

**Chapel Lawn Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens, Crown Point, Indiana**  
*Kuiper Funeral Home, Highland, Indiana*

As one facet of our numerous community outreach programs, every year, Chapel Lawn Funeral Home and Kuiper Funeral Home host an Annual Toys for Tots Drive. With help from the American Veterans Motorcycle Riders Association (AVMRA), and the U.S. Marine Corps League, we display Toys for Tots signage months in advance and set up collection boxes in our reception area.

In 2024, to help increase awareness and extend our efforts to help children in need, we formed a Community Outreach Committee and asked at least one person from every department in our funeral home to join the group. This not only brought a fresh host of new ideas to the table, it ensured we would be represented at the event as a funeral home as a whole. We met with Sargeant Dennis Eastman from AVMRA and Commandant Sam Eaton of the Howling Mad Unit, U.S. Marine Corps League to discuss strategy and advertising.

With the help of our corporate Media Department, a Press Release was sent out to the local news media, and we contacted two radio stations, as well as posting on several township community boards. We scheduled Facebook posts, advertised on our website, and made sure flyers were available at the front desk.

One of our committee volunteers approached several local businesses and asked if they would be willing to donate refreshments. Their agreement to do so allowed us to reallocate those funds toward a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place prize contest, open to anyone who decorated their vehicles in honor of our drive through the cemetery grounds. Sargeant Eastman ensured Santa and Mrs. Claus would be in attendance to pose for photographs, and Commandant Eaton donated a variety of Toys For Tots cups, bracelets, pens and coloring books to the event.

Several members of our grounds crew got involved and helped decorate the cemetery by hanging red bows on the street signs and Christmas lights and décor on the Turkey Creek bridge. Inside the funeral home, the administration department set up a Christmas backdrop with chairs for Santa, lit the banquet room with white lights, and even designed a "North Pole" with arrows directing folks to important places to visit.

After our parade through the gardens, the U.S. Marine Corps League accepted a truckload of wonderful gifts from the AVMRA riders, and then helped by judging which decorated vehicles were worthy of the prizes. We all adjourned to the banquet room for hot chocolate, cookies and assorted refreshments while the winners were announced.

Many families and groups of friends stopped in to have their pictures taken with Santa. We set up a small Kodak dock printer and provided pictures in a cardboard Christmas frame we had adorned with a sticker to advertise both Chapel Lawn and Kuiper Funeral Homes.

Overall, the event was a smashing success. We increased attendance by over fifty percent compared to previous years. We improved company morale and spent valuable time building relationships with our neighbors in the community.

## **Cornerstone Funeral Services & Cremations, Birmingham, Alabama**

### **Empowering the Community Through High School Voter Registration Drives**

#### **Rationale Behind the Idea**

Cornerstone Funeral Service & Cremations believes in the importance of community involvement and engagement that transcends traditional funeral services. While our primary focus is to support families during their most difficult times, we also strive to serve as a pillar of the community. One of the pressing societal challenges is the low voter turnout among young adults aged 18-24. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, this demographic consistently has the lowest voter participation rates, often due to lack of access to voter registration opportunities or awareness about the voting process. To address this issue, I launched a high school voter registration drive in my role as Chair of the Voter Registration Drive, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. Trussville-Pell City Alumni Association, an innovative outreach initiative designed to educate and empower the next generation of voters.

#### **Detailed Description of the Program**

As Chair of the Voter Registration Drive for Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. Trussville-Pell City Alumni Association, I have taken my passion for community engagement into high schools within the area. The program involves visiting local schools to educate high school seniors about the importance of civic participation and providing them with the opportunity to register to vote on-site.

During these events, I present to students about the significance of voting, using real-world examples to illustrate how their voices can shape policies that impact their communities. Students are encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussions about their role in the democratic process. At the conclusion of each session, eligible students are given the chance to complete their voter registration, ensuring immediate action on their part.

