

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors Pte. Ltd., Singapore

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors: Cultivating Community Engagement and Elevating the Funeral Profession Through Heritage

Since January 2024, Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors has actively collaborated with My Community, a distinguished non-profit organization renowned for its significant contributions to arts, culture, and heritage since its founding in 2010. This impactful collaboration, which stemmed from discussions initiated in October 2023, leverages the combined strengths of both entities to present the "My Boon Keng Heritage Tour." This monthly program stands as a clear example of how strategic community engagement can foster a deeper appreciation for local history, cultural understanding, and critical life conversations.

The "My Boon Keng Heritage Tour" is a thoughtfully organized community event, conducted on the fourth Saturday and Sunday of each month. To ensure an optimal and personalized learning experience, each tour accommodates a maximum of 25 participants. During these tours, attendees immerse themselves in the compelling stories of the Kallang-Boon Keng area, uncovering historical narratives and exploring the diverse communities that have shaped this vibrant locale. A key highlight includes a passage through the Geylang Bahru Industrial Estate, home to the 113-year-old Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors funeral home, seamlessly connecting the company's long-standing legacy with the area's rich past and present.

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors generously hosts tour participants for approximately an hour at no cost. This segment serves as a crucial platform to enhance public brand awareness and provide essential education on the sensitive yet inevitable topics of dying, death, and funerals. Participants gain invaluable insights into the company's extensive heritage and the multifaceted role of funeral directors, including the critical importance of funeral pre-planning. To foster lasting remembrance of their visit, attendees receive thoughtfully provided souvenirs and photographs.

Feedback from post-tour surveys has been overwhelmingly positive and highly encouraging. Results consistently demonstrate that these tours significantly enhance public knowledge, actively dispel inaccurate myths about death, and, most importantly, empower individuals to initiate vital end-of-life conversations with their loved ones. This initiative fosters a more informed and open dialogue within the community, reducing apprehension around these sensitive subjects.

In Singapore, the funeral profession has historically contended with a societal stigma, often perceived as a "dirty" profession. By proactively engaging in community initiatives like the "My Boon Keng Heritage Tour," Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors not only educates the public but also plays a pivotal role in uplifting the profession's image. This initiative clearly demonstrates a tangible commitment to community well-being, showcasing how a funeral company can actively contribute to social good, foster a more compassionate society, and effectively redefine its public perception. This tour is a powerful example of how community-centric marketing can achieve both business objectives and significant social impact.

Arrington Funeral Directors & Crematory, Jackson, Tennessee

The Arrington Education Project: Changing the Conversation about End-of-Life Planning

Realizing that many topics related to end-of-life matters are misunderstood and often difficult to discuss, Arrington Funeral Directors is dedicated to providing resources for our community which are informative and beneficial.

Driven by the desire to serve our community, we created The Arrington Education Project for the purpose of helping individuals make decisions about matters like funeral service, hospice, palliative care, grief, legal matters, financial planning, and honoring and celebrating one's life.

The Arrington Education Project events are announced on our Facebook page throughout the year and in our quarterly newsletters.

We are seeking to change the conversation around end-of-life planning by continuously providing rationale for planning, engaging our local community, and impacting young people.

Articulating the Why

Planning matters. End-of-life planning does not prevent the death of a loved one, but it does help lessen the emotional and financial burden on family members at a time when they are already engulfed in grief. We want to relieve as much stress as we can so that when a death occurs, the family can experience healthy grief, unencumbered by additional challenges.

The Arrington Education Project is reframing the conversation, helping people see that planning for the end of your life is not morbid—it's meaningful. Our desire is to serve and care for the community, aid families' grief processes, and ensure the dignity of their loved ones.

Entering the Community

We believe that people are more open to discussing difficult topics in relaxed, familiar, and informative settings. Whether it's over lunch at a civic club meeting, in a church Sunday School classroom, Lunch & Learn events, or at a local senior living facility, our presentations make end-of-life education approachable and relevant.

For these events, we have partnered with: a Certified Financial Planner, who helps participants understand the preparation for future expenses and protection of assets; a Will and Estate Attorney, who explains the legal tools that exist to enshrine a person's final wishes; and our Advanced Funeral Planner, who provides guidance on making final arrangements. Together, these three experts offer a holistic view of end-of-life planning through presentation and discussion to provide those in attendance with greater clarity, confidence, and peace of mind.

Resourcing the Next Generation

Beyond adult and senior education, The Arrington Education Project is actively investing in the future. Through partnerships with a local Christian university, we engage students who are pursuing ministry—future pastors, ministers, chaplains, and community leaders. By visiting the funeral home or hearing from a funeral professional and seasoned pastor, students are receiving practical wisdom about guiding others through conversations about mortality, grief, and remembering a life.

In addition, The Arrington Education Project invests in the community by engaging local high schools and supporting initiatives such as Career Days and internship programs. Through these programs, we provide introductory information and practical, hands-on training concerning the funeral service, all while encouraging personal growth and development which includes learning, responsibility, and planning.

Conclusion

We love and feel called to serve our community in any way we can. To that end, The Arrington Education Project seeks to enter the public square, standing at the intersection of education, compassion, preparation and community service. By meeting people where they are—physically, emotionally, financially, legally, and spiritually—we are changing the conversation from a traditionally avoided topic into one of relevance and clarity.

Cozean Memorial Chapel & Crematory, Farmington, Missouri

160 Years of Service: A Celebration of Legacy and Community at Cozean Memorial Chapel

As one of the oldest continuously operating funeral homes in Missouri, Cozean Memorial Chapel has a rich heritage dating back to 1864. With 2024 marking our 160th anniversary, we recognized a rare and meaningful opportunity to celebrate not only our history but also the people and community who have made our longevity possible. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, community connection and trust are central to a funeral home's long-term success—and we believe this milestone should be used to strengthen those bonds even further.

This event was more than a celebration of years; it was a tribute to continuity, compassion, and our future. We also saw it as an opportunity to honor Dr. Jon Cozean, whose decades of leadership and service have helped shape both our funeral home and the community at large.

Held on Sunday, October 6, from 2:30 to 4:00 PM, our 160th Anniversary Open House and Reception was a public event hosted on-site at Cozean Memorial Chapel in Farmington, Missouri. A special presentation was held at 3:00 PM, during which Missouri Governor Mike Parson offered remarks and officially recognized Dr. Jon Cozean for his lifelong dedication to the funeral profession and civic engagement.

The event featured a professionally curated charcuterie table provided by local business OverBoard Charcuterie, helping to support a local entrepreneur while offering guests an upscale, modern hospitality experience.

This celebration significantly reinforced our funeral home's brand identity and community presence. It fostered staff pride and unity, as every team member played a role in planning and executing the event—from curating the historical materials to hosting guests. The presence of the governor elevated the occasion, positioning Cozean Memorial Chapel as a model of enduring excellence in funeral service. By opening our doors to the public, we created an inviting, non-transactional way for families to engage with our staff and services. It allowed community members to learn about our history, connect with one another, and celebrate someone, Dr. Jon Cozean—who has impacted countless lives during difficult times. For many, it was their first time inside the funeral home under joyful circumstances, reframing the perception of our space.

