

The Alderson-Ford and Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Homes, Cheshire, Connecticut

Alderson-Ford and Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Homes. Waterbury, Connecticut; The Alderson-Ford and Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Homes, Naugatuck, Connecticut

The relationship between two friends who were extremely respectful competitors within the same industry, became key on Valentine's Day during 2025. Much love, thoughtfulness and caring had occurred that memorable day in Naugatuck, Connecticut, which positively impacted residents in the borough and surrounding communities. Two prominent family-run funeral homes in Naugatuck, Buckmiller Thurston Mengacci Funeral Home and the Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. officially merged to become one. From that day forth the funeral home has been known as the Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Home.

The rationale behind the idea of the two funeral homes merging came about as a result of Daniel J. Ford, owner of the Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., being realistically cognizant of "different changes in the profession". For most of his life, and having known and been friends with James Mengacci, a fellow owner and funeral director of the former Buckmiller Thurston Mengacci, Dan believed that it was important for both long-time operating firms to continue to provide services within the Naugatuck and surrounding communities. These same, shared communities that both funeral homes served (Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes since the 1920s and Buckmiller Thurston Mengacci Funeral Home since 1935), were now together in a show of unity, yet respective of their own unique legacies and histories. Families needed to no longer be torn over which funeral director friend's business that they had to choose from.

Because of certain changes trending in the death care industry, including the rise of direct-disposal providers and the ever-increasing costs to remain financially sustainable while operating a family-run funeral home, from a business standpoint, it was reasonable that both owners concluded that it was in their best interests "to do things together" as opposed to individually. Mr. Mengacci believes that "no matter where someone goes, expenses are going up. The facilities are big buildings" and "costly to operate". The merger helped create efficiencies for the two businesses particularly due to the union of both funeral homes into one physical space. The Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Home now occupies the former Buckmiller Thurston Mengacci Funeral Home which is located on 82 Fairview Avenue in Naugatuck, Connecticut. As a result of the now combined business expenses and overhead, the merger helped to promote stable costs of our funeral goods and services that are extended to our families and the service community-at-large. The merger was also strategically mindful of our business longevity plan in providing the trusted, multi-generational continuation of care to the families who call upon us in their time of need.

The funeral directors and staff remain in the same locale as the two funeral homes were only about one mile apart. The merged location up the hill on Fairview Avenue remains a prominent home that families were already familiar with. The Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Home has larger, more comfortable spaces for public areas along with an abundance of private office spaces (including a full kitchen area for the staff). Besides the physical merger, the newly combined staff continue to incorporate certain practices, or customs, which had been unique to each funeral home, by a blending of the two. This includes even simple, yet thoughtful actions that are often overlooked, such as placing individual water bottles and customized facial tissue packs in the pews at our local churches during services, or ordering floral arrangements or grave markers for the bereaved families. Included in the unification, our part-time staff of funeral attendants were all provided with hourly raises and together with our licensed funeral directors, were also fitted with new tailor-made suits and new ties for a sharper, professional look.

Just days after the official merger that formed the Buckmiller Ford Mengacci Funeral Home on February 14, 2025, Dan Ford and Jim Mengacci sat for an interview and photograph with reporter, Andreas Yilma of the CT Insider. Some of their quotes can be found within this essay. Mr. Yilma's article and attached photograph of the two funeral directors was published on February 27, 2025, and is now memorialized on a mounted, wooden plaque which is proudly displayed within the funeral home. As a result of the article and word-of-mouth within the community, many congratulations and well wishes poured in to the funeral home. Both Dan and Jim couldn't have been any happier.

Bailey Family Funeral Homes, Wallingford, Connecticut

Bailey Family Funeral Homes/Connecticut Funeral Care, Plainville, Connecticut; Bailey Family Funeral Homes, Southbury, Connecticut

Bailey Signature Services: Defining Excellence Through Consistency, Innovation, and Personalization

At Bailey Family Funeral Homes, we strive to offer more than what families expect from a traditional funeral experience. In 2024, we introduced Bailey Signature Services, a structured collection of distinctive offerings that clearly communicate the unique ways our funeral homes serve with care, intention, and detail. This initiative brings clarity to what makes our service model different and provides our team with the tools to consistently present those offerings across all locations.

Rationale Behind the Initiative

We recognized a challenge that many high-performing firms face. Families often do not know what to ask for, and staff may not always feel confident explaining less familiar options. Although our team already delivered thoughtful and personal touches, those efforts varied depending on who was making arrangements or which location was serving the family. We needed a unified system that would standardize our best practices and make them easy to present during arrangements.

Informed by hospitality practices and family feedback, we developed Bailey Signature Services to reflect the level of care our brand has become known for. This structured presentation ensures families see the full range of meaningful enhancements available to them while reinforcing our commitment to intentional, professional service.

Program Description

Bailey Signature Services are presented in three formats:

A professionally designed printed binder is placed in every arrangement room. The binder outlines available Signature Services with full descriptions and high-quality visuals. These services include personalized memorial blankets, custom video tributes, veteran recognition items, fingerprint keepsakes, and follow-up visits.

An online version is hosted at www.baileycare.com/services/our-services, giving families the opportunity to review services in advance or share them with relatives who are participating remotely.

Each offering is also available in PDF format, which our team may email to families before or after arrangement conferences. This has been especially useful in supporting decision-making for those unable to attend in person.

Our staff has been trained to use these tools not as a sales pitch, but as part of a guided conversation about what will make the service feel meaningful for each family. These conversations are respectful, clear, and consistent across all funeral home locations.

Benefits to the Funeral Home and Staff

The introduction of Bailey Signature Services has brought increased alignment across our team. Staff now have a reliable framework to present services and respond to family questions with clarity. It has helped new employees onboard more effectively and improved the consistency of our offerings. The binder also supports quality assurance and reduces the pressure of relying on memory or guesswork during arrangements.

Benefits to Families and the Community

Families now experience a more structured, informed arrangement process. Many have selected items they would not have known were available if not for the presentation materials. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Families describe feeling seen, understood, and cared for through the range of thoughtful options we offer.

Ongoing Development

In 2025, we started developing a bilingual version of the binder to better serve Spanish-speaking families. We are now working on incorporating testimonials and examples of how Signature Services have made a difference in the lives of the families we serve.

Bailey Signature Services has enhanced our identity, elevated the standard of care, and provided our staff with a meaningful, professional way to present what we do best. It is a living program that continues to grow and improve alongside the needs of the families and communities we serve.

Bannan Funeral Home, Alpena, Michigan

Bannan Funeral Home in Alpena, Michigan is honored to share an innovative service we've introduced to better support the families we serve during their most challenging times. We understand that navigating the loss of a loved one is incredibly difficult, and the financial burden associated with funeral arrangements can often add an unwanted layer of stress. It's precisely this understanding that led us to develop and offer alternative routes for funeral payments, ensuring that every family in our community can provide a dignified and meaningful service for their loved one, regardless of immediate financial circumstances.

