

C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors, Danvers, Massachusetts

On Friday, March 28, 2025, C.R. Lyons & Sons Funeral Directors, in partnership with Care Dimensions Hospice, hosted our second annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Celebration. Held in the Care Dimensions Café, this event was created to honor a generation of American heroes who too often returned home from service to indifference or silence. It exemplifies our firm's ongoing commitment to meaningful community outreach, compassionate care, and the highest standards of funeral service—core values that align with the mission of the NFDA Pursuit of Excellence program.

The Welcome Home event was born in 2024 out of a desire to publicly recognize the courage and sacrifice of Vietnam veterans, a group whose contributions were not fully acknowledged at the time of their return. Now held annually in late March to coincide with National Vietnam War Veterans Day, the 2025 celebration was expanded and enhanced through careful planning and collaboration with Care Dimensions.

This year's event welcomed nearly 100 veterans and their family members for a morning of recognition, remembrance, and fellowship. Set in the warm and inviting Care Dimensions Café, guests were greeted with a breakfast buffet, live music provided by Care Dimensions' talented music therapists, and a heartfelt program of speakers. The event featured remarks from state elected officials, reflections from funeral home staff, and a powerful keynote address delivered by a local Vietnam veteran, whose words underscored the service and loyalty of those who served during a tumultuous period in our nation's history.

For C.R. Lyons & Sons, this initiative represents more than a single event—it is a cornerstone of our community outreach strategy and a reflection of the kind of excellence we strive for every day. By reaching out to a historically underserved group, we are fostering deeper connections with veterans and their families, many of whom are now entering a stage of life where funeral planning becomes more immediate. The event not only allows us to give back to those who gave so much, but it also establishes our funeral home as a compassionate and trusted community partner.

Partnering with Care Dimensions—a nonprofit hospice and palliative care leader—has been instrumental in the event's success. By combining our resources, staff, and networks, we were able to scale the program in 2025, offering a more robust and impactful experience. It also allowed for a blending of expertise: Care Dimensions brought clinical and therapeutic insight, while our team provided ceremonial structure and logistical leadership. Together, we created an event that was both emotionally resonant and professionally executed.

The 2025 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Celebration is a model of what can happen when funeral professionals move beyond the walls of the funeral home and into the heart of the community. It speaks directly to the ideals of the NFDA's Pursuit of Excellence program: innovation, meaningful service, and leadership through action. As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing this event annually, growing its reach, and deepening its impact.

In honoring those who were once forgotten, we are building something enduring—and that, we believe, is the true measure of excellence.

French Funerals and Cremations, Albuquerque, New Mexico

French Funerals and Cremations – Lomas, Albuquerque, New Mexico; French Funerals and Cremations - Wyoming, Albuquerque, New Mexico; French Funerals and Cremations – Golf Course, Albuquerque, New Mexico; French Funerals and Cremations – Gold Course, Albuquerque, New Mexico; French Funerals and Cremations, Rio Rancho, New Mexico

Honoring and Remembering Every Life: Our Inaugural Year with Wreaths Across America at Sunset Memorial Park

In 2024, French Funerals and Cremations proudly launched its involvement with Wreaths Across America (WAA) at Sunset Memorial Park, marking the beginning of what will be a lasting annual tradition. The decision to participate in this national program was born from a deeply rooted commitment and our mission, to honor and remember every life, particularly those of veterans who have selflessly served our country.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 600,000 veterans die each year in the United States (VA, 2023). While many are honored with traditional military funerals, countless others are laid to rest without formal recognition beyond the immediate family. Wreaths Across America fills this gap by ensuring that veterans are publicly remembered and honored each December with the placement of wreaths on their graves. Our participation was inspired by this mission and driven by our belief that every life is unique and worthy of respect. We believe remembrance should extend beyond the day of the funeral and should be a lifelong commitment.

Our funeral home spearheaded the local coordination of the WAA ceremony at Sunset Memorial Park. This involved securing sponsorships for wreaths, coordinating with the WAA national organization, and inviting families, veterans' groups, schools, churches, and civic organizations to participate in the event. We managed communications, volunteer recruitment, and logistical planning for the wreath-laying ceremony, which took place on National Wreaths Across America Day in December 2024.

