

2017 NFDA Pursuit of Excellence Awards: Best of Best

## Category: BEST OF THE BEST

### STEM PRESENTATIONS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: “The Science Behind Funerals.”

#### *Rationale behind the idea:*

Spicer-Mullikin serves families in New Castle County, Delaware. We are always looking for useful ways to contribute to our local communities, and to continue to be an active, visible part of the neighborhoods where we live and work.

We identified an opportunity to outreach to high school students in our county – and worked together with a few high school teachers on creating a “curriculum” focusing on “The Science Behind Funerals.” The teachers were enthusiastic and helpful, and very encouraging about us presenting to their respective classes.

#### *Detailed description of the STEM program:*

We put together an interactive 45-minute PowerPoint show on the science, math and the technologies involved in our profession as funeral directors. We included interesting facts about our industry, the history of embalming, the social sciences we use every day, the math (working with budgets) and even the engineering that goes into digging a grave. The presentation we created was specifically for high school students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) classes. We have had the privilege of presenting to 2 large high schools in the area:

Wednesday, May 24 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Conrad Schools of Science in Newport, Delaware and on Tuesday, June 6 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Middletown High School in Middletown, Delaware.

#### **We had two main objectives:**

- 1) To introduce this generation (aged 16-17) to the funeral home industry – what we do, who we are and from an academic (STEM) and business level, *how* we do what we do. (Typically, a high school audience does not have much interaction with funeral homes, unless of course, they are attending a funeral.) By engaging high school students about our business and our outreach within the community, we believe we are dispelling myths that may exist and possibly encouraging some of the students to work in the industry.
- 2) To encourage the younger generation to think about ‘what’s on their bucket list’ – professionally and personally – and to take the time to consider what goals they would

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like to accomplish. At the end of our presentations, we handed out ‘bucket list’ notebooks to each student. We also believe the notebook may be the catalyst for a discussion at home with their family members, about funeral services, pre-planning and achieving bucket lists as a family.

The STEM presentations were made on Wednesday, May 24 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Conrad Schools of Science in Newport, Delaware and on Tuesday, June 6 from 11 to 12:30 p.m. at Middletown High School in Middletown, Delaware. The licensed funeral directors who presented to the students were: Matthew Smith, John Meyer and Mitch Jackson. They have a combined 100 years of experience behind them in the funeral industry, representing both the business and scientific perspectives. The PowerPoint presentation and discussion included the following highlights:

- STEM and the Funeral Industry
- Science of embalming and Cremation – how does it work exactly?
- Career Path of a Funeral Director
- Future of Funerals – social media’s impact on funeral services
- The Bucket List

### Benefits provided to the community:

*“I hope that we can continue this relationship and opt for another presentation next year to my next group of Biotechnology II students. Providing them with real world experiences helps give them a visualization of how the content I teach is helpful.” – Cristin Brown, Biotechnology and Chemistry Teacher, Conrad Schools of Science*

Our presentation and outreach benefitted the students in several ways: -

- Raised their awareness of how relevant STEM classes are applicable to the funeral industry;
- Debunked myths that may exist among the generation about what working in a funeral home is all about;
- Encouraged students to think about a career as a funeral director;
- We inspired them to live life to the full, to create a bucket list and to accomplish their goals!

Here is a sample of the feedback we received following the presentations:

- “I thought your presentation was very interesting. I liked the fact that you were very professional. Also, the way you spoke made the topic somewhat lighter.” ~Lex Z.
- “I like how you fully explained your career and what you had to do to become a funeral director and I liked your bucket list you gave me.” ~ Brian K.
- “Good information about the engineering behind the graves and embalming process. Lots of information. I would like to hear more about the science.” ~Tatiana T.
- “What I like was that you told us about the behind scenes that goes into directing funerals that none of us realized.” ~Meolah D.

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### Benefits to Funeral Home:

Spicer-Mullikin has seen several benefits from the STEM presentations to date: Not only did we reach outside our comfort zone of discussing what we do with a generation we normally don't interact with on a professional basis, but we learned what teen-aged students are thinking about when it comes to death and dying. We also realized that their curiosity level about what we do as funeral directors was quite high, and lastly, that we may have encouraged the younger generation to embrace what a funeral service really means, and to possibly even consider how significant it is to pre-plan.

In summary, Spicer-Mullikin enjoyed working with the school environment to share our knowledge and experience. The teachers we worked with noted that it was refreshing to have guest speakers with a different perspective of real-world experience in a career that is often not discussed with their students. We hope our STEM presentations will encourage the next generation to consider the services provided by the funeral industry and how we can make a positive impact on the communities in which we live.



*Spicer-Mullikin licensed funeral directors and STEM presenters, L-R, Mitch, John and Matthew with Cristin Brown, Biotechnology and Chemistry Teacher, Conrad Schools of Science*

*More photographs on following page:*

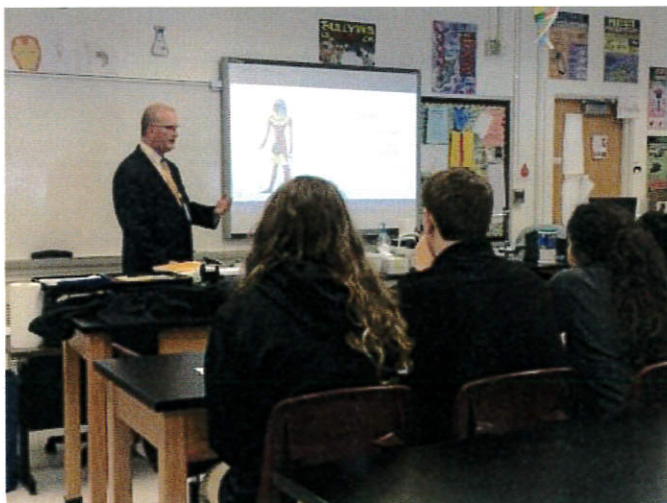
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## The Science Behind Funerals - Gallery:

Visuals from the presentation:



Above - Matthew Smith introduces the presentation.  
Right - John Meyer answers students' questions



Left - Students received a BUCKET LIST note pad after each presentation.

Mitch Jackson teaches STEM students about the history of embalming