The rationale behind this initiative is rooted deeply in our commitment to compassion and community support. We've witnessed firsthand that while families desire to honor their loved ones with a respectful farewell, the upfront costs can sometimes be prohibitive. Our core belief is that financial constraints should not prevent a family from providing a proper tribute. This service is our way of extending a helping hand, ensuring that dignity and remembrance remain accessible to all.

Our innovative payment service offers two alternative payment options available to families, designed to provide flexibility and immediate relief. Firstly, we have partnered with Family Shield to facilitate access to short-term, unsecured loans. These loans are specifically tailored to cover funeral expenses and offer a crucial lifeline to families who may not have immediate funds available. A unique aspect of this option is the allowance for up to three co-signers, which significantly broadens the eligibility for families and makes these loans more attainable. This collaborative approach allows family members or close friends to collectively support the cost, easing the individual burden.

Secondly, we have partnered with C and J Financial for families where the decedent had a life insurance policy. This option addresses the often lengthy processing times for insurance payouts. Through our partnership, families can receive an assignment amount related to the decedent's insurance policy, getting the money fronted to them before their life insurance is processed. This means that instead of waiting weeks or even months for the insurance company to disburse funds, families can access the necessary resources almost immediately. This eliminates the need for out-of-pocket payments while waiting for the policy to mature, ensuring that services can proceed without delay and with the full financial backing intended by the insurance policy.

The benefits of this service extend broadly. For Bannan Funeral Home and our dedicated staff, it allows us to truly embody our mission of service. We are able to help families in need in alternative ways, moving beyond traditional payment structures to provide more comprehensive and empathetic support. It strengthens our role as a pillar in the community, demonstrating our commitment to going above and beyond for those who turn to us in their time of grief. It also fosters a deeper trust and appreciation from the families we serve, knowing that we are genuinely invested in their well-being.

For families and the community at large, the advantages are profound. Families are empowered to pay for services in alternative, manageable ways, removing significant financial barriers. This means that loved ones can receive the dignified farewell they deserve with services that might otherwise be unaffordable without this crucial additional support. It alleviates immediate financial pressure, allowing families to focus on healing and remembrance rather than worrying about bills. This service ultimately contributes to the overall well-being of our community, ensuring that compassionate care is accessible to everyone during their most vulnerable moments.

To bring these vital services to our families, we have carefully partnered with two reputable companies known for their expertise in funeral financial solutions: Family Shield and C & J Financial. We are proud to work alongside them to provide this invaluable service to the Alpena community.

Bradbury Memorial Center, Lake Havasu City, Arizona

Bradbury Memorial Center is in the Mohave Desert of Arizona. People who live in the city here come for the casual, lake living lifestyle. Lake Havasu City is located on a 46-mile manmade lake and the Colorado River. Due to the topography, the community loves rocks. People in the area carry rocks in their pockets or it is not uncommon to find them on a coffee table, in potted plants or in the console of a car.

In our arrangement room we have a basket of what we call grief rocks placed in the center of the table. They have sayings and pictures that relate to healing and comfort and are in several sizes. They are free for family members to take. What we have received as feedback is most positive. The rocks run 50 cents to \$1.00. It is a minimal cost to the funeral home but packs a big bonus as people like to be given things. It provides a comfort and distraction when dealing with the grief and stress of funeral arranging. Most families take at least one rock if not multiples to give to grandchildren and other family members.

When we leave the room to add the goods and services or make photocopies, it is not uncommon to hear the individuals sifting through the rocks. Upon returning, the people comment on what a great idea and it helps calm their minds. We have had individuals lay out all the rocks, take a photo and text other family members to pick one. Some like to place them at home while others carry in their pocket like a worry stone.

In our lobby, we have a large bowl of rocks with more positive or inspiring words printed on them. These are also available for the taking. It is not uncommon to have people look through the rocks while sitting in the lobby while waiting. Finding ways to make people comfortable when entering and being inside Bradbury Memorial Center is our goal. We want them to feel at home and relaxed. Simple things can sometimes have the biggest impact on how the customer feels, such as these rocks.

On the marketing and advertising side, we have had feedback that the person who has a rock is asked where they got it and they answer Bradbury Memorial Center or at the funeral home. Every time they look at the rock or rocks, they not only think of their loved one but of the place and people who it was received from, always top of mind awareness.

Capillas Señoriales Casa de Homenajes, Merida, Yucatan, Mexico

Guau Señoriales: A Legacy of Love Transforming Grief and Society Capillas Señoriales – Pet Dignity Program / Guau Señoriales

Guau Señoriales, the emotional support dog program created by Capillas Señoriales, House of Tributes, is far more than a comforting service—it is a transformative force that unites hearts, inspires change, and leaves a lasting mark on society. In 2024, two of its most beloved ambassadors—Mambo and Roxy—stepped beyond the walls of our chapels and cemeteries to become agents of legislative change in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, writing a new chapter in the history of animal welfare and social awareness—one pawprint at a time.

A Legislative Call with a Name and a Cause

The program's impact reached such magnitude that Congresswoman Sandra María Arreola Ruiz, well-acquainted with the sensitive and structured work of Guau Señoriales, personally requested the presence of Mambo and Roxy to support two landmark legislative initiatives:

1. The Sandy Initiative, aimed at guaranteeing the rights of individuals with disabilities who rely on service dogs. In a deeply moving scene, Mambo and Roxy entered the State Congress chamber and, simply through their presence, communicated what words could not—the vital role these animals play as extensions of independence and emotional resilience. The bill was passed unanimously, thanks in part to the emotional impact sparked by our ambassadors.
2. The Animal Welfare Law Reform, focused on regulating the use of fireworks in both urban and rural areas. Acting as representatives for millions of animals affected by loud noises and explosions, Mambo and Roxy helped sensitize lawmakers to the issue. As a result, a ban on fireworks exceeding 80 decibels was approved, offering protection to both animals and people.

These were not mere ceremonial visits. They were historic moments, where empathy became law and the love for animals translated into public policy. Both initiatives will be honored with a commemorative plaque bearing the pawprints of Mambo and Roxy, forever memorializing their contribution to social well-being.

The Inspiration Behind the Vision

The program was born from a personal, touching story: a grandfather gifts his granddaughters a golden retriever named Apolo, discovering how the dog's presence helped ease the emotional pain of a family loss. This moment of healing was soon fused with the corporate purpose of Capillas Señoriales: To Change Lives, paving the way for a structured initiative that blends canine training, thanatological sensitivity, and organizational discipline.