Governor Mike Parson's office also partnered with us to coordinate his appearance and formal remarks. The role of Cozean Memorial Chapel was to plan, host, and coordinate all elements of the event, while our partners added distinguished presence and memorable hospitality.

While Cozean Memorial Chapel has hosted community events in the past, this 160th celebration marked a significant evolution in both scope and professionalism. The integration of multimedia historical storytelling, state recognition, and small business collaboration represented a more modern, inclusive approach to community engagement.

The 160th Anniversary Celebration of Cozean Memorial Chapel was more than a party—it was a meaningful reflection on legacy, leadership, and the enduring value of community trust. It not only honored the past but inspired continued excellence in the future. We are proud to submit this program as a representation of innovation grounded in tradition.

Duksa Family Funeral Homes, Newington, Connecticut

Duksa Family Funeral Homes, New Britain, Connecticut

Lunch and Learn Presentation

As part of our ongoing commitment to serve and support our community beyond times of loss, our funeral home recently held a new outreach initiative: our first complimentary community luncheon on funeral pre-planning, hosted at one of our neighborhood's newest restaurants. Made possible in part by our recent partnership with Domani Preneed, this event combined hospitality, education, and a sense of togetherness — all in an effort to spark meaningful conversations about the value of planning ahead for life's most inevitable event.

The collaboration of Domani Preneed, a trusted leader in funeral preplanning and marketing services, and Duksa Family Funeral Homes, reflects our shared commitment to helping families make thoughtful, informed decisions about their end-of-life arrangements—well in advance of need.

The luncheon was entirely complimentary for attendees, with all costs covered by our funeral home as a gesture of goodwill and public education. Participants were greeted by our staff and seated at beautifully arranged tables, where they first listened to a brief presentation, and then enjoyed a wonderful meal.

Held at Casadoro Ristorante & Bar, a local establishment that just opened its doors earlier this year, the luncheon provided a relaxed and welcoming setting for community members to enjoy a free, chef-prepared meal while receiving important information about funeral pre-planning. Our goal was twofold: to support a growing local business while also creating an approachable, stigma-free space to discuss a topic that is too often avoided.

To begin the luncheon, our team gave a brief, engaging presentation on the key benefits of funeral pre-planning — such as reducing emotional stress on loved ones, ensuring personal wishes are honored, and alleviating potential financial burdens. We shared all that we offer such as various preplanning resources, expert guidance, and flexible options to suit every family's preferences and budget. We informed our guests that whether they're looking to ease the burden on loved ones, lock in today's prices, or ensure their wishes are clearly documented, we are here to make their preplanning process simple, accessible, and compassionate. We can help provide peace of mind and support every step of the way.

When the presentation ended, our staff mingled with the attendees and made themselves available for one-on-one conversations and to schedule follow-up appointments for those interested in learning more.

This luncheon was not only informative, but deeply meaningful. Many guests shared that they had been hesitant to consider pre-planning, but felt empowered after learning more in such a comfortable setting. Many attendees returned in the following weeks to begin the pre-arrangement process, while others referred friends and family.

Ultimately, this event reflected our funeral home's core mission: to support families before, during, and after their time of need. By combining education, hospitality, and community connection, we helped demystify funeral pre-planning — transforming it from a task to be feared into a gift of peace and preparation. We look forward to hosting many more luncheons like this in the months to come.

Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, Lansing, Michigan

Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, Dewitt, Michigan; Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, East Lansing, Michigan; Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, Mason, Michigan; Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, Williamston, Michigan; Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes, Lansing, Michigan

Gorsline Runciman Funeral Homes showed innovation, care, and community this year with our first Dying to Know Event. This event was sponsored and paid for by the funeral home, but supported by businesses and organizations throughout the community. We hosted Local senior centers, estate attorneys, moving companies, realtors, florists, caterers, National Cemeteries, Nursing and rehab facilities, local cemeteries, hospices, our local fire department, grief counselors, the nurses honor guard, gift of life and more.

To advertise for this event, any organization or table that was able to "bring" 10 people to the event had their fee waived. Additionally, we paired with our local news station, WLNS and their long-time news anchor did photos with people at the event and they helped advertise for this on social media and the evening news.

The event was to educate the community on different options and things while planning for aging, whether for themselves or for someone else. We wanted a fun way to give people options, let them know of things they might expect and also, have a little fun! We had our chapel and downstairs event space setup with tables for table attendees and each table was numbered. As guests entered, they would get a punch card to allow them to go to each table and once they visited each one, they could return it and enter to win the raffle. We decorated with fall decor, allowed people to see our horse drawn carriage, gave tours and a Q&A of the prep room, and provided catering so guests could sit and eat. The thing most people enjoyed was the photo booth. There were lots of props and the photos were printed with "dying to know" on them and they could take them home. This room also had fresh popcorn and our favorite news anchor. Guests and staff really enjoyed the laughs and having the "keepsake".

The entire event was organized and ran by the Gorsline Runciman Staff from invitations, to set and clean up. Following the event, we did a recap with the team and they said there were many people eating the catering who said they didn't know we offered that, they were able to speak with some of the leaders from the local chapter of the nurse honor guard and build a stronger bond with the fire department.

The feedback from the community and participants far exceeded our expectations and they networked a lot among themselves. The event hosted around 60 guests as vendors and 100 visitors. We plan to grow and do it again this year!

Heath Funeral Chapel & Crematory, Lakeland, Florida

The Value of Facebook Advertising for Heath Funeral Chapel's Preneed Lunch and Learn

Heath Funeral Chapel's use of Facebook advertising for its preneed Lunch and Learn events is a prime example of how a well-executed digital campaign can deliver measurable value. By leveraging the power of targeted social media outreach, the funeral home was able to educate its audience, increase event attendance, and foster long-term client relationships, all while maintaining sensitivity and professionalism around a delicate topic.

One of the most significant advantages Facebook advertising brought to Heath Funeral Chapel's preneed Lunch and Learn event was precise audience targeting. Unlike traditional print or radio advertisements that cast a wide net, Facebook ads allowed the funeral home to reach a specific demographic—typically adults aged 55 and older, often responsible for planning end-of-life services. This ensured the event promotion reached those most likely to be interested in preneed planning, making the campaign not only more effective but also more cost-efficient.

Moreover, Facebook's ad platform provided the ability to communicate a message that balanced educational value with emotional sensitivity. The ad content emphasized the benefits of planning ahead—such as reducing stress on loved ones and locking in today's prices—without invoking fear or discomfort. Including inviting visuals, a clear call to action, and reassuring language helped increase click-through rates and generated a sense of trust in Heath Funeral Chapel as a compassionate and professional service provider.

The measurable outcomes further demonstrate the value of Facebook advertising. Compared to previous Lunch and Learn events promoted solely through traditional channels, this event saw a marked increase in RSVPs and attendance. Many attendees mentioned the Facebook ad as the reason they signed up, highlighting its role in boosting visibility and engagement. The relatively low cost per attendee also underscored the return on investment, as the digital campaign delivered strong results for a modest budget.

