

**Arrington Funeral Directors & Crematory
Jackson, Tennessee**

OBITUARYSHARE: THE DIGITAL CONNECTION

With the steadily increased use of social media over the past several years, the popularity of newsprint has declined rapidly across the country. Where newspapers were once king and were the primary source where families would share news and information of their loved one's death, that role is now filled by social media, especially Facebook. ObituaryShare was born from recognizing the opportunity for a new platform to serve families' needs by publishing obituaries in a better way. We all want to assist families in celebrating one's life and must also do what we can to continue building our marketing and brand.

Bob Arrington, president and founder of Arrington Funeral Directors of Jackson, TN, and Roy Heatherly of Monroe, LA, a thirty-plus year Gannett Newspaper executive for three Gannett newspapers in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kansas, joined forces to develop a better method for families to honor their loved ones by promoting obituaries through social media as an alternative to newspapers. Bob brought his funeral expertise and Roy brought his newspaper expertise to the table.

The concept was to strategically post the obituary on the funeral home's Facebook page and lead traffic to that funeral home's website. ObituaryShare is the engine that makes this happen. The obituary is written and sent to ObituaryShare via their portal, and the obituary will be reviewed to determine what audience would have the most interest in the deceased. We then target and promote the obituary to that audience. We do not wait for viewers to search and find the obituary on the funeral home website or Facebook page; ObituaryShare finds them. Once the viewer opens the obituary on Facebook, they are taken to the funeral home's obituary page on their website. The main goal of ObituaryShare is to drive viewers to that funeral home, both on the Facebook page and ultimately to the funeral home's website.

By strategically targeting an audience, the engagements and click-through rate have been exceptional. The average click-through rate from a Facebook page to a corresponding website is 1% - 2%, whereas we are experiencing 13%-15%. We are also driving the audience to spend more time on that website. The average visit to a funeral home obituary through the website is 42 seconds; we are experiencing 56 seconds. ObituaryShare can track how the reader is spending their time with that obituary, whether they are writing a tribute, a note to the family, or lighting a candle. Because of this, Arrington Funeral Directors has recently added a link at the bottom of the obituary, sending them directly to our pre-planning page on our website for them to consider pre-planning. We have experienced very positive pre-need traffic, driving increased interest in our pre-planning services.

The families are the beneficiaries, as well. Several obituaries were viewed by more than 15,000 people. With one family we served, the gentleman was active in the TN Tire Dealers Association, his wife was a thirty-year realtor, and his daughter-in-law was on the board of the TN Banker's Association. That obituary resulted in over 16,000 views, as ObituaryShare targeted and promoted to all three groups. We did not wait on those groups to try to "find" the obituary; the obituary found them.

We have continually modified and improved this platform process, working with and listening to test markets. The simplicity of the user experience is something we pride ourselves on. Over the past 3 years, we have tested ObituaryShare in several funeral homes in Kansas and Tennessee, and from that, we changed and improved several processes. Based on the feedback we received, we now offer a texting feature. Once the obituary is posted, the family will receive the obituary via text. We are committed to evolving with current technology and automating ObituaryShare as much as possible for continued ease of use for our funeral homes.

Our followers in the last three years have grown over ten times. Families are so pleased with the response that, every week, we have visitors thank us for sharing their loved one's information. In addition, we have at-need families now making sure we will do for them what they have seen us do for others on social media.

To help the funeral home see their results, ObituaryShare provides monthly analytical data reports that tell them who their audience is, their ages and genders, and what devices they are using, among other items of interest. This information is designed to assist each funeral home with its marketing, especially pre-need.

ObituaryShare is a win, win, win. The family wins because more people see the obituary, and most importantly, it is targeted to those who would have an interest. It is also a win for the community because more people become informed and educated about deaths that would be of interest to them. Lastly, it is a win for the funeral home by helping build its brand and offering more services to the families and the community. As funeral directors, we could not hope for a better opportunity to create positive and effective outcomes for all.