What began with four dogs has now grown into a full network of emotional ambassadors across Mexico, each one with a name, a mission, and a heart devoted to healing:

- Aquiles in Mérida
- Nova in Campeche
- Olivia in Tuxtla
- Olinka in Tapachula
- Mambo and Roxy in Morelia

Each ambassador is based at a Capillas Señoriales location, trained and nurtured under the same ethical, emotional, and professional standards.

Structure, Purpose, and Heart

Each dog lives with a Host Guardian, a team member of Capillas Señoriales responsible for their daily care and emotional well-being. The dogs follow structured schedules, receive continuous medical care, and undergo routine training directed by the program coordinator. Their participation in funeral services is thoughtfully planned, ensuring a respectful and empathetic presence during the most sensitive moments. Guau Señoriales is not a spontaneous initiative—it is a carefully designed, professionally implemented, and ethically sustained program driven by passion, empathy, and a deep respect for life and death.

What Makes It Unique?

There is no other program in the world that offers a structured emotional support dog initiative within the funeral sector—and that also extends into legislative advocacy and community outreach. Guau Señoriales has reached hearts in hospitals, schools, legislative chambers, and public institutions, always guided by the core purpose of Changing Lives.

Measurable Impact

- 5,000+ individuals directly impacted across Michoacán and surrounding communities in 2024
- 35% increase in brand recognition in local media and social networks following key events like "Día de las Estrellas"
- Direct influence on animal welfare legislation, setting a precedent within the funeral profession
- Stronger internal culture and heightened employee pride through active participation as dog hosts and supporters

Conclusion

Guau Señoriales is more than a program—it is a living tribute to the healing power of love and companionship. It turns grief into connection, sorrow into shared memory, and silence into warmth. It is the ultimate expression of Capillas Señoriales' commitment to dignity, empathy, and innovation in funeral service.

Its impact—both emotional and measurable—has touched hearts, shaped laws, and left enduring pawprints on those who needed it most.

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Windsor, Connecticut

Carmon Funeral Home and Family Center, Avon, Connecticut; Hayes-Huling & Carmon Funeral Home, Granby, Connecticut; Nicholson & Carmon Funeral Home, Suffield, Connecticut; Samsel & Carmon Funeral Home, South Windsor, Connecticut; Ladd-Turkington & Carmon Funeral Home, Vernon, Connecticut; South Green Memorial Home, Hartford, Connecticut

During the past twenty years of our firm's almost eighty-year history we have noticed that the needs and desires that our clients and communities have are more rapidly changing than in the past. They have come to expect life around them to move quickly, reflecting the fast-paced society we live in. Often people are looking for quick and effortless ways to make themselves feel good or look good. We recognized the need to evolve and adapt to these changing societal norms.

Our funeral home has always striven to evolve in a holistic way to try and serve our blended communities offering nine facility locations to accommodate varied size gatherings in whatever form they would take. One example of how we have evolved is through the development of The Lodge, a large community chapel including a reception center where gatherings can accommodate over five hundred people with equipment for any AV need. Another example of our evolution in services is the Mt Laurel Crematory. This offers our communities a place where cremation can take place privately while also accommodating the cultural needs of religions wishing to take part in the cremation process. Mary's Place, A Center for Grieving Children & Families is another example of how we have evolved and provided much needed services to grieving children and families. We have also paired with Cremation Society of Connecticut who offers the lowest possible cost for the most basic service of caring for the final disposition of human remains. We have also created Life Planning Programs which encompass education on ethical, safe, and financially responsible ways to fund end of life wishes. This includes advanced planning with Medicaid regulation considerations. Considering all the above community offerings which have grown and evolved throughout our Pursuit of Excellence Submissions for over 30 years we have developed a reputation for innovation of programs, offerings, and services to meet all segments of our communities. With this in mind, we felt the next step was to make changes to the appearance, feeling, design, and function of our basic "funeral/service facilities" to reflect the attitudes and expectations of the changing consumer.

We knew younger consumers were not comfortable in traditional funeral homes but would rather restaurants, hotels, bars, social clubs, parks, wineries, etc. where "Celebrations of Life" are held in more "life friendly" and less formal settings. It was time for us to make a change in the space that we provide, so that we could continue to meet the needs of our communities that align with their expectations.

In response, a complete renovation and redesign of three of our properties to make them more modern and welcoming to adapt to this newer consumer. We recognize that the families of today are vastly different than the traditional families we have served in the past. Clients today are looking for a different environment as opposed to the traditional funeral homes and funeral home experiences. Many of our current clients do everything they can to avoid the trappings of traditional funerals. Instead, they look to have Celebrations of Life and memorials as they shift from traditions tied to religion and are more focused on culture, family traditions, and lifestyle.

We looked at our Windsor, Suffield and Granby locations and created new environments that are calming and welcoming. These newly renovated spaces are quite different than the environment of a traditional funeral home with dark drapes, outdated fixtures and furniture and drab lighting. We started out with a completely different type of designer to help us create uplifting spaces in quality settings that would change the mood of the environment we provide but still give the guests a space to grieve with friends or family in a dignified and compassionate way. The following photographs show the first three interior design projects with the hidden TV monitors and bookcase type backgrounds that reflect quality library or private club décor rather than traditional funeral homes. (See attached pictures: Cat 1 G Carmon Granby 1, Cat 1 G Carmon Granby 2, Cat 1 G Carmon Suffield 1, Cat 1 G Carmon Suffield 2, Cat 1 G Carmon Suffield 3, Cat 1 G Carmon Windsor 1, Cat 1 G Carmon Windsor 2, Cat 1 G Carmon Windsor 3) Appearance can have a profound effect on how people "feel" about the space they are in and has a lot to do with their associations i.e., color, décor, innovative technology and more modern furniture.

As part of our recent facility renovations, we have also added water bottle filling stations to our two busiest locations, Windsor and South Windsor. (See attached picture: Cat 1 G Carmon Windsor fountain) This offers a convenient, hygienic, and sustainable way to access filtered, fresh water while reducing plastic waste. Most people carry their own water bottles, and we realized that people would appreciate a way to easily refill their own water bottles rather than awkwardly using a traditional water fountain.

By renovating and updating the spaces that we offer the families and the communities we serve, we are providing a more caring and compassionate environment that aligns to the evolving community around us. We feel that these improvements will help our firm better serve our communities and show our commitment to the sustainability of our environment.

Cook Funeral and Cremation Services, Grandville, Michigan

Reyers North Valley Chapel, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cook Funeral and Cremation Services, Byron Center, Michigan; Kubiak Cook Funeral and Cremation Services, Wayland, Michigan; Kubiak Cook Funeral and Cremation Services, Dorr, Michigan; Koops Funeral Chapel, Lake Odessa, Michigan

Communication is the foundation for every successful business. Especially among a staff that needs to work as a team, but is located among 6 funeral chapels, and a variety of communities, all unique.