In addition to increased attendance, the Facebook campaign helped nurture long-term relationships. People who attended the Lunch and Learn often became ongoing contacts for the funeral home, engaging with its page for future updates or reaching out later for services. This kind of digital interaction laid the foundation for brand loyalty and community trust, essential for a business that relies heavily on reputation and personal connection.

In conclusion, Facebook advertising added significant value to Heath Funeral Chapel's preneed Lunch and Learn by increasing targeted reach, enhancing message delivery, improving attendance, and fostering client relationships. This digital approach exemplifies how even traditional industries can benefit from strategic social media marketing.

Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Villa Rica, Georgia
Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory, Douglasville, Georgia

Celebrating 75 Years of Legacy and Service: A Community-Focused Anniversary Initiative

As Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory marks its 75th anniversary in 2025, we recognized the importance of not only commemorating our rich history but also using this milestone to connect with our community, celebrate our legacy of service, and inspire future generations. Our innovative 75th Anniversary Celebration and Marketing Program was born from this vision.

Rationale Behind the Idea

According to research from the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), community engagement is a key driver of trust and loyalty for funeral homes (NFDA Consumer Awareness Study, 2022). We saw our anniversary as an opportunity to remind families why they have trusted us for generations and to reinforce our commitment to compassionate, personalized care. With three generations of husband-and-wife teams—each with both partners licensed—we wanted to highlight our unique story, demonstrate our stability, and show that our service is deeply rooted in family and tradition.

Detailed Description of the Program

Our comprehensive 75th Anniversary Program included a multi-faceted marketing campaign:

Launching a branded anniversary logo used across all communication materials.

Sharing weekly historical photos and stories on our website and social media, tracing our journey from 1950 to today.

Creating a series of anniversary-themed social media posts celebrating key moments, milestones, and the people who built our legacy.

Hosting in-person and online events to thank families who have supported us over the decades, including a community open house and a special reception for clergy and local leaders.

Partnering with local newspapers to publish feature stories about our 75 years of service, including a special article during Women's History Month that highlighted three generations of women leading our funeral home—an achievement that is both unique and inspiring in our profession.

Installing commemorative banners at both of our funeral home locations and throughout Villa Rica and Douglasville to visually reinforce our longstanding presence.

Benefits Provided to Funeral Home and Staff

This program has united our staff around a shared sense of purpose and pride. By celebrating our legacy, we have reinvigorated our team, reminding everyone that we are part of something bigger than ourselves—a tradition of excellence and compassion spanning three generations. The increased community visibility has already led to new pre-need inquiries and strengthened relationships with referral partners.

Benefits Provided to Families and the Community

For the families we serve, the program has reinforced our reputation as a trusted, stable, and community-focused funeral home. The shared stories and historical reflections have helped families see themselves as part of our history, deepening their connection with us. Our events have also provided opportunities for community members to come together, fostering relationships and shared memories.

Partnerships and Roles

We partnered with local newspapers, such as The Newspapers of West Georgia, which produced an in-depth feature on our legacy of women leaders during Women's History Month, spotlighting the remarkable story of three generations of women serving in funeral service. The funeral home coordinated interviews and provided historical materials, while the newspaper handled research, writing, and publication.

Ongoing Improvements

While we have celebrated past anniversaries, this year's 75th milestone marked the most comprehensive campaign in our history. Unlike previous celebrations, we implemented a fully coordinated marketing plan, professional photography, enhanced social media storytelling, and community-wide promotions. We also made our materials more inclusive and focused on showcasing our diverse history, reflecting feedback from families who value our commitment to honoring all people.

Our 75th Anniversary Program embodies innovation rooted in tradition—reminding families of our unwavering dedication to compassionate service while celebrating the past, present, and future of Jones-Wynn Funeral Homes & Crematory.

Lakeshore Memorial Services, Holland, Michigan
Ever Rest Funeral Home and Chapel, Muskegon, Michigan

Cookies & Caskets

One of our prearrangement licensed agents, Jackie Chandler, came up with an idea to see if she could host a free event with the title of "Cookies and Caskets". She was trying to come up with a new place to host this type of event so that she could reach out to people who may not have ever even thought about preplanning their own funeral before. When she was thinking of where to find people in this category of life and how to get them together in a place that would not be intimidating about this subject matter, she thought of checking with the local library in the community of our Ever Rest Funeral Home and Chapel in Muskegon, Michigan. After she reached out to the Hackley Library the response was very supportive, and they were willing to give it a try!

Next step was to get the flyer together and to decide how to get the date, time and place out to the public. The best way was through the library itself and our website(s) within our West Michigan funeral homes. We also had flyers available at our funeral home in that area of Muskegon Michigan, Ever Rest Funeral Home and Chapel.

The event was held on January 27, 2025, from 3:00pm – 4:00 pm at Hackley Library. We provided cookies of course and simple beverages. There were 7 people in attendance and plenty of questions after Jackie finished her conversation on how preplanning works and why you might want to consider doing this for yourself or a loved one.

She focused on the ideas within her talk with the following focus points. First, that it really is the greatest gift and only gift you can give your family when you no longer can be there to help them with these big decisions. Decisions like burial or cremation along with many more questions a licensed funeral director will ask the family at the time of need. Second, she explained how they can lock into today's prices for something they hopefully won't need for several more years down the road. This can save them and their family hundreds to potentially thousands of dollars. And finally, how much this eases the family's burden by letting them know what your wishes are and that the financial burden has been taken care of.

After she finished with these and other points of the benefits of preplanning, she opened the conversation to questions. With this type of young, and less informed group on this topic they had a lot of questions. She was able to navigate through the questions to give them enough information to start thinking about their own funerals. Some were planning on taking back this information for their own parents to help them start thinking about planning their own funerals.

The benefits to the funeral home were that they might first think of us in their time of need and even better hopefully pre-plan with us. It also felt like we as funeral home staff were giving a service of knowledge to our community. For the families, this event gave them more knowledge about planning their or a loved one's funeral.

From the success of this event of "Cookies and Caskets" we will be hosting this annually moving forward. Jackie's idea, planning and execution of the educational event was worth the time and effort. We will be looking into trying this event at other libraries that are a part of their community.

Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc., Hamburg, New York
Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc., West Seneca, New York

LGBTQIA+ Support in the Funeral Industry

One of the most essential pieces of the funeral industry is the unwavering care and commitment to the bereaved, accurately and compassionately honoring a loved one's life and legacy. Without the utmost care for those we serve, our industry can become lost or jaded. Every person deserves to have their life remembered and honored in the proper way fitting of a beautiful life well lived. However, some individuals/families do not get that opportunity. For many years, those within the LGBTQIA+ community have not always been afforded this right to dignified funeral rites, whether that be from prejudice from the funeral industry, society as a whole, or their biological families/legal next-of-kin. The bereavement experience of those within the LGBTQIA+ community is complex, especially with fears associated with the healthcare and the deathcare industry in the shadow of the HIV/AIDS Crisis. When planning a funeral, many LGBTQIA+ individuals face unique challenges such as family relationships, romantic relationships that go unrecognized or unsupported, and the complexity of gender identity and expression. Family relationships can often be strained or non-existent with biological families, with many LGBTQIA+ individuals finding solace in "found family," a family made up of closely bonded friends. When biological families have a non-existent relationship with the deceased, this can result in overriding wishes of the chosen family as is their legal right and poses a risk for transgender individuals' identity to not to be respected such as the use of incorrect pronouns and appearances that do not reflect the person's authentic life (Sy). Examples of unsupportive families misrepresenting or disrespecting an individual's identity are far and wide. One could point to the well-known case of Jennifer Gable. Gable, a 32 year old transgender woman, passed unexpectedly from an aneurysm. Upon attending her funeral, friends and other loved ones were shocked to see her memorialized and buried as Geoff, her birth name. Her father, her legal next of kin, also chose to have her hair cut and dressed in masculine clothing despite Jennifer's legal name change and well-documented identity (Nobel). Without prearrangements or a designated agent set up, Jennifer's identity was not respected upon her death as her father did not accept his child's identity and as legal next-of-kin, he had the ability to make these choices. Unsupportive families are not the only obstacle that LGBTQIA+ individuals face with the deathcare industry – even with a supportive family or legal next-of-kin, families can also be targeted by professionals. Whether it is disrespectful remarks or outright refusal to serve those within the LGBTQIA+ community, this is still a problem today. While many individuals think of the response to the HIV/AIDS Crisis, modern cases still break news headlines. For example, it was not that long ago in 2017 when a Mississippi funeral home refused to accept the body of Robert Huskey after finding out he was married to man as seen in the lawsuit *Zawadski v. Brewer Funeral Services* despite a member of the family making arrangements with the funeral home for Mr. Huskey's cremation prior to his death (Warnke). Whether it is due to estranged and hostile family relationships or fears of prejudice from unaccepting deathcare professionals, LGBTQIA+ individuals and their families need to know not only their legal rights to protect themselves pre-need but also know which funeral firms in their community are open and affirming to all walks of life. However, this process can be lengthy and stressful, especially as the resources are not always readily available or easy to understand. This process of aimless searching can also add undue stressors on an already bereaved family. Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. has set out to change that.

Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. is a forward-thinking firm that strives to openly and compassionately serve all – no matter their race, religion, income status, sexual orientation, or gender. For the past few years, we have begun work in our community to not only clearly establish this as our identity, but educate the local LGBTQIA+ community on their rights regarding estate planning and funeral arrangements. This program consists of multiple pieces regarding our collaborative efforts with The Rainbow Collective of WNY including our Know Your Rights pamphlet, educational events, and our involvement with Pride in the Park. With all three places in play, the rationale of this idea was to develop a program to address this lack of education to better uplift our community, as well as demonstrate our openness and serve as a safe space for the LGBTQIA+ community. As mentioned in our 2023 Pursuit of Excellence entry, this idea started with our brochure "Before Arranging a Funeral, Know Your Rights: A LGBTQ+ Guide." The brochure began as a starting point to discuss various rights someone is entitled to, preplan benefits, and the absolute importance of utilizing New York State Department of Health's

"Appointment of Agent to Control Disposition of Remains" form. Offered similarly in other states, the Appointment of Agent form allows someone to appoint a Designated Agent to be in charge of their final disposition and funeral, to ensure that their wishes and identity are respected. The Designated Agent supersedes anyone else in the hierarchy. This information is essential to setting up the path for one's "found family," to care for one's final wishes and avoid situations like what happened to Jennifer Gable. However, this was just the starting point. For the past year, Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. has taken a closer look at this brochure and our outreach program as a whole and found a few holes. The original brochure lacked information about estate planning and other legal applications such as healthcare prior to passing. The brochure, which we often utilized at Buffalo Pride, also did not have an entirely local reach. Buffalo Pride, while a large event, also typically gears itself towards much younger generations and our staff was potentially missing important conversations with elders within the community. Therefore, we set out to fix it with two main events we added to our outreach program – a collaborate effort with The Rainbow Collective of WNY for not only informational events but also a local Pride event – Pride in the Park. The Rainbow Collective of WNY, as mentioned in Category 4, is a local community group that offers a safe and supportive environment for those in the LGBTQIA+ community and advocates for local causes that affect the community. Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. began working with the collective this year to further understand our local community needs. After discussions on how we could help best, we began work organizing educational events with The Rainbow Collective as well as assisting with their event Pride in the Park, a family-friendly pride event right in the park in the heart of the Village of Hamburg, NY. The first set of events were the educational/informational events. The latest event was held on May 23, 2025, at 6PM alongside a presentation by The Center for Elder Law & Justice. During our presentation, our outreach program focused on the importance of preplanning for LGBTQIA+ individuals and their families, how to preplan, and how to protect your identity in death. The Center for Elder Law & Justice offered a presentation as well, focused on the legal aspects of healthcare and estate planning in regards to the unique needs of the LGBTQIA+ community, especially if they are unmarried. After listening to the information that The Center for Elder Law & Justice provided, we realized our brochure had a large hole in the education provided. After that meeting, we worked with the center to update our brochure to include their resources. Without our collaboration with The Rainbow Collective, we would not have been able to make this update as smoothly, enshrining it as an important piece of this outreach program. We continue to hold these educational events. The main piece of this outreach program, however, came to fruition with Pride in the Park. Pride in the Park, as detailed in Category 6, was held on June 8, 2025, in Hamburg, NY. The event, designed to be family-friendly and a slower, more sensory friendly version of Buffalo Pride, focused on the smaller communities outside the city. Pride in the Park consisted of tables from local businesses, churches, or organizations that either offer direct support to LGBTQIA+ individuals or are open and affirming. In addition to the tables, there was a ceremony that included speeches from local advocates, speeches from local and state governmental representatives, musical and dance performances, and several food trucks. Our team at Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. assisted with the event in various aspects. In coordination with, and under the leadership of The Rainbow Collective, our team assisted in organizing tables for vendors, promoting the event, and ran a table in the event as well. The table itself, ran by Joshua and Anna DeLoriea-Colicino, allowed our team to answer questions from community members and offer our visible support for the LGBTQIA+ community. During the table, we openly discussed our Know Your Rights brochure and the importance of protecting and advocating for yourself and your family – especially given the horror stories from the past. In addition to those resources, we also continued and updated our "My Story Matters." program – giving out not only stickers but journals that had our messaging that no matter who you are – Your story matters, period, and it is worth celebrating as loudly and proudly as you desire. Between the education only events, to Pride in the Park, to our collaboration with The Rainbow Collective of WNY, our team was both honored and incredibly pleased with our success of our outreach program. Attached to our entry are photographs of both events as well as the poster we helped The Rainbow Collection of WNY print and distribute around the community.

