

William Villanova

National Funeral Directors Association

Pursuit of Excellence Award, Best of the Best Award, Richard Myers Pinnacle Award

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Frank E. Campbell – The Funeral Chapel: The 121st Year of Innovation

Since 1898 the name, Frank E. Campbell – The Funeral Chapel, has been known for Excellence when it comes to customer service and as a Pioneer of Funeral Profession Innovation.

In keeping with this rich history, Frank E. Campbell – The Funeral Chapel made a thoughtful commitment to support *Culture, Music and the Arts* that started September 2018. For 120 years Funeral Service throughout the world has experienced countless changes and our profession in New York City has experienced many, if not all of them. Variations of Religious Beliefs and Cultural Standards come and go, and through it all we remained ahead of these changing conditions by being proactive and a catalyst for the future of our profession while remaining responsive to the needs of our families. Because of all these changes funeral directors throughout the world have modified the way they think and the progressive ones began to reimagine their funeral home capabilities. I am one of those progressive funeral directors that has realized there are limitless possibilities of our approximately 17,000 square foot funeral home situated on the corner of Madison Avenue and 81st Street.

Our first event. After reviewing months of schedules we confirmed that an event in our Main Chapel on any Saturday night should not impact the needs of our client families. Next we discussed the theme of the concert and we easily decided on *Winter*. So the first Annual Winter Concert was conceived. Now for the musicians. We met with our long time music director Krystof Witek and together created a music program for this intrepid event. We also needed to provide refreshments. Since we lobbied and passed NYS legislation allowing food and beverage in funeral homes just a couple years before, a full complement of Refreshments and Lite Fare were ordered. We worked with our designer and created a custom ad copy for publication and then emailed and mailed invitations to our “Friends of Frank E. Campbell”. It is now Saturday December 8, 2018 at 5:30pm, the musicians (Violin, Flute, Piano and Opera Singer) are all set, red poinsettia plants accented the chapel and a tables with lite refreshments ready to be served and then, the first person walks through the door on Madison Avenue. I welcomed approximately 65 people, introduced our musicians and the concert began promptly at 6pm. Shortly after 7pm after the applause ended, the first person I spoke with asked “when will the next concert be?” I took that question and many other positive comments from that evening as a mandate to host another event.

Our next event was an Art Exhibit on February 26th and 28th, 2019. This event was most exciting since the timing could not have been any better. The artist was Cynthia Talmadge, she just finished a 2 month installation at a gallery in the Village and she was able to bring her paintings of Frank E. Campbell – The Funeral Chapel to her iconic place of inspiration, 1076 Madison Avenue New York, NY. For two nights we had hundreds of New Yorkers make their way to our Presidential Library to view these magnificent works of art created by a local artist. The setting was perfect for everyone to stay for an extended amount of time and enjoy their friends and admire the paintings. Seeing the print ad invitation, Patty Marx from the New Yorker Magazine came to interview the artist and the person who put this concept together. A few weeks after the event, the article ran in the New Yorker and the paintings found homes on walls throughout NYC. We still hold out hope that one will make its way back to our corner.

In anticipation of changing seasons and fulfilling our commitment made back in 2018 we then scheduled a Spring Concert for May 18th, 2019. Another call to our music director and I thought we were done, or so I thought. He had a question for me. “Have you ever heard of classical tango?” I said not in the same sentence and he replied “trust me, I won’t let you down”. Once again we ordered refreshments and lite fare for our guests. So in addition to the violin, piano and flute we now added a bandoneon and an upright string bass. Even more exciting, the string bass came with the 2018 Grammy Award winning musician, Pedro Giraudo. So you can say Krystof didn’t let me down. The concert began at 6pm with approximately the same amount of people as the winter concert and at the end we received more of the same positive responses and requests for more events. The conversations with our guests were made even more special as we handed everyone who attended a potted African violet plant as a memory of this fun and exciting concert.

These events are only possible through the unwavering commitment of our entire Frank E. Campbell Team. The exacting detail by which each task is handled is truly not illustrated in the aforementioned text. Like each Funeral, each Event we arrange and execute begins with a clear vision that is shared with our team so they can each envision it and understand their key role in the fulfillment of our responsibility to *our families, our community and our profession*.