans and dog and cat treats for our special guests!

One of the attendees to our program stood up at the end to tell us that she had not planned on coming to the program originally, but two days before the service her cat became ill and had to be put to sleep. She was so glad that she had a place to go to pay tribute to one of the dearest members of her family. We are glad also.



### An innovative Program

# "Our Angels In Heaven" A Memorial Candlelight Service

On May 25, 2007, the Sharer-Stirling-Skivolocke Funeral Home planned and participated in a special memorial service called "Our Angels In Heaven," a memorial candlelight service.

Bill Gross, a staff licensed funeral director and embalmer and  $\Lambda my$  Slater, our  $\Lambda dvance$  Planning Consultant, assisted a family which we served in structuring a new support group. The Craven family lost 2 sons on the same day in two totally different incidents.

Following the funeral service, Both Bill and Amy visited the family on numerous occasions. The funeral home provided the family with grief support information and a list of groups and seminars currently in place in our area. However, after attending almost all of the support groups, none seemed to actually address their needs. Stemming from this absence, we helped the family start their own support group called "ParentShare," a grief support group specifically designed for parents who lose children.

As this new support group was beginning, suggestions were made to the family by both Bill and Amy. And of course, as with anything new and growing, those most in need are the ones to give fuel for the momentum. The family took the leadership position and obtained assistance from their pastor, Rev. Rick Sams, Pastor of Alliance Evangelical Friends Church. Pastor Sams had in place a grief support program, which our funeral home recommends to grieving families, and through his experience also helped form this new support group.

After the first memorial service program that "ParentShare" conducted in 2005 was completed, Bill Gross stepped up to the plate to offer some organizational skills to the Craven family, while he was at their home on another aftercare visit. During this visit, he offered to help the "ParentShare" group in sponsoring the next memorial service. The family was extremely happy to hear of the offer to assist. Bill Gross additionally offered to help the next service by offering his personal talents to sing a special hymn during the service. Further conversation also led to the funeral home covering expenses for a release of doves at the conclusion of the service.

During the following meetings, several great ideas were discussed and those that were agreed on were implemented into the program.

As an additional suggestion by Bill Gross, an offer was made to the family to have a professionally printed program for the memorial service. This offer to the family was also received well, and the funeral home took the responsibility in organizing the program and printing it as well.

Also, during the subsequent meetings, the program seemed to grow with suggestions and additions, resulting in more expense, which resulted in other businesses being solicited to help in sponsorship.

As the event came closer to its day of service, the family, our funeral home and participants reviewed and practiced for the program. This in itself proved to be therapeutic for the family, as they were remembering their past and continuing to focus on life and their future.

This year's service was better planned and better advertised, which resulted in a well-attended event.

The family was extremely pleased with the efforts of Bill Gross and Amy Slater, and especially in having the opportunity to help others in grief.

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tree of Memories

This past December, we were excited and honored to begin a new community event with Hospice and Palliative Care of Northern Colorado. The Tree of Memories is a program now in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year that offers a holiday remembrance program for those families who have lost someone dear to them.

In the past we had offered our own program that included a remembrance for adults and children. Through conversations between Hospice and the Stoddard Funeral Home / Sunset Memorial Gardens staff, we felt that we could offer more to our community by helping to support the Tree of Memories program for adults, while continuing to provide an annual children's memorial program.

It was a great experience to see the level of community commitment that existed within both organizations. The input and expertise from both staffs created a wonderful program that is believed to have had a positive impact on those in attendance. The program included music, speakers and a pictorial slide show that commemorated those who had passed during the last year. The venue was decorated with pictures, seasonal décor and many Christmas trees with the program culminating by the lighting of the Tree of Memories.

We are very pleased with the impact that our involvement had in assisting Hospice with this program. We feel we were able to offer an additional service to the families we serve as well as helping to serve the families that have been touched by Hospice. We look forward to continuing to be a part of this program.