This outreach program was helpful and beneficial to all parties involved. For our team at Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, we always pride ourselves on learning as much as possible to assist our families and community. Through our work with both The Rainbow Collective of WNY and The Center for Elder Law & Justice, we were able to not only update our resources but fill the gaps where we were missing supportive materials. We were also given the opportunity to speak with our community directly

and not only hear their stories but offer advice and comfort for those who are hurting or frightened. Positive community relations are incredibly important to us, and best serving our community includes celebrating all walks of life, as every story matters. Pride in the Park was particularly impactful to our staff. While Buffalo Pride has a larger reach, our team greatly enjoyed the more local feel that allowed us more one-on-one time. Our team was also able to hear direct feedback from our community. While there were concerns how we would be received, many attendees were incredibly supportive and often emotional upon seeing a funeral firm be so open and affirming, which warmed the hearts of our staff. These positive interactions only instilled a fire in our staff to continue to work on and improve upon this program. We hope to be even more involved with Pride in the Park and other Rainbow Collective events in the future. For families we serve, and the community at large, both parts of the outreach program were helpful as educational tools. Not only did they receive information and resources for both pre-need and at-need but had some of their fears quelled surrounding deathcare. Not only does the community and local area understand that our staff and funeral home are a safe place, but they understand how to protect themselves and ensure their identities are celebrated the way they would want. They also understand that we are here to help them through that process and they are not alone. Pride in the Park was especially great for families as it also offered a family-friendly alternative to the louder and larger Buffalo Pride while also showing there are allies all throughout towns outside the city.

In conclusion, the expansion of this outreach program and all its moving pieces offered a bright spot for many LGBTQIA+ individuals and families in our community who feel like they have nowhere to turn. The events demonstrated that there are many allies willing to be open with their support and offer a helping hand. With some specialized resources, and our help, those within the LGBTQIA+ can have some of their fears diminished and soothed knowing their story, their legacy, will be honored. All lives deserve to be celebrated authentically without the stressors of prejudice or mistreatment. With this outreach program, and future endeavors, Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. will continue our dedication to compassionate care for all.

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Stamford, Connecticut

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Greenwich, Connecticut; Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher & Son Community Funeral Home, Monroe, Connecticut

As more families choose cremation and move away from traditional funeral services, we have been exploring new ways to help them celebrate the lives of their loved ones. We understand how important it is to bring family and friends together, as this can be a vital part of the healing process after a loss.

With this in mind, we have made meaningful changes within our funeral homes. We've created more welcoming spaces by adding tables for personal items, bringing in electric candles and candleholders, incorporating decorative table linens, and replacing some of our traditional seating with round tables and chairs. These round tables give guests a comfortable place to gather and connect face to face, rather than sitting in rows.

Once these updates were in place, we hosted a Clergy Open House to share the changes and showcase how our space can support a range of services, from traditional funerals to more casual celebrations of life. We sent invitations to clergy in our town as well as nearby communities, with the goal of creating a warm and memorable event that highlighted our celebration of life program.

The event took place on September 25, 2024, at the Spadaccino and Gallagher Funeral Home in Monroe, Connecticut. It was a wonderful day that brought together clergy from various congregations. Guests were greeted with warm music and a chapel arranged to reflect a life celebration. Tables were adorned with meaningful items such as old cookbooks, recipe cards, a vintage apron, framed photographs, and teacups filled with fresh flowers.

The setting created a welcoming environment where clergy could relax, connect with one another, and spend time with members of our team. One minister, in particular, shared how deeply the space and atmosphere resonated with him. He spoke about helping to plan a service for a family member in a similarly personalized way, and how powerful that experience had been.

To thank our guests, we prepared gift bags that included locally made scented candles. We also provided boxed lunches, allowing each attendee to take a small piece of our hospitality home with them. The Clergy Open House gave us a meaningful opportunity to connect with an important part of our community. We have always valued the essential role clergy play in supporting grieving families, and it was a pleasure to host them in a setting that reflected the same level of care and attention we strive to bring to each of our families.

Memorial Funeral Home, Edinburg, Texas

At Memorial Funeral Home, we know that the care we provide to families often goes hand in hand with the support of local clergy. Every year, we host a Clergy appreciation event to honor the pastors, priests, church staff, musicians, and other individuals who help guide families through loss with compassion and grace.

This tradition has been part of our funeral home since the beginning. What started as a small, informal gathering in our home has grown into a much anticipated annual celebration held in our event center. As the guest list has expanded over the years, so has our commitment to making the event meaningful and memorable.

The purpose of the event is simple: to say thank you. These individuals give so much of themselves, offering comfort, faith, and presence during some of life's hardest moments. We want them to know how much their partnership means to us and to the families we serve.

Many of the clergy we invite have worked closely with us for years, and some have become like extended family. The relationships we've built through this event go beyond the funeral service, they represent mutual trust, shared purpose, and community. We've found that when clergy and funeral professionals work together with mutual respect, the experience for the family is always stronger. This event gives us the chance to nurture those bonds outside of work, in a space filled with joy, laughter, and connection. It also gives newer clergy members an opportunity to meet our staff and feel welcomed into the network of people who help guide families through difficult times.

Each year, we begin planning months in advance. Our staff collaborates on everything from food selection to music to decorations. It's a team effort that reflects just how important this event is to us. The preparation brings out the best in everyone, and it reminds us how powerful it is to serve not just families, but those who support them.

We serve a grand dinner, bring in live entertainment, and try to create an atmosphere that feels warm, welcoming and truly celebratory. We aim to make each year better than the last, not just with food or music, but in how we make our guests feel. We've had live bands, heartfelt speeches, and moments that stay with people long after the evening ends.

Over time, the event has become something people genuinely look forward to. We hear from pastors and church members who tell us how much they appreciate being recognized and how nice it is to gather with others in the community in such a positive setting.

We're proud to continue this tradition and to keep finding new ways to make it special year after year. For us, this event is more than a thank you, it's a reflection of our values, and the kind of service we strive to give every day.

Mercer-Adams Funeral Service, Bethany, Oklahoma

Death Cafes

During my involvement with ADEC: The Association for Death Education and Counseling, I learned about Death Cafes. Death Cafes are a world-wide movement, originating in Europe, with the model developed by John Underwood, Hackney, East London, and his mother, Sue Barsky Reid, based on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz. Lizzy Miles ran the first Death Café in the US and Megan Mooney runs the Death Café Facebook Page. They are focused on providing a safe, judgment-free place to freely discuss any component of death, to make conversations about death more mainstream. What a fascinating concept for our death-denying American culture. A featured comment on www.deathcafe.com is this: "At a Death Café people drink tea, eat cake, and discuss death. Our aim is to increase awareness of death to help people make the most of their (finite) lives."

For those unfamiliar with Death Cafes, it is a group-directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives, or themes. It is a discussion group and not a grief support or a counseling session. It is safe to say that one needs to experience it to fully understand what occurs in a Death Café.