Bolock Funeral Home and Crematory
Cresco, Pennsylvania
Molden Funeral Chapel, Bristol, PA

Preventing Compassion Fatigue Among Funeral Directors

After enduring the hardships and uncertainties brought upon us by the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, this year, 2023, has finally felt like life and our surroundings have normalcy again. It is a year that feels like a breath of fresh air, as our lives slowly but surely return to a semblance of what we once considered normal. Various aspects of our lives that we took for advantage of are now seen as the gift that they are, social interactions, economic progress, travel, education and group settings, and mental and emotional well-being.

Having had the blessing of being nominated to become a Mentor at NFDA's Meet the Mentors which is sponsored by the Funeral Service Foundation, I was confronted with a sobering thought, "Am I putting my team's emotional wellbeing a the forefront of my organization?" All too often as operators the focus is on financial gains, market share, staff benefits (payroll, health plans, retirement) but how many funeral homes are actively focusing on Compassion Fatigue, Mental Health Awareness, and Manager training to help identify compassion fatigue.

At Meet the Mentors we had an amazing presentation by Lynda Cheldelin Fell, Founding Partner at the International Grief Institute about compassion fatigue, resilience, and managing grief in the workplace. I left convicted yet motivated to institute immediate change. The Mentor became the mentee, you are never done learning.

As Founder and Operator of Jersey Memorial Group, with assets across funeral homes, crematories, pet services, insurance agency, and publication services in multiple states, I met with our Michael Grandi and our leadership team to develop a comprehensive Staff Support Plan to ensure the team's well being. We quickly found that one plan would fall short, we needed TWO plans. One for our staff members and equally important, one for our location managers to be able to help identify and promote wellness. Operating numerous roof tops presented challenges in that we needed to be able to scale, make financial investments, and educate team members. Also having the honor of previously being award NFDA's POE and Best of Best our intent was to make a plan that can be easily adopted and shared with our colleagues throughout our profession. We wanted a plan that would work for a single rooftop or multiple roof tops, family firms or corporate locations, as well as with suppliers.

We decided to roll out the program in each firm but started with furniture, equipment and building modifications in two of the locations with plans to roll out companywide furnishings and be finished by the 4th quarter of 2024.

We experienced such an overwhelming response that something else happened, something we had not anticipated. We started to receive resumes from funeral directors, apprentices, and non-licensed support staff. Word got out. We may have lived through a health pandemic, but funeral service is in another pandemic, and Employment Pandemic. We learned quickly that our profession has overlooked the very same thing we promote, guidance in dealing with loss and grief, just on a professional level. But when an operation places their priority in their team and their well being by identifying overall mental and emotion health moral skyrockets.

As a testament, Jersey Memorial has been able to fill every position across each funeral home with resumes continuing to come in. I have had the pleasure of adding to the team Funeral Directors, Managers, Crematory Operators, Dually Licensed Advanced Planning Directors, Administrators, Apprentices, and Accounting team members. My hope is that these simple steps outlined in a plan for staff and the mangers would be able to be replicated and funeral homes that take make compassion fatigue a main focus will be able to separate from other firms and employ the very best practitioners.

A Comprehensive Staff Support Plan

Introduction:

Funeral directors play a critical role in providing compassionate care and support to grieving families during one of the most challenging times in their lives. However, the continuous exposure to grief and loss can lead to compassion fatigue, a condition that affects their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. To ensure the well-being of funeral directors, it is crucial to implement a comprehensive staff support plan that addresses their needs and prevents compassion fatigue. This plan outlines various strategies and resources, including massage chairs, quiet rooms, collaborative areas, mental health days off, and reading materials, to promote self-care, relaxation, and mental health support.

1. Implementation of Massage Chairs:

- a. Provide massage chairs in designated areas to offer relaxation and stress relief during breaks.
- b. Collaborate with professional massage therapists to provide occasional on-site massages to alleviate tension and promote relaxation.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to take advantage of these resources during their downtime.

2. Establishing Quiet Rooms:

- a. Designate specific rooms or areas within funeral homes as quiet spaces for funeral directors to take short breaks.
- b. Furnish these rooms with comfortable seating, dim lighting, soft music, and calming scents.
- c. Encourage the use of these spaces to facilitate relaxation, meditation, or simply to find solace during challenging moments.