Our inaugural event drew over 300 attendees and honored more than 800 veterans buried at Sunset Memorial Park. The ceremony included a moment of silence, remarks from a local Gold Star family, a color guard presentation, and live patriotic music. Volunteers placed wreaths on each veteran's grave, speaking each name aloud. This is a key aspect of the WAA mission to "say their name, and they live."

This initiative has significantly strengthened French's and Sunset Memorial Park's relationship with the community and enriched our staff's sense of purpose. It has positioned us not just as a service provider, but as a steward of remembrance and community healing. Staff members reported increased morale and pride in participating in an event that extends our role beyond the funeral and into the broader mission of honoring lives lived.

Families expressed deep gratitude for the public recognition of their loved ones, especially those whose service had previously gone unrecognized. Community members, including students and youth groups, were educated about the sacrifices of veterans and the importance of remembrance. The event fostered a powerful sense of unity, patriotism, and historical continuity. Josh Glass, the park's executive director said, "It is a very special day for a lot of families that have veterans here at the park and it is a training, learning opportunity, to teach young children and remind us as adults about what these veterans have done for us."

Our funeral home collaborated closely with the local VFW post, a nearby high school ROTC program, and several local churches and businesses. Each partner played a vital role. The VFW helped identify veteran graves, the ROTC provided ceremony support, and churches and businesses promoted the event and provided volunteers. We served as the coordinating body, ensuring seamless integration and execution.

As we prepare for our second year in 2025, we are already working on enhancements. These include expanding outreach to sponsor additional wreaths, and improving signage and accessibility at the cemetery. Our goal remains unwavering: to honor and remember every life.

Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc., Albion, New York

Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc., Holley, New York; Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc., Medina, New York; Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc., Middleport, New York; Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc., Gasport, New York

The citizens of the United States have been blessed throughout the years with men and women who stepped up to the plate and have served our Country with selflessness and bravery to defend our freedoms. We owe our Veterans everything for the sacrifices they have made throughout the years...some of them giving their life so we may enjoy the freedoms which we hold dear.

In Orleans County, NY there is a group called the Orleans County Joint Veterans Council which is overseen by a County Employee who is the Director of Veterans Services for the County. The Council has been in existence for the past 27 years. The Joint Veterans Council runs the Veterans Transport Service for Orleans County Veterans who need transportation to and from doctor appointments, shopping, and various other appointments free of charge to the veteran. The drivers, about 20 of them, are all VOLUNTEERS and are a mix of veterans and lay people alike. The service provides transportation to over 1000 medical appointments alone. They have a fleet of 5 minivans, all with extremely high mileage and constantly need repair and upkeep. All this is provided by donations and fundraisers.

Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc. along with Cooper Funeral Home (Cooper Merged with Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc. in April 2024.) work with the Joint Veterans Council throughout the year as they also provide Honor Guards for Military Honors at Cemetery Services with combined members of the Orleans County 3 American Legion Posts and 3 VFW Posts. The members of the Honor Guard, with an average age of 70-75, show up in all kinds of weather to honor their fallen comrades. They also volunteer one day a week to provide honors at the WNY National Cemetery in Corfu, NY...about 30 miles from Orleans County.

Like most Funeral Homes, Mitchell Family Cremations and Funerals, Inc. and Cooper Funeral Home keep their vehicles in a constant state of readiness with regular maintenance, upkeep and cleaning. Every 2-3 years, the vehicles are upgraded to newer models and the old ones generally traded in. For a second time, it was decided to donate one of the older minivans in the fleet to the Joint Veterans Council Veterans Transport Services. The 2017 Chrysler Pacifica Minivan had 73000 miles on it and had a value of around \$15000. Rather than sell it, the Funeral Home felt that the invaluable service provided to our local veterans could use another vehicle based on the demand for services.

The small gesture of donating a van to those who fought for our freedom and for use in taking those people to important appointments, meetings and engagements, pales in comparison to the sacrifices our veterans made for us. The impact this will make on the ability for veterans to go places when they may not ordinarily have transportation, is priceless and goes beyond any monetary donation. As a Nation and as a society, we cherish our freedoms. We love our Country, and we are forever in the debt of the men and women who fought, bled and died for every right and freedom we have and who have kept the United States of America the best Country in the World. Thank you to all our Veterans and service members...past and present!!