I had been intrigued for a few years before meeting someone in my community who shared my desire to start a Death Café in the Oklahoma City metro area. We held our first event on a Saturday afternoon on May 31, 2025. It was held in a small upstairs space of a local law office. There were light refreshments and coffee to hold a conversation over. There were eight of us, including the other facilitator and myself. The conversation flowed for just over two hours, and when we concluded each person said that they had learned so much from the conversation, truly enjoyed the time, and were very glad they came, despite some misgivings early on. Several indicated they felt validated for their feelings or relieved to hear that what they were doing or thinking was not 'weird' or somehow wrong. Instead, it was one of many 'common thread' responses to deep grief and loss.

We discussed holding a monthly Death Café meeting and again, several said they would be back and bring friends with them. It was a rewarding experience that we are excited to replicate and see where it takes us. Let's make talking about death mainstream!

Mitchell-Wiedefeld Funeral Home, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland

At the March 26, 2025 meeting of The Appian Society of Baltimore, our President, Jack Mitchell, was the guest speaker at their monthly dinner. The Appian Society is a community association of the Italian community in Baltimore, that has been in existence since 1946. They are a charitable organization that supports groups such as the Associated Italian American Charities of Maryland, Inc., among others. The Society holds monthly meetings of its Board and members at which a guest speaker is invited. The group is of an older sort, generally speaking, all Gen X or older, so some of the members thought that it would be informative to have someone speak on funeral services and funeral planning.

Mr. Mitchell spoke to the members, a gathering of about 30-35 men, about several subjects pertaining to funeral service and pre-planning. He explained to them the various forms of disposition now available (and all legalized in Maryland), many of which are newer and unknown to most of the general public. Those newer forms discussed were alkaline hydrolysis, organic reduction, and green burial. The attendees were also made aware of the growing trend of females entering funeral service at an increasingly higher rate, and how new funeral establishments being constructed are being built to accommodate life celebration gatherings, as that is what today's funeral consumers want.

An emphasis was put on the value of preplanning whether it be prepaid or not. The attendees were given an understanding of the number of details to be addressed, the questions to be answered, and the overall burden placed on someone planning funeral services for a loved one and how much better it is for them to make those plans ahead of time with a clear head and time to think and make decisions. Methods of prepaying were explained, irrevocability, and the role that that can play in being able to receive government medical assistance.

Packets were offered to all upon conclusion of the meeting. Each packet included the checklists from the rememberingalife.com website (which was promoted during the presentation), a blank Maryland death certificate, a template for writing a death notice, and Maryland's irrevocable assignment of policy proceeds form. Some of the documents had the funeral home logo on them and some business cards were handed out. A little PR never hurt.

After conclusion of the presentation and opening the floor to questions, more time was actually spent answering the group's questions than the presentation itself. Clearly those in attendance learned a great deal and will benefit from Mr. Mitchell's insights, with one possible exception, Mr. Carlucci, who had already made prepaid prearrangements for he and his wife with Mr. Mitchell just last year.

Pixley Funeral Home, Rochester, Michigan

Pixley Funeral Home, Auburn Hills, Michigan; Pixley Funeral Home, Keego Harbor, Michigan

On June 8, 2025, we volunteered at the Motor City Pride Booth for Pixley Funeral Home. Pride was a two-day event which drew over 60,000 to the city of Detroit. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining, everyone was happy, colorful, and full of excitement and we were so happy to be a part of it. Approximately 7.2% of the US population identify as LGBTQ+ which includes same-sex couples. This is roughly 24,077,664 people who may not have the proper rights at time of death if they don't have the information they need to make an informed decision before the time comes.

The purpose of our booth was twofold. One, to inform the public about the Funeral Representative Form and, two, to let them know about the ability to pre-arrange their own funerals. Many of the people we spoke with were unaware that at the time of their passing their legal next of kin would be able to control their funeral planning and can even override their pre-arrangements. The Funeral Representative form gave them the option to assign someone else, such as a friend or significant other, to have the right to control the funeral process instead. Several of the visitors mentioned that they were not on good terms with their next of kin and had feared that their wishes would not be respected by them at their time of passing; this form brought them comfort.

Several couples were also unaware that the State of Michigan does not recognize Common-law spouses as having the right to control funerals and were thrilled to learn there was a way to ensure they had the same rights to control the funeral as a traditionally married pair. While the funeral representative form was popular, some people also wanted to discuss how to pre-arrange their funerals. We answered questions regarding pre-paying vs only pre-planning and the availability of paying in installments instead of a lump sum.

While it was not the main reason we were there, we also distributed many drink koozies, bookmarks, sunglasses, and ChapStick; and made a lot of new friends!

It was wonderful to be able to bring people comfort that there was a way that their final wishes would be granted and handled by someone they love and trust. Although same-sex marriage is now legal, this doesn't mean every single couple in the community has had the opportunity, desire or support to be wed. In such an often-marginalized community, there is so much uncertainty on how their family will handle things when the time comes and it was such a pleasure to help bring peace of mind for so many.

Pixley Funeral Home is glad to have been a part of the event this year, and appreciated the opportunity to bring important information directly to the community.

Popp Funeral and Cremation Services, Viroqua, Wisconsin

What is now Popp Funeral and Cremation Services began as Arneson-Thorson Funeral Home, located in a store front that previously sold auto parts. From this beginning, Thor Thorson and Richard Arneson set about to transform the humble 50 x 60 feet cinderblock building into a structure suitable for funeral services. The result was a comfortable interior space all on one level that featured an office and meeting rooms with two chapels. The facility continued developing to include an ample parking lot, the addition of a colonnade porch, and a gabled roof. Thorson attained licensure as a funeral director and purchased the business outright in 1975, operating it as Thorson Funeral Home before selling it to Nathan Popp in 2021.

Nearly all of Thorson's life has been rooted in his mantra "Service, service, service". His background in the U. S. Military, a school social worker, and funeral director have all contributed to his legacy of making a difference. Thorson Funeral Home was recognized for excellence in funeral service and Thorson was awarded the International Order of the Golden Rule (OGR) Public Approval Award in 1983. He served on the OGR board of directors from 1991-1994 and was state chair for Wisconsin. Thorson is also a member and past board member of the Wisconsin Funeral Directors Association (WFDA), the National Association of Social Workers, the Reserve Officers Association, the U.S. Navy League, and the U.S. Naval Institute. In Viroqua, Thorson is a past President of the Viroqua Area Chamber of Commerce, past President of the Viroqua Industrial Development Board, a charter member of the Viroqua Police and Fire Commission, a member of the Fraternal Order of the Eagles #2707, and a past member of the Viroqua Lions Club. He was instrumental in building the Viroqua Community Arena and the Eckhart Enchantment and was involved with the Viroqua Partner's Association to Restore the Temple Theater (ARTT). Thor was the coordinator for the welcome home activities following Operation Desert Storm and regularly participates in Memorial Day and Veteran's Day Military Honors with area veterans' organizations.