#### **Benefits Provided to Funeral Home and Staff**

This program highlights Cornerstone Funeral Service & Cremations as an institution dedicated to community betterment. By spearheading this initiative, I have not only enhanced the visibility of our funeral home but also reinforced our commitment to uplifting the community in meaningful ways. Participating staff members report a sense of fulfillment from being part of a program that inspires civic responsibility in the next generation. This initiative has strengthened Cornerstone's reputation as a trusted, engaged community leader.

#### **Benefits Provided to Families and the Community**

The voter registration drive directly benefits students and their families by providing an accessible way for young adults to register and become engaged citizens. Families appreciate the funeral home's proactive approach to equipping their children with tools to succeed in civic life. For the broader community, the program contributes to a more informed and engaged electorate, which ultimately strengthens local governance and community development.

#### **Ongoing Improvements**

Since the program's inception, I have refined the approach to maximize impact. This year, we expanded outreach to include workshops on the voting process and the significance of local elections, ensuring students understand how their votes directly affect their communities. Additionally, we've added follow-up communication with participants to encourage them to stay engaged in civic activities, such as voter education events and mock elections.

By integrating civic engagement into our mission, Cornerstone Funeral Service & Cremations demonstrates that funeral homes can have a meaningful impact on their communities beyond end-of-life

services. The high school voter registration drive is an innovative way to empower young adults and foster a sense of community responsibility, solidifying our role as a leader in community service.

**Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home and Crematory, Canal Winchester, Ohio**

*Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home and Crematory, Pickerington, Ohio*

The Year of Education is the slogan we have created for this year. Education is the backbone of funeral service, as we always strive to be better. To uphold this statement, we have held three events to reach out and educate our young community members and across the states to Nebraska to talk about what we do, why we do it, and how we do it.

This was done by our staff, Conner Lynch at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Julia Jones virtually with Clarkson Public Schools in rural Nebraska, and finally, at our establishment in Canal Winchester, hosting the students of World Harvest with a tour, history of our establishment, why funeral service and the church connection are so important, and finally, a Q&A.

Reaching out and educating our young, as many teachers would express, is pivotal to the continuation of the values of our society as a whole. Funeral service is mainly done behind closed doors, which is great for the dignity and privacy of our deceased loved ones, but difficult for the public as they can imagine the worst. Movies, TV shows, and news displaying horrible crimes, scenes, and misinformation are so harmful to our profession. Especially us who strive for understanding and hold high standards for the care of our deceased. We hope that letting in the children of the next working generation will help bring more light to our world behind closed doors. To teach them we are not scary and always willing to serve the community and families to the best of our abilities.

Since two of these events happened locally, one being in the same parking lot as our funeral home, we hope this benefits us as well as the community in getting our name on people's minds. Whether it be a child telling their parents what they did at school or seeing the merchandise we handed out with our logo and name on it. We also want to build a stronger bond with these two churches. We often work hand in hand with Seton Parish but do not get many families from World Harvest we hope that by opening our doors we can show we are in service to their church as well.

So far two of these events have been annual. The tour with World Harvest and virtual class with Clarkson Public Schools. We have improved in both of these as the years go on by adding a Prezi presentation to the World Harvest Tour Event and adding a new section to the virtual presentation about modern funeral directing.

**Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home, Pennsauken, New Jersey**

*Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home, Camden, New Jersey*

at Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home teamed up with a local Catholic School, St. Peter, in order to help raise money for their Athletic Fund. We hosted this event on Sunday, September 15, 2024 from 1 to 4 PM at our Falco, Caruso & Leonard Pennsauken Funeral Home. We extended the use of our property to the school for that time period to host a car wash, allowing members from the community to bring their cars to be washed by students, parents, and even some members of our staff. This car wash was open to anyone in the community to bring their cars by to be washed and dried for \$5 each. All of the proceeds were then donated to the St. Peter Athletic Fund. There were several stations to the car wash. Cars were encouraged to enter our parking lot from the Browning Road entrance where they were hosed down in the first station before moving on to the second station where they were scrubbed and washed. Lastly, they were instructed to pull forward to the last station where they were dried before paying for the car wash. In addition to the car wash, we had tables set up under the side portico where parents and students sold snacks, pretzels, hot dogs, baked goods and water to the cars as they passed through the car wash. The students and parents positioned at the entrance made sure to instruct cars where to go to the first station as well as offered them any of the food and drink items they were selling. They then would run the purchases from the tables to the cars so that the patrons did not have to exit their vehicle. In addition to the students and parents, several members of our staff, including a few funeral directors, attended and helped wash cars and serve food. This event was great for the community in several ways. It helped raise funds for the St. Peter Athletic Fund. It helped teach the students management skills, the value of hard work, and how to work together as a team. It benefited the community by offering an affordable way to have their cars washed while also supporting a great organization. Lastly, it benefited our staff by allowing us to help one of the local Catholic Schools raise money for an important part of their Athletic Program. The members of our staff enjoyed being out on a sunny Sunday afternoon helping the community and seeing familiar faces bring their cars through the wash line.

## **Hughes Family Tribute Center, Dallas, Texas**

At Hughes Family Tribute Center, we believe our role in the community goes far beyond providing funeral services. We are committed to serving as a source of comfort, connection, and support for families during all stages of life, not just in moments of loss. In keeping with that vision, on April 26, 2025, we hosted our first ever Children's Day and Book Day event. This bilingual community celebration was held in honor of Día del Niño and Día del Libro, widely celebrated in many Hispanic cultures to uplift children and promote literacy. The event brought together families from all over Dallas for a joyful afternoon centered around books, play, culture, and community.

We created this event with the goal of making a positive and meaningful impact on local families, while also reinforcing our identity as a compassionate and approachable funeral home. Our team was inspired to offer something that would both celebrate life and reflect the diversity of the community we serve. We partnered with the City of Dallas Office of Arts and Culture to bring the event to life and promoted it through press releases, local event listings, and our own social media channels. It was open to the public and designed to be family friendly, accessible, and entirely free of charge.

The event was hosted at our funeral home and was intentionally structured to be bilingual, ensuring that both English and Spanish speaking families could feel welcomed and included. The centerpiece of the event was a reading of "Book Fiesta!" by Pat Mora, a colorful and engaging bilingual book that celebrates both reading and Latino heritage. A professional storyteller read the book aloud to the children and then led a group discussion about the power of storytelling. He encouraged children to think about how stories shape our identity, how we share our experiences, and how we remember others. This naturally tied into the work we do as a funeral home, helping families honor and share the stories of those they have lost. In addition to the reading, we had bounce houses, provided free food, and gave every child a copy of the book to take home. It was a lively and joyful afternoon with about 30 to 40 attendees. Our staff played a hands-on role, helping with setup and decorations, and many brought their own children, which made the event feel even more like a family affair. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive. Families appreciated the chance to engage in a fun and meaningful event with their children, and several asked if we would be hosting it again next year.

Hosting this event helped expand our reach and deepen our relationships with the community. It showed that we are more than a funeral home, and that we care about enriching lives and supporting families in uplifting and thoughtful ways. We plan to continue Children's Day and Book Day as an annual tradition and are excited to watch it grow in the years to come.

**Jones and Son Funeral Home, Richton, Mississippi**

*Jones and Son Funeral Home, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Jones and Son Funeral Home, Moselle, Mississippi; Jones and Son Funeral Home, Beaumont, Mississippi*