The Cook Connections was created as a resource for the staff to better know each other. The magazine style publication contains small articles about various accomplishments of the staff, different ideas to promote excellent service and provides staff with unified expectations and information.

When a quarterly Connections is shared it will include information on upcoming community events and how the staff can participate. It will share seasonal information on how to help the families we serve with holidays, anniversaries and new sources for grief support groups. There are always personal reflections from one or two staff members, as well as interesting tidbits like a family recipe, a major staff milestone or a unique family experience.

The Connections is shared internally with a copy being provided to each staff member. The members of our preplanning team will share copies where appropriate at various community events, we disperse copies to all organizations mentioned in our specific editions.

Having a more intimate publication that shares and allows our staff to know one another, gives us a bigger sense of team. When a new staff member starts, it is nice to know some of their favorite things, especially their hobbies and pets. If someone has a new grandchild or gets married, we can celebrate, or the times when a teammate has a family illness or death, we can circle the horses in a matter of speaking to provide support and comfort. It allows to focus on creating a team, not just a room of coworkers. By working as one cohesive team it allows us to promote a higher level of excellent service to the community.

Within each edition, we approach different community members and request insight, short articles of their business, or how we can utilize our partnership most effectively. These contributions to our staff publication builds strong relationships amongst the people of both businesses so we can provide service at the highest level of excellence to our communities.

Our company has the benefit of an inhouse commercial printer. This is not something all funeral homes have the luxury of utilizing. However, our magazine style publication can still be obtained by any office environment by simply creating a word document that shares the same information. It is a great project for the creative, crafty person on the team, and everyone has something important to share with their colleagues.

Using this printed communication has been a fun and engaging platform which has vastly improved our team's morale and increased their desire to work cohesively because those around them are not just the other funeral directors or office administrators. They are teammates, friends and work family.

Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels, Hutchinson, MN

Personalizing Funeral/Memorial Services

Funerals give families and friends an opportunity to share their grief and celebrate the life of one who has passed away and is an important part of the grieving process.

When the funeral directors at Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels meet with families, they encourage family members to talk about their loved one and the things that were important to him or her, such as work, interests, hobbies, and/or organizations they may have been involved in. The funeral directors use this information to begin the personalization of the deceased's funeral or memorial service with the writing of the obituary and then creating customized memorial folders, candles, and chapel signs.

Every person is unique and has their own story to tell. Showcasing someone's life in an obituary sometimes cannot do justice to that person's life. Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels encourage families to bring in memorabilia that reflect their loved one's life and personality. Besides poster boards and photo albums, items such as trophies, awards, quilts, knick-knacks, to name a few, are creatively displayed and spread throughout the funeral chapel so extended family and friends can view and reminisce. Our staff will also assist families with creating a memorial DVD that can be played during the gathering or visitation.

For those who publicly serve our communities, we will coordinate to have a fire truck/ambulance/police car etc. displayed in the parking lot of where the service will take place. Veterans of our community are offered flag representation, color guard, playing of taps, and gun salute. Families of veterans may also request the presence of the Patriot Honor Guard to attend the funeral/memorial service and/or provide a motorcade to the cemetery.

Additional ways that our funeral staff has and will assist in the personalizing of a funeral or memorial service may include having a violinist, bagpiper or the releasing butterflies, doves, or balloons after the service or at the cemetery. To be even more creative, our staff has also assisted some families by giving their loved one a "special last ride". Instead of using a standard hearse, the use of a horse drawn hearse or hay wagon, classic truck, and even a boat/trailer have been used to transport the deceased to their final resting place.

"Being limited only to your imagination" opens up several ways that the deceased can be remembered and can create a fond and meaningful memory for the family. These special touches help make a beautiful tribute to a life well lived!

Holman-Howe Funeral Homes, Lebanon, Missouri

Running with AI: Redefining Funeral Service Through Innovation

At Holman-Howe Funeral Homes, we believe excellence lies not only in honoring the past but in boldly shaping the future. As artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly reshapes every industry—including ours—we made the early and intentional decision to lead rather than follow. While many funeral homes have begun to explore AI for basic applications like obituary writing or tribute video enhancements, we asked a different question:

How can AI transform every facet of our operation—marketing, community engagement, historical preservation, and strategic growth—for the betterment of the families we serve?

Marketing Reinvented: Creativity Meets Community Connection

One of the first areas where we embraced AI was marketing. Through our use of ChatGPT and other AI platforms, we've built a powerful digital presence that has grown our Facebook audience to over 5,600 engaged followers—an exceptional number for a funeral home in a rural community.

AI has allowed us to create humorous, heartfelt, and timely social media content that resonates with our audience. For instance, we used ChatGPT to write community-focused posts and light-hearted ad campaigns that humanize our brand and increase relatability, all without the high costs and long timelines traditionally associated with professional marketing firms.

Beyond social media, we've used AI to design architectural renderings of potential building renovations—helping us visualize and share future improvements with our staff and the public. Whether it's reimagining the exterior of our funeral home or simply testing new furniture layouts, these tools provide accessible ways to involve stakeholders in the future of our facilities.

Strategic Growth: Market Analysis at Your Fingertips

AI is not just a creative tool—it's also a powerful strategic partner. We've used AI platforms to analyze demographic data, map underserved populations, and uncover potential service gaps in our current market. By inputting data such as call volume, zip code trends, and competitor services, AI can generate customized reports and actionable marketing plans designed to increase reach and relevance.

We've also used AI to evaluate acquisition opportunities, comparing our service model with other firms in neighboring areas. This allowed us to make informed decisions backed by market insights—something that used to require expensive consulting firms is now available to us with just a few keystrokes.

Preserving History, Inspiring the Future

Another unique application of AI has been our commitment to honoring and preserving our legacy. In collaboration with a new digital television station, we now publish death notices that automatically link back to our website. Furthermore, we are being featured in an upcoming documentary about legacy businesses in our region—and AI is playing a starring role. It is being used to recreate 1930s newspaper articles and 1940s radio broadcasts, breathing new life into our story and sharing it with a new generation.

Fearless Innovation in Funeral Service

AI is still in its early stages, but that's exactly why we believe now is the time to act. At Holman-Howe and our affiliated firms, we have chosen to experiment boldly and lead courageously. We view AI not as a replacement for personal service, but as an enhancement—a way to give families more meaningful experiences, reach more people in our community, and continue evolving in our mission to serve with excellence.

From ChatGPT to ChatSonic, Bing AI to Google Assistant, each platform offers unique strengths. By exploring these tools, we encourage funeral professionals everywhere to unlock their potential and let innovation drive the next era of compassionate care.