2025 marked Thorson's fiftieth anniversary as a licensed funeral director, and Popp Funeral and Cremation Services honored him for his many years of professional service and community leadership. With Thorson living a life of community service and a selfless individual, we believe it was important to facilitate an event for a grateful community to gather. Similarly, honoring our founder gave staff the opportunity to learn from his many achievements and benefit from his generous mentorship. Likewise, bonding past and present administrations reinforced the seamless transition from one owner to another, aiding acceptance to change and preserving customer loyalty. In January 2025, we simplified our business name to Popp Funeral and Cremation Services, thereby removing "Thorson" from the business name. This was done, in part, to accurately reflect current ownership and help evolve our brand. With respect to Thorson's contributions and sensitivity to his place in public perception, celebrating his accomplishments as we retired his name from the business seemed most appropriate. We began early in the year by adjusting the "History" section of our website to highlight Thorson's story and his achievements as former owner and founder. We also created a Facebook post announcing 2025 as a professional milestone for him. A press release was distributed to area media in May promoting Thorson's 50 years and announcing an open house to be held in his honor at our facility on June 22, 2025. A Facebook post and event flyer was published online as well, with posts being shared to community group pages. We organized an exhibit of scrapbooks, photos, video tributes, and other artifacts from Thorson's career for display during the open house, and Nathan Popp awarded Thorson with an honorific plaque as part of the festivities. Now age 88, Thorson was delighted with the presentation and attendance saying, "It's one thing to know you've made a difference, but it's really nice to have someone else know it too and say thank you – I couldn't be more pleased."

Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Traverse City, Michigan

More Than a Career It's a Calling

Rationale behind the idea:

There is a dire need for licensed funeral directors in our country. Like many other professions, the rate of younger people choosing a career in funeral service is diminishing.

Dan Jonkhoff, fifth generation licensed funeral director saw the recruiting need first hand at the Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services in Traverse City, Michigan. Dan is a former MFDA President, educator and life long learner who began brainstorming "how to become part of the conversation" as students contemplate their career opportunities. He knew the younger the better even five years of age when he himself and his daughter Lindsey knew they wanted to become funeral directors. Dan's idea evolved to eventually meeting with many people to create the new program entitled "More Than a Career, It's a Calling".

Detailed description of the program:

There were planning and/or project status meetings in Traverse City and Port Huron but most were virtual. Nearly \$50,000 has been invested to date to roll this program out. It is funded totally by the Michigan Mortuary Science Foundation with the help of MFDA's Executive Director, Phil Douma and staff. Dan Jonkhoff's serves as chairman devoting countless hours of visionary time and talent. Funeral directors from around the state of all ages were interviewed for this program. We encourage the reader of this essay to visit the website "morethanacareer.org" to learn more.

MFDA members can add this program to their funeral home's website free of charge. Plans are currently underway with Phil Douma to share this program with other state associations. Dan even manned a booth at the MFDA Convention in May, 2025 to help kickoff this program. Hopefully there will be representation at the NFDA Convention on the exhibit hall floor in the fall in Chicago, Illinois.

There are many ways that this program is being promoted such as TicTok, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, 3x5 standup banner for 5th grade classroom visits and above and career fairs manned by local funeral home staff, 5x7 handout cards, exhibit signs, QR code and our funeral home's website. The entire state of Michigan high schools will be geofenced to reach the target audience with search engine marketing and displays. The Detroit area is being specifically targeted first on YouTube and TicTok as a test area. There is a call to action! To become a licensed funeral director is now "part of the conversation" when young people are exploring what they wish to do with their lives to help others.

Monthly data is being tracked by Laura Biehl, Director of Public Affairs and Events with Resch Strategies. An example emailed report from June 12, 2025 for the timeframe of April 21, 2025 to June 11, 2025 is as follows: Impressions 538,295; Clicks 3,243; Web Visits 4,556; Contact Form 1; Clicks to Websites Wayne State 10, Mid-America 4, Worsham 3, PIMS 1 and CCMS 1. This is such impressive data from only 7 weeks! Imagine the reach and being "part of the conversation" over the next several years!

There are many plans underway to help promote this program such as 1) a letter to explain the campaign to include instructions for embedding the video on funeral home websites 2) an ad in the MFDA Fall Journal 3) creating the presentation for funeral directors to take into schools 3) give recruitment cards to District Directors for future meetings and future status meetings.

Benefits to the funeral home and staff:

Our funeral home is always looking for funeral director "Rock Stars". Our funeral service standards are high with excellence always our goal nothing less. More qualified funeral directors mean less burnout of existing staff thus more quality of life and family's are served better. Our funeral home's licensed funeral directors, Mia Wielenga and Henry Parvel, appeared in the videos. Mia shared, "It was very cool to be a

part of this project. As a kid, I did not know that funeral service was a career option for me. I am happy to be part of something that gets this opportunity out to young people."

Benefits to the families and/or the community at large:

Families who experience the loss of loved ones will have compassionate, qualified, highly skilled funeral directors to help them at their time of need. Not just "order taker undertakers" as the saying goes.

Program partners included Michigan Funeral Directors Association staff; Michigan Funeral Service Foundation board; Reusch Strategies (MFDA marketing consultants created video content for the website, conducted focus groups with newly licensed funeral directors around the state of Michigan; MFDA joint professional recruitment task force and Dan Jonkhoff (chairman) who worked on the program for over two years. Dan also worked with Bud Solem who did some of the video production work.

This essay highlights the details of an innovative, recruiting program that is replicable by any NFDA member funeral home. We in fact encourage it to benefit the future of the funeral service profession. We encourage funeral homes to create their own videos of staff testimonials (or use ours) to help share the difference making, true calling that is SO much "more than a career!"

Soxman Funeral Homes, Ltd., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Honoring Families on Mother's and Father's Day: A Thoughtful Outreach Initiative

Paws for PreNeed

With the addition of Lilo, our bereavement care service dog, in 2021, we knew that we would establish great opportunity to showcase her in branding and promotional materials within our business in addition to the obvious purpose of her job, offering comfort to the families in our care. What we hadn't counted on was just how broad and creative our ideas for events could become with a new furry face on the team. In featuring Lilo on staff, we have had wonderful conversations with people passing through the building and we have learned so much about the love and care people take for their pets. In fact, our own Funeral Director, McKenna Swartzwelder adopted a puppy, Scotland, last year from the Venango County Humane Society. For that reason, we selected VCHS as the beneficiary of Lilo's annual birthday donation drive last year.

In her down time, McKenna, and her very energetic dog, take to the local dog park in Allegheny County's Boyce Park. This had become part of McKenna and Scottie's daily routine and as such, McKenna began to forge relationships with some of the other regulars in the park. More interestingly, people began recognizing McKenna when they happened into the funeral home for visitations and services. It was one day when someone from the dog park called the funeral home to ask for McKenna's advice on dog boarding. This matter of opinion had nothing to do with funeral services and everything to do with the relationship of trust and rapport he had built with McKenna.

Following that conversation, we started thinking about ways that we could provide a service to this group of people that have built a network of camaraderie while sharing a mutual love for their dogs-much like us! And with that, our concept for Paws for PreNeed was created.