Jones and Son Funeral Home has always taken steps to be more involved in our community and different social and civic organizations. We were honored to once again be asked to take part in the Greene County High School Career Day, in which their students had to opportunity to visit with different businesses and industries that serve the community, to offer them insight and potentially steer them in a career path. On October 24, 2025, Ladd Pulliam, funeral director and embalmer with Jones and Son Funeral Home, set up a table top display to introduce the students to funeral service and what exactly goes into the "funeral". Through a display of embalming fluids, cosmetics, instruments, cups, pens, personalization items, and flags, Ladd was able to generate questions and inquiries from students about all different aspects of the funeral business and what it takes to make things actually happen. We feel that all too often, children are left out of the funeral process and really don't have a great understanding of how funerals are planned, organized, and conducted. They certainly don't have a very good understanding of the embalming process, which on this particular day, generated the majority of the questions. It is our belief that the more we can educate and inform children and young adults about what we really do, the more they will understand the industry and its importance to our community. We also look at this event as a wonderful opportunity to encourage young people to consider a career in funeral service by talking to them about mortuary schools in our region and different licensure requirements by the state. Many have never even thought about there being a school that teaches "embalming", much less considered that as a possible career path, and we hope through taking the time to talk to them about funeral service and its importance to the community, they will at least consider it in hopes that we can secure more young men and women into our industry to preserve our future. By participating in this event and we hope to change the stigma surrounding the funeral industry that it is just a bunch of "creepy" old men in dark suits that take grandma to the cemetery. We want them to know that we are just as much a part of the community as any other industry and can be just as involved, and hopefully, maybe one or two of them will want to join our team.

## **Lane Funeral Home and Crematory South Crest Chapel, Rossville, Georgia**

In 2023, Lane Funeral Home and Crematory South Crest Chapel launched a new community outreach initiative called "Cookies with Santa." Designed to bring families together during the holidays, this free, family-friendly event created an opportunity for our funeral home to serve and support our neighbors in a joyful, non-traditional way. Our goal was to build trust, foster goodwill, and show the community that we are here for them. Not only are we there for them in times of grief, but in times of celebration and togetherness.

The rationale behind "Cookies with Santa" stemmed from our desire to create positive and meaningful interactions with the public. We understand that the holiday season, while joyful for many, can also be a time of emotional hardship, especially for those grieving the loss of a loved one. We wanted to offer a comforting and uplifting experience for families where children and adults alike could create new, happy memories.

The first year, we had reindeer food, photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus, and milk and cookies. We wanted to grow the event for 2024 and implemented new activities. The event was held inside our funeral home and featured a range of engaging activities. During the previous "Cookies with Santa," families could take professional holiday photos outside or inside with Santa and Mrs. Claus in a beautifully decorated photo area, make keepsake ornaments, and receive personalized "Nice List" certificates from one of Santa's elves. Children were invited to write letters to Santa at our custom designed North Pole Station. Each child who submitted a letter received a handwritten response in the mail, something that brought incredible joy and wonder to their holiday season. We also held a giveaway with a Christmas ham, helping ease the financial strain that often accompanies the holidays.

This event brought numerous benefits to our funeral home and team. It encouraged collaboration, creativity, and connection among our staff and provided an uplifting and energizing experience that reminded us of our deeper role in the community. The overwhelmingly positive feedback we received reaffirmed our belief that community care is at the heart of what we do.

Most importantly, "Cookies with Santa" provided a magical and memorable experience for families in our area. It gave us the chance to meet neighbors, build new relationships, and remind people that Lane Funeral Home and Crematory South Crest Chapel is a place of compassion, kindness, and community. We are excited to continue growing this event in the coming years and look forward to expanding our partnerships and offerings to serve even more families. "Cookies with Santa" will continue to be an annual event and we can't wait to expand it in the coming years.



**Tetrick Funeral Services, Johnson City, Tennessee**  
*Oakley-Cook Funeral Home & Crematory, Bristol, Tennessee*

## **TRUNK OR TREAT**

Before starting to read this essay and after seeing the title you must think, "Really!?"

After attending the workshop entitled Master the Art of Community Events, I came back from the convention with the idea that we need to give a gift to our community with an event to engage new families to being introduced to Tetrick Funeral Services with nothing to do with funerals per se but connecting with younger adults seeing us as people who want to share in having fun with them and their children. We met to brainstorm and our manager Kristen Stevens suggested that we do a Trunk or Treat on Halloween. We decided to put our dollar outlay for an event and invest the money and our time into the community to hold a Trunk or Treat event on the funeral home parking lot on October 31st.

Many churches and other entities have a Trunk or Treat but it is usually held the weekend before the actual date of the holiday.

We decided to take a leap of faith to provide this event for our community. We had no idea how this idea would be received but decided to give it a try and see how it turned out.