3. Creating Collaborative Areas:

- a. Designate specific spaces within the funeral home that encourage social interaction and support among funeral directors.
- b. Furnish these areas with comfortable seating, coffee machines, and a relaxing ambiance to promote informal discussions and bonding.
- c. Encourage open communication, sharing experiences, and seeking advice from peers to foster a sense of camaraderie and support.

4. Mental Health Days Off:

- a. Recognize the importance of mental health by implementing a system that allows funeral directors to take mental health days off without stigma or guilt.
- b. Develop a policy that outlines the procedure for requesting and approving mental health days off, ensuring confidentiality and understanding from management.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to utilize these days for self-care activities, seeking therapy, spending time with loved ones, or engaging in hobbies that bring them joy.

5. Access to Reading Materials:

- a. Establish a library or resource center within the funeral home that provides books, articles, and other reading materials on grief counseling, self-care, and mental health.
- b. Collaborate with local libraries or grief counseling organizations to curate a collection of relevant resources.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to make use of these resources during their breaks, helping them enhance their knowledge and coping strategies.

Conclusion:

The demanding nature of the funeral director profession makes it crucial to prioritize staff well-being and prevent compassion fatigue. By implementing strategies such as providing massage chairs, quiet rooms, collaborative areas, mental health days off, and access to reading materials, funeral homes can create a supportive environment that promotes self-care, relaxation, and mental health support. This comprehensive staff support plan not only benefits funeral directors but also ensures that they can continue to provide compassionate care to grieving families with empathy and professionalism.

Executive Coaching Plan for Funeral Director Managers to Support Teams Dealing with Grief and Stress

Introduction:

Funeral director managers play a crucial role in supporting their teams, who are exposed to grief and stress on a daily basis. To ensure the well-being and effectiveness of the entire staff, it is essential for managers to possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective support and guidance. This executive coaching plan outlines a structured approach to develop funeral director managers' abilities in addressing their teams' needs, managing stress, fostering resilience, and promoting a healthy work environment.

1. Assessing Managerial Skills and Knowledge:

- a. Conduct an initial assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement in funeral director managers' abilities to support their teams dealing with grief and stress.
- b. Utilize surveys, interviews, and feedback sessions to gather insights from managers, staff, and external stakeholders.
- c. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the managers' current skill set, challenges, and areas requiring development.

2. Providing Education and Training:

- a. Organize training sessions or workshops to enhance funeral director managers' knowledge and understanding of grief, stress, and their impact on individuals and teams.
- b. Collaborate with grief counseling experts, psychologists, or mental health professionals to provide specialized training on supporting employees dealing with grief and stress.
- c. Ensure that managers are equipped with effective communication techniques, active listening skills, and strategies to address team members' emotional and psychological well-being.

3. Developing Resilience and Self-Care Strategies:

- a. Provide executive coaching sessions to funeral director managers focused on developing personal resilience and self-care techniques.
- b. Explore stress management strategies, mindfulness practices, and exercises to help managers maintain their well-being while supporting their teams.
- c. Encourage managers to model healthy self-care habits and prioritize their own well-being, setting an example for their staff to follow.

4. Enhancing Emotional Intelligence:

- a. Conduct coaching sessions to help funeral director managers develop their emotional intelligence skills.
- b. Assist managers in recognizing and managing their own emotions while empathizing with their team members' feelings.
- c. Train managers to navigate difficult conversations, handle conflicts, and provide appropriate support to their teams based on individual needs.

5. Implementing Team Support Strategies:

- a. Collaborate with funeral director managers to develop strategies for supporting their teams dealing with grief and stress.
- b. Encourage managers to foster a supportive and empathetic work environment by implementing regular team check-ins, open-door policies, and confidential communication channels.
- c. Provide managers with resources such as grief counseling referrals, community support networks, and educational materials to assist their teams in accessing the necessary resources for coping with grief and stress.

6. Ongoing Coaching and Support:

- a. Provide regular coaching sessions and check-ins to funeral director managers to ensure the continued development of their skills and support strategies.
- b. Create a safe space for managers to discuss challenges, seek guidance, and share best practices.

c. Offer opportunities for managers to share their successes, lessons learned, and personal growth experiences with their peers through workshops or team-building activities.