This event, which would be the first of its kind for us, would be held at a pavilion positioned next to the dog park in Boyce Park on June 24, 2025. This was a rain date following the postponement of our initial date which was rained out. Unfortunately, while the sun was shining on the 24th, the temperature for the day reached well over 90 degrees so we didn't expect a large turnout. We did, however, have several people, and pets, stop in to see us and discuss our materials.

Our extensive set up included information from local attorneys on setting up pet trusts, and listing your pets in your will which was collected over time from several law offices. Also displayed were packets of grief support information at the loss of your pet, including a book and resource list, children's grief resources, information on advanced funeral planning and funding, and of course treats and toys for visiting dogs! The materials we had also included local, reputable funeral homes and crematories that handle pet services as those are not services that we specialize in. We had a cooler filled with ice cold water for humans and bowls of water for dogs as well as cooling mats for any four-legged friends that stopped in. We had the best give away, since being unprepared is 'crappy'- poo bag holders for everyone who stopped in, certainly adding some levity to the topic.

Overall, we felt that there is a need for this information as the dog park has become a well-attended, staple of the community which to us means that people take the care of their pets seriously. Why wouldn't that consideration continue into end-of-life planning? That coupled with the continued conversations that are frequently had with McKenna at the park solidified our decision to hold this 'outside the box' style event. While it was lightly attended due to the weather, those that did find their way to the pavilion seemed impressed with the information provided and appreciative for resources that we extended for other family members. We are certainly planning to hold another event in the Autumn when cooler temperatures will prevail.

Another factor that became of importance to us as the planning of the event was underway was the credibility of pet services. In the Spring, news broke of a Pittsburgh area Funeral Director who was mishandling thousands of pet remains at his crematory. This information shocked the community and us,

neighboring funeral professionals alike. While Paws for PreNeed was already in the works, we realized that the need to offer reputable service options for families was even more important following the horrific news plaguing our area.

We recognize that for many people, their pets are part of their family and even in death will be treated as such. For this reason, we felt that this was our time to shine a light on how to consider your furry friend and companion as you plan for your end of life arrangements. Once our team, a bunch of dog lovers, started the discussion, we realized how easily and seamlessly the idea came together - from Lilo's presence, to McKenna's home away from home at the dog park, to our staff's daily dog stories, to the thoughtful milkbones that we tenderly place in the casket from a furry friend left behind, to the endless pups listed in obituaries, we knew that Paws for PreNeed had a place in our Funeral Home's outreach programming.

Waitt Funeral Home and Cremation Service, Morganville, New Jersey

Old Bridge Funeral Home, Old Bridge, New Jersey; Silverton Memorial Funeral Home, Toms River, New Jersey

A Revolutionary Presentation: Michael Grandi Introduces the Urn Ark to SCAN Members

On June 26, 2025, Michael Grandi delivered a groundbreaking presentation to 60 members of SCAN (Senior Citizens Activities Network) at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Ocean, New Jersey. This wasn't just another educational seminar — it marked the first live demonstration in SCAN's history, making it a memorable and engaging experience for all attendees. The seminar, titled "URN ARK: What Are They and How Have They Revolutionized Cremation," offered attendees a fresh perspective on modern memorial practices and transformed the way many thought about cremation services.

Michael began his presentation with an air of mystery, unveiling a covered item only later in the session. Under the cover sat an actual Urn Ark — a beautifully crafted ceremonial carrier used to honor and display cremated remains with the same dignity traditionally reserved for caskets. What made the setup particularly unique was Michael's use of an ordinary Yeti coffee mug to represent an urn. In doing so, he emphasized how a basic everyday item placed in an Urn Ark transforms even the simplest vessel into something ceremonial, elegant, and deeply respectful.

This clever use of the coffee mug resonated with the audience and drove home the point: the presentation isn't about the urn itself, but about how we choose to honor and memorialize a loved one. When the urn was placed inside the Urn Ark, the transformation was both visual and emotional — elevating a personal item into a sacred tribute. It also demonstrated the alternative uses and accessories that allow for displaying of photos or other personal mementos.

Adding further impact, Michael invited four volunteers from the audience to come forward and participate in a live demonstration. The volunteers practiced carrying the Urn Ark as it would be during an actual service. This hands-on component brought the concept to life and allowed the audience to witness the grace and dignity of this emerging tradition.

Perhaps the most telling moment came when Michael polled the audience. While 50% of attendees (30 out of 60) had previously attended a memorial service, only 3 had ever seen an Urn Ark used. This staggering contrast underscored the need for more public education and awareness about evolving cremation practices.

The feedback following the session was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees praised Michael's engaging delivery, his innovative approach, and the clarity he brought to a topic often misunderstood or overlooked. Many expressed gratitude for being introduced to something so meaningful and transformative.

In the end, Michael Grandi didn't just educate the SCAN audience — he sparked a new conversation about how we celebrate life and remember loved ones. The success of the event set a new standard for future SCAN presentations and opened the door for more dynamic, interactive sessions in the years to come.

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home, Royal Oak, Michigan

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home, Utica, Michigan

Wm. Sullivan and Son has taken a proactive approach to educating our community about end-of-life planning by producing a series of informative, bite-sized videos featuring our director of preplanning, Michelle O'Hara. These videos are designed to guide individuals through the various options available for disposition and preplanning, ensuring that families can make informed decisions that align with their values and preferences. These social media-friendly videos have been published and promoted on our Facebook page throughout this year.

One of the topics discussed in this video series is green burial, which our funeral home is a leading advocate for in our market. Green burial is an eco-friendly practice that minimizes environmental impact. This approach avoids the use of certain embalming chemicals, metal caskets, and concrete vaults. This allows the body to decompose naturally and return to the earth. Instead, biodegradable materials such as untreated wood, wicker, or bamboo are used for caskets, and graves are dug without liners to facilitate natural decomposition. This outreach has allowed the community to learn more about what green burial is and how to go about planning for it with assistance from our funeral home.

Another topic that has become increasingly popular in our community and therefore highlighted is a memorial service. These services can be scheduled anytime that allows family and friends to gather. The video explains to viewers that memorial services can be held at our funeral home, a place of worship, private residence, or any meaningful venue to the deceased and their loved ones. Many families opt for a "Celebration of Life" service, focusing on the deceased's life and legacy rather than the mourning of their passing. These gatherings can be informal and held at various locations, such as parks, beaches, or community centers. They often include shared memories, music, and personal stories.

Michelle O'Hara brings warmth, sincerity, and expertise to these videos, as she does with all outreach efforts within our preneed program. Michelle applies her knowledge to help individuals and families navigate the complexities of funeral planning, while emphasizing the importance of preplanning. She highlights how preplanning can ease the burden on loved ones during difficult times. Michelle is also licensed by the state of Michigan to sell insurance, allowing her to assist families in securing financial arrangements for their chosen services.

By producing this video series for our social media, Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home demonstrates its commitment to assisting families in selecting services that best meet their needs and preferences. Our funeral home's dedication to education and community service ensures that individuals have access to the resources necessary for informed decision-making during challenging times. The funeral home's use of this video series allows for more accurate information to be in the hands of the community which, in turn, allows them to make the right decisions for their loved ones.