**Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre, Madison, Indiana**

**Grief Program Expands & Emphasizes Social Interaction for Widows, Widowers**

• Observations of recent widows and widowers smiling, chatting and sharing experiences about travel, hometown roots, children and careers of yesterday.

• Farewell gestures encompassing hugs, handshakes and waves.

• Cards expressing gratitude as well as personal thank-you’s from their children for “getting Mom/Dad out.”

• Online posts of their participation prompting outreach from current friends, old neighbors and high school buddies.

• Traditional grief support options attracting low attendance and/or participation.

When added up, these individual components prompted Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre in 2024-25 to re-examine its grief program and place more emphasis on social interaction for recent widows and widowers. With the emphasis primarily on psychological resources, our previous offerings featured the traditional services of grief support meetings, printed material by authorities and private counseling. Although not an instant, inclusive panacea, the enhanced social concept lets our new widows and widowers gradually experience the road to acceptance and normalcy with those walking the same journey. And even when a three to six hour outing ends for the day, its impact continues on with participants having pleasant memories and sharing happy talk about the event with family members and friends in their private, inner circle. At least for a while, thoughts of the spouse’s death, personal stress and isolation take a backseat.

Without question, some new widows and widowers do need and desire conventional grief aids and Morgan & Nay certainly maintains those options. However, we certainly observed and sensed the need to implement a more, healthy “moving forward and accepting” concept.

An additional, internal factor that also influenced our expanded social thrust entailed how the death of a spouse significantly differs from the death of a parent or sibling although the latter one is much, much loved and deeply missed. But in the days or weeks following the death of a parent or sibling, there is a spouse at home to extend compassion, address the hurt, listen and do things together. That powerful support arm no longer prevails when the death involves a spouse. Although children, relatives, neighbors and friends still reach out, understandingly they must return to their routine lives and employment responsibilities. For most widows and widowers, the former house of two – filled with laughter, conversation and plans - becomes a lonely structure for one. The four part-time associates who primarily coordinate the events/activities side of Morgan & Nay’s grief program are all widows and they reference that point often.

The expanded Morgan & Nay social concept spans the entire calendar year, thus always available to new widows and widowers. Activities and events range from lunch outings at a rural, bucolic bistro, holiday luncheons, Christmas show, day trips to the unique. None of the endeavors focus on grief per se nor incorporate counseling advice, but rather create and promote happy fellowship and social interaction – the sunshine of life. The aura of grief will still be there when they get home.

For several of the activities, Morgan & Nay mails personal invitations (in hand-addressed envelopes) and always creates an interactive program for each endeavor. For the holiday and luncheon gatherings, we also encourage invitees to bring a guest along to provide an extra comfort zone for the invitee. This gesture encourages attendance, plus lets Morgan & Nay strengthen the bond with old friends and clients as well as meet new acquaintances. And regardless of event type, there are Morgan & Nay AfterCare associates in attendance to make sure every guest feels involved and welcomed. No one ever sits nor stands alone. The social concept, as well as the company mission, would fail if a guest felt isolated or regret that he/she came. For most of the events, the Morgan & Nay personnel are part-time employees who comprise our AfterCare team, thus no negative impact on the company’s daily operation nor full-time employment force.

A Brief Overview of the Social Diversion Activities

Stream Cliff Farm Luncheon

Each late spring and mid-fall, Morgan & Nay invites recent widows/widowers to be our guests at a quaint, bucolic bistro, embellished with flowers everywhere, a large herb garden, primitive antiques, concrete figurines and a savory sandwich/dessert menu that never fails to please. The setting’s ambiance with its many simple but unique features not only soothes the soul but prompts conversations entailing memories, experiences and questions. Although the eatery only looms about 15 miles away from the funeral home, many of our guests have always heard about it, but never been there.

Christmas Luncheon

For one day in early December, the gathering room in our branch chapel totally changes style and exudes Christmas with festive table décor, Christmas carols playing in the background and Morgan & Nay associates decked out in festive red and green attire. The program, designed and implemented by the Morgan & Nay AfterCare team, focuses on the happy aspects of the holiday. Segments range from most popular Christmas songs, Christmas memories that now bring a smile – such as the lights wouldn’t burn but the turkey did or Santa forgot to tighten the bolts on the bicycle wheel, family traditions, must-have foods at the holiday table, family or cultural customs passed down through time and/or generations and the list goes on. Morgan & Nay associates assemble the meal from items purchased from local venues or caterers. The lunch-stye menu is not elaborate nor expensive but nice and always with emphasis on presentation. The event is not about the lunch, but the ambiance and fellowship. For the Christmas 2024 hospitality token for guests to take home, Morgan & Nay gifted each attendee a small ceramic Christmas tree ornament featuring a photo of his/her spouse. Several attendees contacted Morgan & Nay days later to request an additional ornament for a child or family member. The ornament was an Amazon product, under $2, with the photo retrieved and printed from our files, thus an inexpensive gesture with a meaningful touch.