A Replicable Roadmap for Funeral Professionals

For those looking to replicate our journey, here's how to get started:

- **Start Small:** Use ChatGPT to assist with obituaries or tribute video scripts.
- **Build Community:** Use AI to create social media posts that reflect your local personality.
- **Analyze Your Market:** Feed AI tools local demographic data to uncover growth opportunities.
- **Visualize the Future:** Use image-generation platforms to design facility updates and share with your team.
- **Preserve Legacy:** Partner with local media to share your history in a modern format using AI voice and text generation.

At Holman-Howe, we are running with AI—not away from it—and we believe our story can inspire others to do the same.

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, New Haven, Connecticut

Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, Hartford, Connecticut; Henry L. Fuqua Funeral Service (A Division of Howard K. Hill Funeral Services), Bloomfield, Connecticut

At Howard K. Hill Funeral Services, we've created a distinctive way to honor the lives of loved ones by offering innovative and commemorative experiences, all while maintaining the highest level of service. Rooted in our Aria philosophy, which represents our most elevated tier of care, our commitment to personalization and community connection is reflected in every detail of our offerings. We believe every life deserves to be celebrated in a way that is as unique and meaningful as the person lived.

To truly capture the spirit of each individual, we've introduced features such as custom hearses, striking displays of vehicles and personal mementos, and visually captivating LED wall presentations. These elements come together to create a fully immersive experience that offers comfort and connection to both grieving families and the wider community.

For those with deep connections to their profession or passions, we offer customized hearses that reflect their unique journeys. For example, we've transformed a traditional tractor-trailer into a hearse for a truck driver, honoring their love for the open road in their final ride. Similarly, we've showcased ATVs and motorcycles for individuals who embraced adventure and the outdoors, providing a tribute that powerfully reflects their spirit and lifestyle.

Our LED walls serve as dynamic backdrops for these tributes, featuring custom-designed moving graphics and animated visuals inspired by the hobbies, careers, or passions of the departed. Whether it's a fisherman casting into serene waters, a hairstylist surrounded by tools of the trade, a music lover with notes dancing across the screen, or a painter with a selection of brushes, these presentations artistically tell their story. These graphics are revealed only once the casket is closed, offering a powerful final moment that visually expresses the essence of the individual's life.

These tributes are not just for remembrance—they serve as spaces for emotional healing and reflection. Personalized commemoration allows families to feel truly seen and supported in their grief. It also sparks conversations and shared memories among guests, creating a sense of unity and collective celebration that reinforces community bonds.

In conclusion, our innovative commemoration experiences, enhanced through Aria's premium lens, are designed to make each funeral not just a service, but a meaningful experience. With every customized tribute, moving graphic, and intentional design, we honor the legacy of each person we are entrusted to serve—helping families heal and bringing communities together to remember, reflect, and celebrate a life well lived.

Jardim da Saudade Assistência, Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil

At Jardim da Saudade, we believe that respect for life extends beyond the moment of farewell. Our commitment is to transform each space into an opportunity to generate a positive impact for families, connect with nature, reconnect with memories, and renew affection. Our initiatives go beyond burial. Therefore, our innovative initiatives are not just services. They are part of a strategy aligned with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles, promoting sustainability, social inclusion, and care for collective well-being.

Composting Soil: Life that blooms from longing:

We consciously reuse the cemetery's own green waste—leaves, flowers, and prunings—and transform it into high-quality soil, rich in nutrients and organic matter. In addition to reducing organic waste disposal, we provide this soil free of charge to our customers, so they can use it to plant flowers in flower boxes in honor of their loved ones. A concrete action for the circular economy and combating waste.

Preservation of Native Stingless Bees:

Guardians of Biodiversity, our underground park houses different species of native stingless bees, such as the Mandaçaia, Guaraipo, Jataí, and Iraí. In addition to providing security and borders for visitors, these bees are essential for the pollination of native plants, helping to preserve local flora and maintain ecosystem balance.

By preserving these species, we are directly contributing to the conservation of endangered species, maintaining urban biodiversity, and the environmental regeneration of our green spaces. A true demonstration of ecological responsibility.

Social Action – Well-being, Health, and Community Integration:

Our cemetery park is much more than a place to say goodbye. It is a space for coexistence, welcome, and well-being open to the entire community. Through the Passeio no Parque project, we offer bicycles so that anyone—clients, family members, neighbors, or occasional visitors—can enjoy a leisurely, safe, and contemplative outdoor ride along the paths of our park.

Furthermore, with the children who accompany families on their visits in mind, we provide leisure spaces with playgrounds, allowing them to play and have fun, bringing lightness and moments of joy even in a time of longing.

This combination of initiatives provides free access to leisure, health, and social integration activities, promoting physical and emotional well-being for all ages. It's a way to make Jardim da Saudade a welcoming place, where people can not only honor those who have passed, but also care for themselves and find comfort in nature and community.

The feedback has been inspiring: many families have already turned their visit to Jardim da Saudade into a moment of emotional and physical care. We have clients who make a weekly habit of coming to the park, whether to visit loved ones, walk, bike, or simply let their children play while breathing in the fresh air and contemplating nature.

Because experiencing grief can also mean finding spaces for life, health, and affection.

These projects make us a sustainable, socially responsible park open to the community, reducing environmental impacts, promoting health and quality of life for society, contributing to practices that preserve local biodiversity, and ensuring that each service is performed with ethics, respect, and responsible governance. Memory, nature, and sustainability must and must walk hand in hand, honoring the cycle of life in all its forms. Here, longing flourishes and life goes on!

Morris-Baker Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Johnson City, Tennessee

Fostering Transparency and Financial Literacy at Morris-Baker Funeral Home and Cremation Services

At Morris-Baker Funeral Home and Cremation Services, we believe that transparency is not just a value—it's a strategy for unity, accountability, and long-term sustainability. One of our guiding principles is that in the absence of clear information, people tend to fill in the blanks with assumptions shaped by fear or bias. This insight became the foundation for a transformative initiative that has reshaped our internal culture and strengthened our service to the community.

When our current owner, Preston McKee, joined the business in 1995, he observed that much of the organizational dysfunction stemmed from a lack of transparency. Staff members saw large figures on contracts but had little understanding of the expenses that offset those revenues. This disconnect bred confusion and mistrust. By opening up our financials, we aimed to foster a culture of shared understanding and mutual accountability. We also recognized the growing financial pressures of operating a funeral home in an era of rising cremation rates. As revenue patterns shifted, we needed a way to manage personnel costs during lean periods and reward staff during prosperous ones. Transparency became the key to aligning our team with the financial realities of the business.

Our program centers around weekly and quarterly financial updates. Every Wednesday, the entire Morris-Baker staff gathers to review key financial indicators: gross sales, accounts receivable over 30 days, pre-need sales, and customer satisfaction as measured by our Net Promoter Score. These meetings ensure that everyone—from funeral directors to administrative staff—has a clear view of how the business is performing.

