

Chambers and James Funeral Home thought long and hard about our Best of the Best Entry for the 2017 Pursuit of Excellence and this is our conclusion. We call it our James Garden. The garden and the rationale are not a grand parade or weeks in the news; but an idea to change the conversation and change lives.

The James Garden is an area of blank space of concrete that needed to have a splash of color, but adding more flowers was not the answer. Although flowers look nice, we saw no increased value in them. We planted a garden. Keeping in the same budget with flowers, we were able to purchase tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, and numerous herbs. This area of the funeral home is really hitting home with our clients. Everyone talks about the tomatoes and the large herbs.

The garden is based on a potted garden and has a sign (temp cemetery marker) that reads, "Please feel free to take something home." This was the rationale behind the idea; "Our home to yours," making the funeral home which is a business more of a homelike atmosphere.

The garden takes me back to my childhood. I always remember going over to my grandmother's house and running to the garden to see the progress. Everybody has a story that needs to be told about their grandparents' garden. We love to hear stories and in the stories we are able to help people plan better more unique services. Just because they saw the garden on the way in to the funeral home, it triggers a thought of better times. This makes it a win for us and the families.

You can see the progress we have made so far this year. The progress of the garden is what makes this idea so innovative, because the people need to come back and check on the garden. We are so amazed of the children and adults who talk about our garden and ask how it is doing.

In the larger picture of the funeral home industry, we are sometimes segregated in a black cloth or not being up with the times. This garden brings us into the everyday life. Across our Nation we are hear more and more about the farm to table movement.

This garden is not supplying a restaurant, but it is providing a warm conversation piece in addition to providing value to our guests and families. These temporary items are tomatoes and peppers which go home with our guest. Once the vegetable is at home it continues to be a piece or pieces that are talked about over dinner or neighborhood fences. This is our value of the funeral home being the central piece of life. We are the conversation but not because we have done something wrong but because we have created a "WOW" factor that others are not creating. In addition to having to take a piece or item home the garden creates the value of comforting and teaching children about gardening. I am able to take a child outside and give them a piece of spearmint. I am able to totally change a thought process and make a lasting impression on kids. This is the true benefit of the garden. It is change lives for the better.

In conclusion, the James Garden should be the Best of the Best for its innovative and simplistic duplicated format so that we as a funeral industry have a new unique way to touch people's lives with grounds that we already possess. The James Garden in are eyes will someday soon be in the *Better Homes and Garden* magazine. The garden provides unique and individual way to bring funeral service into the conversation not just about death but making it about life. The value, uniqueness and conversation piece of our idea truly make us the Best of the Best for a simple idea.



James Garden

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Chambers & James
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