Having a staff predominately of females, we decided that we wanted to provide a safe place for parents to bring their children to have fun for the entire evening and to provide enough candy that they will want to stay at our location and not take their little ones anywhere else. We also decided to have hot dogs served from the carport as we remembered how hard it was as a young mother to get everyone fed, dressed in costumes, and get out the door to go trick or treating. If you have had small children, you will remember the chaos that was in your home until you got out the door and on your way to trick or treat.

We had no way of knowing whether we would have 10 - ? people attending the event. We placed a couple of ads in the Johnson City Press, on our Facebook page and shared to our personal pages, and put out a two sided custom sign that was posted on the edge of the funeral home property to hopefully make people aware of the event.

Jerry Barnett, a retired funeral director and embalmer with us, volunteered to oversee the hot dog dinners. We were shocked because in 45 minutes Jerry and his helper had served 200 hot dog dinners and we ran out of hot dogs! However, there was chili left so he served chili dogs (which are very popular in East Tennessee) until the chili was gone.

We also decided that we would not only make this event to be a gift to our community but we also used it as a bonding time between the staff members. This was such a fun opportunity to get to work with each other having fun and to know each other's family members better. Kristen Stevens, our manager, dressed up as The Queen of Hearts and her son and daughter were dressed as other Alice in Wonderland characters. Her daughter Marley dressed as an Alice who walks on the dark side but she looked awesome as you will see in a submitted photo. Kristen's mother was dressed as Medusa and her aunt was a witch. They manned a candy table for the trick or treaters. Jennifer Howard our prearrangement funeral advisor and Amy Holtscaw our office manager and one of Amy's daughters also manned a candy table and information center. Richard Hyatt our removal man and his granddaughter decorated the back of his Bronco and gave candy out from it. Richard was dressed as The Grinch and they had a decorated Christmas tree on the parking lot by their Bronco. People were wanting their photo made with The Grinch.

One decision we struggled with but decided "to go for broke" was whether to place the funeral coach on the parking lot with the back opened up and decorated. People seem to have a fascination with a funeral coach and this gave them a true bird's eye view of the vehicle. Marley Stevens, Kristen's daughter, and a friend and Mr. Bones gave candy out from the back of the funeral coach. This proved to be a very popular setting. There was also a line for attenders to have their photos made standing at the back of the open and decorated funeral coach.

Our part time people volunteered to help and they came and they had a candy table. We also had four businesses come and set up a candy give away tables.

Little Richie Doodle, our comfort dog, has become the unofficial mascot of the Johnson City Fire Department so with his connections, the Johnson City Fire Department sent two fire trucks to work the event as a community service. We supplied candy to them and the fire fighters got into the spirit of the event and loved interacting with the children. One truck was a bucket truck and they aren't sent out very often for this kind of thing! The children were fascinated by seeing fire trucks and fire fighters at such close up and personal range. The bucket truck was called to a fire during the event and the children saw in real life how quickly the fire fighters have to get their gear on and get the truck off of the parking lot to help others. The other fire truck was able to stay for the entire event but on the way back to the fire station; they were called out to a fire.

Appalachian Funeral Home and Woodall-Anderson & Dugger, sister funeral homes, sponsored a bouncy house. The children kept the bouncy house busy and bouncing the entire night. There was a constant line that did not go down until the very last minute of the evening.

Many parents were dressed in costume which surprised us and some bounced with their small children.

Richie Doodle moved all over the parking lot with Laura Graham. He must have been petted by at least 300 people that night. Kids and adults gravitated to him like a magnet. He loved the attention, pets, and kisses but not so much the bath he got the following morning at doggie day care.

At the end of the evening we were happily exhausted! We would have never guessed that we would have the turnout we had. It was guesstimated that we had 500+ attend.

This proved to the staff of Tetrick Funeral Services that a Trunk or Treat night held on the date of Halloween is something that will bring parents and families out to have a fun, safe and wonderful evening in one setting. We gave everything we had to see that happened for them.

We plan for this gift to our community to become an annual event.