Quarterly, we take this a step further by partnering with David Nixon, a respected industry consultant. Mr. Nixon distills our quarterly financials into a one-page summary and leads a Zoom session with the staff. His neutral perspective allows for open discussion and deeper understanding of the numbers. This partnership has been instrumental in building trust and financial literacy across the organization.

The benefits of this initiative are profound. Staff members are more engaged and aligned with the company's goals. One funeral director captured the sentiment perfectly: "I love your transparency, and I hate your transparency." The comment was in response to learning that, although they were feeling overwhelmed by the month's workload, the month's revenue barely met the budget. This awareness has helped bridge the gap between perception and reality, fostering a more cohesive and informed team.

Families and the broader community also benefit. Our funeral directors are now better equipped to explain the costs of funeral services with confidence and clarity. This transparency enhances trust and helps families make informed decisions during difficult times. Moreover, a team that understands and believes in the mission of the business delivers better service. We believe that energy is contagious, and our aligned, informed team radiates the kind of positive energy that uplifts grieving families.

In a profession built on trust and compassion, our commitment to transparency has become a cornerstone of excellence. It has empowered our staff, strengthened our culture, and elevated the care we provide to the families we serve.

Return Home, Auburn, Washington

Return Home Partner Program – Equipping Funeral Homes Nationwide to Offer Terramation with Confidence

In 2024, Return Home completely redesigned and relaunched our Partner Program—a first-of-its-kind training and support system to help funeral homes across the country confidently offer terramation (natural organic reduction) to the families in their communities.

The need for this program became clear as Return Home continued serving families nationwide, many of whom had long-standing relationships with their local funeral homes. When those funeral homes were unfamiliar or uncomfortable discussing terramation, families would bypass them entirely to work with us directly. This resulted in lost revenue and fractured trust at the local level—and it reinforced the misconception that funeral directors weren't prepared to meet modern disposition needs. We believe the opposite is true. Funeral directors are deeply capable. They just need the tools and support to stay current in a changing field.

The Return Home Partner Program was created to close that gap. We set out to build something more than a referral system—we built a relationship-driven model that restores the family-funeral home bond, keeps revenue local, and empowers directors to confidently offer a service that aligns with evolving values.

The Return Home Partner Program includes:

A comprehensive “Terramation 101” curriculum covering the science, service options, legal requirements, demographics, and preplanning strategies.

Live and recorded training sessions taught by our internal team—Katey, Mandy, Tully, and Micah—plus follow-up calls to answer questions and navigate real-time cases.

A custom-built Partner Dashboard that provides access to scheduling, shipping tools, resource libraries, and a central communication hub.

SEO and SEM support, branded brochures, soil samples for arrangement rooms, and prewritten website content to support education and marketing.

Custom authorizations and documentation tailored to state requirements.

A newly developed AI chatbot to offer funeral professionals real-time answers and assistance.

Full onboarding by our dedicated Partner Program Manager to ensure seamless integration.

The benefits to funeral homes and their staff are profound. This program equips funeral professionals with the knowledge, tools, and confidence they need to offer a cutting-edge disposition method without compromising on service quality or family trust. It enhances the reputation of participating funeral homes, positioning them as progressive, full-service providers ready to meet evolving client values. For staff, it alleviates the pressure and uncertainty of discussing a process they may not be familiar with—giving them language, visuals, and back-end support they can rely on. For many, it has re-energized their passion for the profession, allowing them to reconnect with the “why” behind their work as they serve families in increasingly meaningful ways.

For our team, the impact has been just as transformative. The Partner Program has firmly established Return Home as the national leader in terramation. It has deepened our connection to the funeral service profession and allowed us to build genuine, long-term relationships with funeral directors across the country. In a time when innovation can often feel like a threat to tradition, this program has given us the platform to uplift the funeral director as an essential guide—demonstrating that modern disposition and

time-honored care are not mutually exclusive. We've been able to share our knowledge, listen deeply, and collaborate with some of the most compassionate professionals in the industry. It has pushed our mission forward in a way that feels both meaningful and sustainable.

We don't stop at technical tools. Our team works hard to maintain genuine relationships with each partner. When a funeral director serves their first terramation family, we send them handwritten notes and cookies—because we know how stressful and vulnerable that first case can be. We cheer them on, troubleshoot alongside them, and celebrate their successes. This program is deeply personal to us, because we know how personal this work is for them.

Return Home handles the terramation process, but the partner funeral home maintains the family relationship—managing arrangements, services, and aftercare. We are here to reinforce their expertise, not replace it.

For families, the program increases access to trusted, local funeral homes that are prepared to offer sustainable choices with confidence and care. And for our partners, it's an opportunity to grow into leaders in the green deathcare space. Some now refer multiple families per month. Others have become known in their region as the funeral home that offers everything—including terramation.

Two partner firms have gone even further: building their own temporary terramation vessels to allow families to hold laying-in ceremonies close to home before transport to Return Home. One of these vessels is a beautiful, boat-shaped structure made of polished metal—a striking and heartfelt nod to the journey a loved one takes through this process.

More than 100 funeral homes in 22 states and numerous Canadian provinces now participate in the Partner Program. With our 2024 revamp—including the dashboard, chatbot, new curriculum, and full onboarding support—we're not just offering access to terramation. We're building a national community of empowered, supported funeral professionals—committed to leading the next era of deathcare, together.

Robinson Funeral Home & Crematory – Downtown, Easley, South Carolina

Robinson Funeral Home & Crematory – Powdersville Road, Easley, South Carolina; Duckett-Robinson Funeral Home & Cremations, Central-Clemson Commons, South Carolina

At the start of 2023, the company introduced quarterly gatherings known as “CX Huddles” (Customer Experience Huddles) aimed at exploring various phases of customer engagement. These sessions are designed to encourage team members to identify new ways to exceed customer expectations consistently.

The idea for these meetings was inspired by a presentation delivered by Jake Johnson of Johnson Consulting. During his talk, Jake discussed *The Customer Service Revolution* by John R. DiJulius III, highlighting the book's core message: businesses thrive when their employees are deeply committed to building strong customer relationships and delivering exceptional service to foster loyalty.

Motivated by this message, Chris Robinson collaborated with the Johnson Consulting Group to form a “Steering Committee” composed of seven staff members from various locations and roles within the organization. This committee is responsible for organizing the quarterly CX Huddles, where employees are encouraged to share innovative ideas for improving customer experiences and provide constructive feedback on areas needing improvement.

Since the committee's inception, the organization's approach to customer service has evolved significantly. The focus has broadened beyond simply serving families during times of need to proactively engaging with the community before a need arises. The Steering Committee not only continues to explore strategies for exceeding expectations during direct service but also emphasizes community outreach and involvement—staying true to its original mission of cultivating exceptional customer service.