RATIONAL BEHIND IDEA

Via a donation, to provide invaluable transportation to our veterans who either don't have transportation or have no one to take them to their appointments and meetings. To allow the Joint Veterans Council and opportunity to upgrade their fleet of vehicles with NO COST.

BENEFIT PROVIDED TO FH AND STAFF

The personal satisfaction of a genuine thank you to those who have served and continue to serve our Country to maintain the freedoms we all enjoy as citizens of the United States.

BENEFITS PROVIDED TO THE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY AT LARGE

The ability for the veteran and his/her family to have transportation to and from appointments they normally wouldn't have access to. The ability to use a service which may free up a family to do other

things while the veteran has somebody with the ability to drive them to and wait for them during appointments and bring them home...giving some families a bit of respite and relieving them of the responsibilities which may add to family stress. Also, the ability for community members to volunteer to drive these men and women to their appointments...allowing the drivers to give a 'thank-you' back to the veteran community.

Moments Funeral Home, Lucedale, Mississippi

Moments Funeral Home, Leakesville, Mississippi

All of us at Moments Funeral Home are extremely honored to live where we do and have the freedoms that we have. We are proud US Citizens and try hard to not take these freedoms for granted. We are honored to serve military families during their time of grief and give back to Veteran programs as much as possible. We are humbled to arrange military honors at services and have a hard time not tearing up during the playing of Taps. We assist military families with ordering markers through the Department of Veteran Affairs. We allow those markers to be delivered to our facility and set them at no charge to the families. We have also hosted various events focused on military families in the past. This year, we once again had the honor of being able to host a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The United States Flag Code, Title 4, Section 8k states- "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

No, this is nothing new. However, this is an event that our community loves and for a funeral home such as ours in the area, we are able to provide the perfect venue. We provided drop boxes at both of our locations, Lucedale and Leakesville. We promoted to donation of flags through social media, or radio program and the local newspaper for a few months. The purchased elephant trunk drop boxes at Home Depot and had a local print shop wrap those for us. See the photo below. We received several inquiries about the boxes. Other organizations such as the local VA and others were interested in offering the same. We received several flags and had to empty the boxes on several occasions. We solicited the help of local Veterans to make sure our program was done properly and with the utmost respect. Hammer Fallon is the current JROTC instructor at George County High School. Mr. Fallon retired from the United States Army after several years serving domestic and abroad. Mr. Michael Walker served in the United States Marine. We also took care of services for his wife, Mrs. Vickie Walker, when she passed away some time ago. We keep in contact with many of our families, and have become good friends with Mr. Walker. These two gentlemen assisted us in t preparing the flags for retirement. We gathered all the donations and carefully went through each one. We did, of course, receive some flags that did not qualify for the program. We received state specific flags and military branch specific decorative flags. We also received many flags that were decorations in nature only. The American Flags were each folded and made ready.

Our event was hosted late one evening so the sun was low and the temperature was not so hot. Bro. Stephen, from our staff, was our host and kept the ceremony moving. The veterans who participated lowered the flag from in front of our building and raised a new one. We had the performance of Taps and all recited the Pledge of Allegiance. We offered bottled water and a variety of tea. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to participate in the burning of the flags.

We had a wonderful Flag Retirement Ceremony. We received positive feedback from the community and will continue to host this event again in the future.

O'Donnell Cremations Funerals Celebrations, Salem, Massachusetts

O'Donnell Cremations Funerals Celebrations, Danvers, Massachusetts

Annual Veteran Breakfast Program: Salute To Veterans

One of the most impactful programs we have implemented is our Annual Veteran Breakfast. The program aims to honor the service of veterans, provide them with valuable information regarding burial benefits, and foster a sense of community among those who have served our country.

Rationale Behind the Program:

We do this to honor our local veterans, their families, and those that we have lost. Our owner's father was a veteran and therefore this service is very dear to his heart. The program provides veterans with valuable information regarding burial benefits and fosters a sense of community among those who have served our country.