Conclusion:

By implementing this executive coaching plan, funeral director managers can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support their teams dealing with grief and stress. Equipped with enhanced emotional intelligence, resilience strategies, and a supportive work environment, managers can create a culture that prioritizes the well-being of their staff while maintaining professional excellence. This plan not only benefits the funeral director managers but also contributes to the overall success and satisfaction of the entire team, resulting in improved service delivery to grieving families.

**Brownfield Funeral Home
Brownfield, Texas**

My wife and I came across a business offering to edit pictures and allow us to print them onto a 13x19 canvas. We both believed this service would be a thoughtful and precious keepsake our families would enjoy. In agreement, we proceeded to move forward and provide each family with a framed 13x19 canvas of their deceased loved one as a gift from us.

Despite the excellent service and quality offered by the company, we opted to broaden the scope of services and enhance affordability for our business. This decision was made possible by having competent staff members with proficiency in photo editing software technology. Our personnel has dramatically improved the quality of pictures we provide to the families by removing unwanted people, adding parts of clothing, and correcting missing portions of the image. We have even added missing parts to motorcycles and cowboy hats to make a picture appear complete. Our staff has worked hard to advance their technological skills and recently learned how to increase the clarity and pixilation of the original photo we receive from families, giving the pictures a professional quality. These valuable tools have also allowed us to use images we would not have been able to use previously.

These advancements have allowed us to utilize the photo for printed canvases, bookmarks, all printable stationery, and the marquees in our stateroom and chapel for visitations and funeral or memorial services. This gives our funeral home a professional and cohesive appearance. We also use the picture on each obituary on our website, providing our website with a clean and uniform appearance.

Our reward in gifting the framed canvas to the family is seeing the genuine look of surprise, gratitude, and appreciation on their faces. They are always happy and excited by the clarity and improvements we achieved compared to the photograph they presented to us in the beginning.

Over the past few years of presenting the framed canvas to the families we serve, we now see them more and more in our community. Sometimes two or three will be hanging on a wall or sitting on a fireplace mantel. We have also found them lovingly set up inside vehicles. Recently, we've seen them on Facebook and other social media platforms. Families take them to family reunions, graduations, weddings, and other family events to hold while taking family photographs or setting them up as a memorial of their absence at an event. This reinforces the fact that families love them. It is heartwarming to see this gift from our funeral home being used in so many meaningful and creative ways.

Capillas Señoriales Casa de Homenajes Merida, Yucatan, Mexico

Capillas Señoriales Casa de Homenajes, offers a dignified farewell to those who have transcended, managing to honor the memory of loved ones through tributes of love. Plus, throughout our journey, we've looked for new ways to give families alternatives to saying goodbye to the ones they love the most. In this sense, many people lost someone knocked down by the pandemic, generating not only pain before leaving, but also frustration at not being able to offer a ceremony as they would have wanted.

Given this significant experience, a space was created in an innovative way at the bottom of the ocean, to preserve and celebrate the lives of our loved ones. We have chosen the sea as an infinite symbol of love, an emblem of eternity, an inexhaustible source of life, and we have made it the means to transcend in a beautiful way over time. Thus, in 2022 we created the second cemetery of the sea in Latin America, the waters of Campeche being the new home for those who left the earthly plane, while conserving and giving life to the marine ecosystem.

The foregoing, in accordance with the fact that, according to the World Department of the Environment, reefs are the habitat of more than 9 million marine species, are responsible for protecting the coasts from erosion, storms and provide the same benefits as the jungle. tropical. Therefore, it is alarming to know that due to their accelerated deterioration, they could disappear in 30 years.

Faced with this alert and committed to the planet, memorial capsules and pearls were created; designed for each person, so that they are unique, valuable and special as a treasure. The submersion of reefs formed by specially designed structures with material that contains a pH similar to that of seawater is carried out; its unique design allows ocean currents to withstand storms without any anchorage.

Each reef shelters a pearl, which has its name engraved on a plate; These reefs are designed for the adherence of larvae of native species, without affecting their ecosystem, contributing to preserve and restore marine life. The process of elaboration of these is through the ashes of the loved one, which is transformed into a precious pearl that is later deposited inside the reef.