Starting in early 2025, we revamped our quarterly meetings to encourage more open discussion among all staff members. Previously, some associates were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts. To ensure everyone can participate, we now hold monthly meetings at each location, covering all departments. The same meeting is conducted over a three-month period at each site, with two different time options available to accommodate varying schedules.

Benefits of This Approach:

1. **Enhanced Customer Loyalty:** By consistently seeking ways to exceed expectations, the company fosters stronger emotional connections with customers, which boosts long-term loyalty.
2. **Employee Engagement:** Empowering staff through participation in CX Huddles and the Steering Committee gives them a sense of ownership and involvement in shaping customer experience, leading to higher job satisfaction and motivation.
3. **Proactive Community Engagement:** Extending efforts beyond immediate service to include community outreach helps build trust and familiarity, positioning the company as a reliable and compassionate presence in the community.
4. **Continuous Improvement Culture:** Regular feedback loops and idea-sharing sessions promote a culture where innovation and improvement are ongoing, not just occasional.
5. **Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Involving employees from different roles and locations encourages diverse perspectives and fosters teamwork across departments.
6. **Alignment with Modern Customer Expectations:** Today's customers expect not just good service, but personalized, proactive, and community-conscious experiences. This initiative aligns the company's practices with those modern expectations.

The implementation of CX Huddles and the establishment of the Steering Committee have significantly advanced the organization's approach to customer experience. Dianne Robinson, Family Service Counselor, stated, “my observation after the implementation of the quarterly CX meetings is: our people have been empowered. Empowered to think outside the box in both serving our families and strengthening relationships. The creative, loving spirit that guides our quest to love and care is enabled, encouraged and nurtured. I have never been more proud to be associated with the Robinson family of associates and friends.” By fostering a culture of excellence, innovation, and community connection, this initiative has positioned the company to deliver on its commitment to outstanding service—now and in the future.

Roller Funeral Homes, Little Rock, Arkansas

Roller Funeral Home, Mountain Home, Arkansas; Roller Funeral Homes, Paris, Arkansas; Roller-Christeson Funeral Home, Harrison, Arkansas; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, West Helena, Arkansas; Roller Citizens Funeral Home, Marshall, Arkansas; Roller-Coffman-Crouch, Mountain View, Arkansas; Roller-Cox, Clarksville, Arkansas; Roller-Crouch, Batesville, Arkansas; Roller-Daniel Funeral Home, Search, Arkansas; Roller-England Funeral Home, England, Arkansas; Roller-Farmers Union Funeral Home, Jonesboro, Arkansas; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Conway, Arkansas; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Clinton, Arkansas; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home – Greenbriar, Greenbriar, Arkansas; Roller-Owens Funeral Home, North Little Rock, Arkansas; Roller-Swift Funeral Home, Osceola, Arkansas

Reopening Roller-Chenal: A Promise Fulfilled for Central Arkansas

Following the total destruction of Roller-Chenal Funeral Home on March 31, 2023, tornado, our family made a clear and public promise to the people of Central Arkansas: we would not only rebuild, but we would come back stronger and better equipped to serve the families who have trusted us for generations. In 2025, that promise was fulfilled.

On April 6, we held our official grand reopening and dedication ceremony. The event welcomed hundreds from across the community and marked a deeply meaningful milestone for Central Arkansas. Former Arkansas Governor and U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, delivered our dedication remarks. He spoke powerfully about the importance of having Roller Funeral Homes back in service to this community and shared heartfelt reflections on the sacred role funeral professionals play in helping families through grief. His words reminded everyone present that this moment was not just the reopening of a building, but the restoration of something essential to our city.

A highlight of our new facility is the revolutionary Batesville showroom, one of only six in the entire country to feature this new interactive system. It includes illuminated lithographs, integrated QR code technology, and upgraded lighting techniques designed to create a cleaner, brighter, and more celebratory environment. The feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive. Many have commented on the warmth and clarity of the space, stating it helps shift the tone from grief to meaningful remembrance.

The open house was featured on local news and received attention across social media. We handed out custom die-cut cards of the new building and created a high-impact giveaway that truly connected us to our city's cultural heart. One lucky guest won orchestra-level season tickets to the 2025-2026 Broadway series at Robinson Theater. This prize was both fun and meaningful, symbolizing our commitment to life, art, and local legacy.

Beyond the event, our staff benefited by feeling renewed pride in their workplace and confidence in the tools now available to serve families at the highest level. The open house gave them the opportunity to speak directly with community members, share what had been rebuilt, and listen to what matters most to those we serve.

More than just a reopening, this event marked the culmination of two years of resolve, investment, and belief in our city. Our doors have served families across three centuries, but this chapter represents a renewed promise to Central Arkansas. Roller Funeral Homes has been fully embraced back into the heart of the community, and our family's commitment to compassion, innovation, and service remains as strong as ever. Every detail, every decision, and every family served is a reflection of the standard we proudly uphold, "With All Our Respect."

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, New Castle, Delaware

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Newark, Delaware; Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Delaware City, Delaware; Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Middletown, Delaware

Embracing Digital Convenience: Spicer-Mullikin's Innovative E-Commerce Payment System

In an era where digital convenience shapes daily interactions, Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Home recognized an opportunity to enhance the experience of the families it serves by streamlining the often-sensitive process of managing funeral and pre-planning expenses. The rationale behind the development and implementation of a secure online payment system stemmed from a clear understanding of the needs of modern families seeking ease and flexibility, particularly during times of emotional distress. By increasing awareness and usage of online payment options, Spicer-Mullikin aimed to alleviate a potential burden, offering a more accessible and less stressful way to handle financial transactions from the comfort and privacy of their own homes. This initiative reflects a commitment to adapting to evolving expectations and providing peace of mind during the bereavement process.

The innovative program involved the comprehensive build-out and launch of a dedicated online payment portal, seamlessly integrated into the Spicer-Mullikin website at <https://spicermullikin.com/pay-online-2>. This user-friendly system empowers families to securely remit payments for funeral service expenses online. While initial plans included pre-planning payments, the current iteration focuses on at-need services, with the potential for future expansion in this area. The system is meticulously designed to generate immediate digital receipts and automated payment alert emails, ensuring transparency and providing families with accurate records, including the name of their deceased loved one. The technical backbone of this initiative involved a strategic partnership with CeleroCommerce, leveraging their expertise to integrate a secure payment gateway, with Authorize.net selected as the preferred option. This integration process was carefully executed, involving the secure acquisition of API keys and login credentials, followed by rigorous testing, including a "penny test sale," to guarantee a robust and reliable connection. Clear and prominent calls to action, such as a "Pay here/Donate" button on the main website, guide users to the payment portal. The online payment form underwent meticulous refinement, with updated language and mandatory billing fields ensuring accuracy and completeness. Prior to the full public launch, Spicer-Mullikin prioritized comprehensive staff training. This proactive measure equipped the team to confidently navigate the new system, address family inquiries, and ensure a seamless and supportive experience for all involved.