Program Description:

The event is held each year right before Veterans Day, and it includes a full breakfast, a performance of the national anthem, "Taps," and an ROTC presentation. The highlights of the breakfast were our guest speaker, MSG Kevin Holland and our owner, Anthony O'Donnell's speech.

One of the most significant moments of the breakfast is the presentation of the Minuteman Award, given to individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary dedication to veterans. Last year's recipient was John Collins, a volunteer who has performed "Taps" at over 7,700 funeral services, logging more than 14,000 hours in the process. It was very difficult choosing with 35 applicants, but we felt John was most deserving of the award this year.

In addition to honoring veterans, we distribute annual challenge coins as a symbol of our appreciation. We also provide families with critical information regarding veteran burial benefits, ensuring they are aware of the resources available to them. The breakfast continues to grow each year. This past year had 450 attendees.

Partnership with the Chamber of Commerce:

The success of the event is due in large part to our collaboration with the Northshore Chamber of Commerce. Initially, the Northshore Chamber of Commerce and our funeral home hosted separate veterans' breakfasts, but four years ago, the organizations decided to collaborate and create one larger event. This partnership has been invaluable, allowing us to combine resources and reach a broader audience. The Northshore Chamber of Commerce assists with logistical planning, outreach, and promotion, while we handle the direct registration and engagement with veterans and their families. Together, we have created an event that not only honors our veterans but also strengthens the ties within our community.

Benefits to the Funeral Home and Staff:

The program enables us to showcase our commitment to veterans and their families. The sense of camaraderie and shared values that comes from hosting such an important event enriches our workplace culture and enhances staff morale, especially the veterans on our own staff.

Benefits to Families and the Community:

For the families and veterans in attendance, the event offers a sense of recognition and appreciation including the Golden Star Wives and Local Post 113. We also have the opportunity to work with community leaders such as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Secretary, the Essex County District Attorney, a Homicide Detective and several local Directors of Veterans Services.

Improvements and Changes:

Since the inception of the Annual Veteran Breakfast, the program has grown significantly. We have added the ROTC performance from Lynn, MA, Missing Man table, and military tank display, which have been incredibly popular with attendees. Every year, we refine the event, incorporating feedback from veterans and families to make the breakfast an even more memorable and meaningful occasion.

Radney Funeral Home, Alexander City, Alabama

Langley Funeral Home, Camp Hill, Alabama

Honoring Veterans: Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home's Tribute Program

Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home have embarked on a noble journey to honor the brave men and women who have served in the armed forces. Recognizing the sacrifices and dedication of these veterans, the funeral home has introduced a thoughtful program that not only pays tribute to their service but also ensures the respectful disposal of old and tattered flags.

In this heartfelt initiative, Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home have implemented a system to collect and honorably dispose of tattered flags. These flags once proudly flew and are now given a final mission of respect and dignity. The funeral home has placed barrels at both locations to encourage the community to participate by depositing their worn-out flags.

For veterans who have chosen cremation, the program offers an exceptional tribute. The collected flags are draped across the veterans prior to the cremation process, symbolizing the nation's gratitude and respect for their service. This serves as a profound reminder of the honorable life they led and the sacrifices they made.

To further commemorate the veterans, Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home have designed a special certificate to present to the veterans family. The certificate contains a star that has been cut out from the very flag that accompanied the veteran during their final journey. This star serves as a lasting memento, a tangible piece of the honor and respect bestowed upon their loved one. It is a cherished symbol of the veteran's service and the nation's gratitude.

The success of the program relies heavily on the engagement and support of the community. By placing barrels in both funeral homes, Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home have made it convenient for individuals, businesses, churches and schools to contribute their old and tattered flags. This gesture not only helps in the respectful disposal of the flags but also fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility in honoring our veterans.

Radney Funeral Home and Langley Funeral Home's program is a beautiful example of how we can honor our veterans with dignity and respect. By involving the community and providing meaningful tribute to those who served, we have created a lasting legacy of gratitude and remembrance. This initiative ensures that the sacrifices of our veterans is never forgotten and that their service is honored in the most respectful manner possible.