Valentine Luncheon

The Valentine luncheon resembles the Christmas luncheon in concept, format and social outreach, except everything sports red with lots of hearts. Again, no focus on grief per se but rather segments of happy topics with guest interaction purposely designed. Segments range from history of Valentine’s Day, different Valentine customs around the world, most popular Valentine gifts, readings of humorous “vinegar valentines” of the past, extravagant gifts by celebrities and the rich, the top love songs of all times (with everyone even singing some of the verses!), memories of how guests met their forever valentine, places and/or unique locations where guests tied the knot and amusing Valentine happenings (such as the husband recycling the same 99 cents Valentine card every year of their marriage – a 2025 story) and the list goes on. For the 2025 Valentine hospitality gift for guests to take home, Morgan & Nay presented each attendee with a small organdy sack of assorted chocolates, of course accented with a delicate red bow with embossed hearts.

Christmas Show

Every recent widow/widower, as well as all other Morgan & Nay clients who have lost a loved one since the past Christmas, receives complimentary tickets to the Morgan & Nay Community Christmas Show which features a musical artist/group, plus a 30-minute “SingAlong of Christmas Carols” prior to the concert. There is no limit on number of free tickets whether it be for one, two or more for his/her immediate family members. This gesture differs somewhat as it promotes social interaction and camaraderie within family amidst a joyous, stress-free environment, a most valuable component in the grief process.

Day Trip Series

Now enjoying its 12th season with 149 outings completed as of June 2025, the Morgan & Nay Day Trip Series hosts an outing to an area attraction once a month. Representing all facets of the community, the participant roster always includes lots of widows and widowers with that single-life status several years old in many situations. Unlike our other social interactive options, this popular activity (which is detailed in another category) does entail a charge for participants but for the most part money is not an issue for most of our recent widows and widowers. Getting involved and getting out is the biggest obstacle. The trips feature all types of attractions, from historic sites, musical productions, sports, Christmas extravaganzas to art exhibits. This social diversion option certainly accommodates the fellowship and stress-free environment needed by really all widows and widowers, not just the recent ones.

Fishing Trip

Definitely a popular outing with our recent widowers, a fishing outing to a nearby farmer’s pond certainly hits the spot. Most of the participants have the essential gear with Morgan & Nay’s primary tasks being to do the organizing, fix a sack lunch and bring the worms. A great day of fellowship, nature and big fish stories of the past!

Spring Flowers & Growing Tips

A spring, gardening gathering always prompts a lot of internal sunshine for our new widows. They bring their favorite flower pot and Morgan & Nay provides the potting soil, flowers and a picnic style lunch. To add a little wisdom to the event, Morgan & Nay also invites a member of the local garden club or an area greenhouse to share growing tips. With perhaps a little potting soil on their shoes, every guest goes home with a happy heart, some useful growing tips and a colorful container of flowers to enjoy as the days lengthen and the grieving heart heals.

These social activities with a therapeutic impact also generate another positive side effect for which Morgan & Nay can only take partial responsibility. Our company posts follow-up coverage of every event on our Facebook page, which has 8,000 plus followers. We try to include a photo of every activity participant, along with his/her name. The participants look forward to the coverage and so many, many receive likes and comments from current and old friends that bring joy to the soul. Morgan & Nay obviously cannot take credit for the positive outreach by others, but it certainly brightens the day for our new widows and widowers and attests to the healthy benefit of social interaction.

From a company perspective, our social emphasis generates multiple dividends in addition to the principal focus of accommodating recent widows and widowers. The concept lets us bond more closely with the families we serve, connects us to potential clients and certainly casts Morgan & Nay in a positive limelight within the community. The bonding mileage and community exposure far exceed the benefits derived from most advertising and marketing expenditures. Except for the Day Trip Series which is advertised once every six months in the local bi-weekly newspaper, we do not encounter any advertising expenses for these activities. Personal mailings, Facebook posts, in-house flyers/brochures and word-of-mouth do the connecting.

Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre certainly validates the need and maintains the traditional grief resources for recent widows and widowers, but the increased response, enthusiasm and therapeutic impact of the company’s expanded social direction attest to its value as well. The two approaches are sisters with different formats but the same quest.

Wanting to be part of that force, Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre certainly aligns with the paraphrased grief adage that “It takes strength, willingness and interaction with others, the human side of life, for a person to make his way through grief, grab ahold of life again and let those influences pull him forward.”