The implementation of this e-commerce payment system yields significant benefits for Spicer-Mullikin and its staff. Operationally, the increased adoption of online payments has the potential to streamline internal financial processes, enhancing efficiency and reducing administrative overhead. For the staff, the thorough pre-launch training has been invaluable, fostering confidence and competence in assisting families with payment-related matters. This preparedness contributes to smoother interactions and reinforces the funeral home's commitment to professional and empathetic service.

The primary beneficiaries of this innovative program are the families served by Spicer-Mullikin. The online payment option provides a much-needed layer of convenience during a time when navigating logistical and financial matters can feel overwhelming. The ability to manage payments securely from their own homes eliminates the need for in-person transactions or reliance on less immediate methods, offering a sense of control and privacy. This ease of use directly contributes to providing peace of mind, allowing families to focus on grieving and supporting one another rather than being burdened by payment logistics.

The successful development and implementation of this e-commerce solution was a collaborative effort. Spicer-Mullikin partnered with Slice Communications, who expertly managed the updates to the funeral home's website and online forms, ensuring a seamless user experience. CeleroCommerce played a crucial role in providing the secure online payment solutions and facilitating the critical payment gateway integration, offering essential PCI compliance assistance to safeguard sensitive financial information. This strategic partnership underscores the commitment to leveraging external expertise to deliver a high-quality and secure service.

This initiative represents the implementation of a novel service rather than an incremental improvement to an existing program. The explicit goal was to introduce a new, convenient online payment system to better serve families. The comprehensive planning, technical integration, and staff training undertaken within the past year highlight the newness and innovative nature of this program. By embracing digital solutions to enhance the payment process, Spicer-Mulikin Funeral Home demonstrates its commitment to innovation and to meeting the evolving needs of the families and community it is privileged to serve.

Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Downtown, Greenville, South Carolina

Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Northwest, Greenville, South Carolina; Thomas McAfee Funeral Home – Southeast, Simpsonville, South Carolina; Gray Mortuary, Pelzer, South Carolina

The Heart of Service: Living the Core Values of Thomas McAfee Funeral Homes

At Thomas McAfee Funeral Homes, our values are not just aspirational — they are lived, led, and passed down with intention. This commitment begins at the top, with Jay McAfee, whose leadership consistently emphasizes that who we are is just as important as what we do. Jay personally leads new employee orientations, as well as refresher sessions for all staff, presenting our core values, not as corporate policy, but as a deeply held philosophy that defines every aspect of our care. His message is clear: this is not just a job — it's a calling rooted in purpose, compassion, and trust.

Supporting this vision is our Family Experience Manager, Grant Berdan, who plays a vital role in helping team members understand how these values come to life in day-to-day service. Grant equips staff with practical tools and training to ensure that every family we serve feels seen, heard, and honored. Each month, all licensed funeral directors meet to share ideas and learn from one another. Grant's leadership ensures that our commitment to excellence is not just taught, but modeled with consistency and grace.

The McAfee family is quick to point out that without the dedication of many loyal associates, their heritage and reputation in the community would not be possible. Many of these associates have served for 20, 30, 40, or even over 50 years — a testament to the deep sense of purpose and pride they bring to their work. Thomas McAfee Funeral Homes honors this legacy of excellence, built over more than a century of service.

Founded in 1913, Thomas McAfee was a man of determined purpose, and a man of dreams. He envisioned a growing community and planned his establishment to meet the evolving needs of its people with grace and dignity. That vision — to provide personal, intimate, and dignified service to every family — remains unchanged today. However, he surely never dreamed Greenville would ever be one of the fastest growing cities in South Carolina, there would be four Thomas McAfee Funeral Home Chapels as well as a state of the art cremation center, or that his company would serve over 1500 families annually. It is this enduring philosophy of personal service, born of friendship, understanding, and commitment, that continues to guide the work we do.

At the center of all we do is the Family Experience — and everything we do flows from that sacred trust.

*****Integrity: The Unwavering Compass**

Integrity is the foundation upon which all else rests. It is our internal compass, guiding us to do the right thing — not because it's easy, but because it's necessary. It means being honest even in difficult conversations, owning mistakes with humility, and maintaining ethical standards no matter the pressure. In funeral service, where emotions run deep and trust is paramount, integrity isn't optional; it is essential.

*****Respect: Every Life Remembered**

We serve people at their most vulnerable time, and with that comes a sacred obligation to honor each life with dignity. Respect at Thomas McAfee means treating every associate with kindness, every professional relationship with honor, and every family — no matter their background or beliefs — as if they are our own. Every life deserves to be remembered, and respect ensures that remembrance is tender, truthful, and just.

*****Compassion: The Personal Flame**

Compassion is not something we perform — it is something we carry within. It is what allows us to look into the eyes of a grieving spouse or child and offer not just words, but presence. To truly serve in this

field is to care so deeply that healing becomes possible, even if just a little, for every family we meet. Compassion must be deeply personal — it is not policy, but passion.

***Education: A Responsibility, Not a Sale

We are educators, not salespeople. Funeral service is filled with unfamiliar decisions, and it is our duty to walk families through every option with clarity and care. But our role extends far beyond the arrangement room. We are committed to sharing knowledge with the community — through grief education, preplanning guidance, and open dialogue — because understanding empowers healing.

***Creativity & Innovation: The McAfee Moment

Creating meaningful experiences requires imagination. At Thomas McAfee, we celebrate “McAfee Moments” — personalized, thoughtful touches that make a service uniquely comforting. Whether it’s a tribute that honors a loved one’s favorite hobby or a ceremony that brings generations together, creativity ensures each family feels seen, known, and honored. Innovation keeps our care fresh, forward-thinking, and deeply human.

***Professionalism: The Signature of Excellence

Professionalism is not about appearance alone; it is about presence, preparation, and precision. Every interaction — with a colleague, a partner, or a grieving family — reflects who we are as a firm. We pursue excellence relentlessly through training, mentorship, and respectful communication. At its best, professionalism is the outward expression of our inner values — respectful, reliable, and deeply reverent.

***Conclusion: Purpose in Every Gesture

When you walk the halls of Thomas McAfee Funeral Homes, you feel something distinct — not just order or calm, but purpose. It is in the quiet way we carry grief with families, the thoughtful way we design experiences, and the steadfast way we hold to our values. The work we do is sacred. These values — Integrity, Respect, Compassion, Education, Creativity & Innovation, and Professionalism — are not simply ideals; they are our way of life.

Because in the end, it’s not about the service we perform — it’s about the families we serve. And every family, every time, deserves our very best. As it was in 1913, so it is today, we pursue excellence in everything we do.