

Worlein Funeral Home, Austin, MN

I. Pursuit of Excellence Essay – 2016

Worlein Funeral Home Little Free Library

“A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never-failing spring in a desert.” Andrew Carnegie

On June 9, 2016 Worlein Funeral Home of Austin, MN became home to a very special library. A Little Free Library was proudly installed on the grounds of Worlein Funeral Home as a resource for all who are facing the challenges of loss. This Little Library is unique in that it is filled exclusively with grief and loss resources. At Worlein Funeral Home we were continually asking ourselves how we might better share our resources with the entire community and part of our answer was a LITTLE FREE LIBRARY.

In 2009 Todd Bol of Hudson, Wisconsin built a tribute to his mother – a teacher who loved to read. The model of a one room school house was filled with books and put on a post in his front yard with a sign FREE BOOKS. Bol built several more and gave them away to family and friends, thus the beginning of Little Free Libraries.

Here in Austin, a city of 24,000 located in Southeastern Minnesota, the Little Free Library program is offered through the Mower/Freeborn County chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Upon contacting the Habitat for Humanity Community Development Coordinator, Brent Johnson, we learned that a new batch of Little Libraries was scheduled to be built by volunteers from our local YMCA. Paul Worlein, owner of Worlein Funeral Home, is also a very active member of the YMCA board and he felt this collaboration fit our project perfectly. We placed our order and picked up our Little Free Library on 3-29-2016. Our purchase of a Little Free Library benefits the Freeborn-Mower Chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

The fun was about to begin as our Little Library needed to be decorated. We decided to make our Little Library somewhat of a replica of Worlein Funeral Home. A sample of our building's siding was matched to a paint sample and then the paint number, along with a shingle sample and picture of our building were given to friend and artist Sandy Jones.

Choosing the placement of the Little Library became of utmost importance. Easy access and visibility were our main concerns. After receiving an OK from U-DIG, a post was placed. Paul Worlein primed and painted the post. The decorated Little Library was then put in place and

now proudly stands on the west side of Worlein Funeral Home. Our Little Free Library is easily accessible to EVERYONE, 24/7, whether by car, on foot, biking or boarding. People of all ages, experiencing all types of loss, whether the death of a loved one, divorce, loss of a job or loss of physical capabilities, now have a source of help and hope. The Little Library will also be a resource for those trying to comfort someone who is grieving, and may not know how or where to begin.

The Little Free Library is a way for us to help build a sense of community as well as an opportunity for us to share our knowledge. Many individuals grieving a loss need to rely on self-care as they may find themselves without a support system. Our hope is that the Little Free Library will be especially helpful to someone who is isolated, alone, or private in their grieving. Having access to these resources may give griever's a sense of control, no matter where they are in the grieving process. Survivors of grief and loss have told us that their favorite book became their lifeline and they carried it with them throughout a large portion of their grief work. Many grief books contain great wisdom and can speak to us on a personal level and many people find it affirming to read what others say about what they are experiencing.

The Little Library is stocked with a variety of resources including books offering practical coping tips, religious themed items, bilingual books and pamphlets, children's books including activity and coloring books, Care Notes (easy to pocket and carry with you), copies of our award winning DVD "Embracing Grief", Caring Voices cards with a 24 hour toll free hot line number, seasonal items relating to grief and the holidays, journaling pages and fliers advertising the dates and times of our grief support sessions, etc.

The Little Library also provides "healed griever's" and others in our community who feel they no longer need their grief resources a chance to share them with others as Little Libraries encourage the "take" and "leave" idea.

Because no one is immune to grief, it is our sincere belief that the Worlein Funeral Home Little Library will fill a need in our community by providing help, hope, and healing to all, no matter where they may be in their grief journey.

"If you learn from a loss, you have not lost." Austin O'Malley

UPDATE:

EXTRA!!! EXTRA!!! READ ALL ABOUT IT!!!

Since the installation of the Little Free Library, the following has happened:

- Our local newspaper, The Austin Daily Herald, visited Worlein Funeral Home to do a feature article on our new Little Free Library. On Monday, June 13, 2016, the article ran on the front page, letting the community and surrounding area know that grief support materials were available for their use.
- On June 16, 2016, The American Funeral Director magazine contacted Worlein Funeral Home after they had seen our feature article. They expressed interest in running a piece on the Little Free Library in an upcoming edition of their magazine. Worlein Funeral Home owner Paul Worlein and Community Services Director Mary Kittelson gave a phone interview to provide information for the feature in the American Funeral Director publication.
- On June 16, 2016, CBS affiliate KIMT 3 News contacted Worlein Funeral Home after seeing the feature in the Austin Daily Herald and wanted to interview owner Paul Worlein and Community Services Director Mary Kittelson. A KIMT reporter and photographer visited Worlein Funeral Home that same day and conducted the interview, which ran on their televised newscast on June 16 and June 17, 2016, informing the southern Minnesota and northern Iowa viewing area about our Little Free Library. The interview is also available on the KIMT website, with the capability of linking it to the Worlein Funeral Home website.