The immersion ceremony is extremely special, where family and friends can participate in this intimate moment, celebrating and commemorating the life legacy of your loved one. In addition, the tribute is the expression of the most sincere love and through a videography, the essence that has been left in the heart of each one is revived, through photographs that tell experiences and make their loved ones proud. Each family decides to add some priceless objects that represent their life and accompany them in their new home.

Before leaving, each companion is given a white flower, as a symbol of purity, hope and eternal love. The families hold hands and deposit this flower, which will accompany the pearls on their journey out to sea. It is an extremely emotional moment, while they see how it goes away with the sway of the waves, while they say goodbye with love to their loved ones, hoping that one day, on the shore of the beach, the sand and the cool sea breeze returns a little piece of them.

To this day, as Señoriales' family, we feel extremely proud and grateful to the dozens of families that have given us the confidence to transcend together with them. Achieving the submersion of 7 pearls, pearls that symbolize respect and celebration of the legacy of great people, pearls that become the perfect metamorphosis to transform the memory of the most loved into marine life. In addition, this experience has allowed us to understand the importance of protecting and conserving marine ecosystems, to guarantee a sustainable future for future generations.

Carmon Community Funeral Homes, Windsor, Connecticut

Carmon Funeral Home and Family Center, Avon, CT; Hayes-Huling & Carmon Funeral Home, Granby, CT; Nicholson & Carmon Funeral Home, Suffield, CT; Samsel & Carmon Funeral Home, South Windsor, CT; Ladd-Turkington & Carmon Funeral Home, Vernon, CT; South Green Memorial Home, Hartford, CT

This year Carmon Funeral Homes decided to upgrade, restructure, and relocate a few of our departments to not only expand services to our families, but also to the communities we serve. The beginning of this domino and the crux of this new service initiative was the creation of a graphic design department. The purpose of this department expansion was multipronged in an effort to benefit our funeral home and staff, the needs of our families to exemplify their services, and to help service our community better. We decided to expand and upgrade this department to enhance our services to our families and the community at large when it comes to the need for printed materials.

Our graphic design department, managed by Sara Mosher, has grown significantly both in volume of printed and designed materials selected by families. Additionally, our need for our own printed pieces such as Price Lists, Catering and Reception Selections, High Quality brochures for our Preneed and Aftercare handouts, and promotional brochures has also grown considerably. Outsourcing these needs was just not possible any longer. Increasingly we've been asked to print and design items for many of our community partners such as Hospice groups, church groups, and civic & service organizations as a courtesy. (see attached pictures 9 & 10) We often design and print event invitations, fundraising brochures, and other items they use to reach the community. Furthermore, his expansion was driven by our increase in service over the last 10 years to the African/ West Indian churches. Their desire for very high-quality service programs/ books created the need for printing and processing equipment that is the newest and most efficient manufactured today.

First, an upgraded department requires extensive upgraded equipment. This new equipment requires much more room than we had available on the second floor of the funeral home where the old area was. The weight and operation of these printers and machines required a concrete floor and much more physical space. Additionally, the families we serve, outside groups, and the public often prefer to meet with our designers in person and therefore need to have direct access to the public and outside access areas of the funeral home. To accommodate this need for space, we remodeled approximately 1,000 square feet of an office that was previously used for funeral directors, death certificate/permit office, and insurance/catering and relocated these 6 offices. The central part of this office now holds a brand-new state of the art machine that prints, collates, and prepares printed graphic material of the highest quality, (See attached pictures of the equipment, offices, design materials *pictures 5 & 6).

This expanded onsite graphics area and new equipment allows families to make changes to programs and other printed materials in live time with our designers. These materials can be printed whenever ready and if the need arises can be reprinted to accommodate undetermined quantities. We are available and ready to help grieving families memorialize their loved ones with many more options and the quality of work people are looking for.

Subsequently, by making this new space for the graphic design department, we now required the relocation of the senior arranging funeral directors. The directors moved to the upstairs area of the main funeral home which housed the financial/business functions of our firm. In effect, this caused the required the relocation of the financial/business area, who we moved offsite in an effort to be part of the revitalization of Downtown Windsor Center and a direct benefit to the community.

When Carmon Funeral Homes moved our main campus to our present location in 1988, we dedicated 3,500 square feet of our original funeral home location in the center of the Town of Windsor, to Mary's Place, A Center for Grieving Children and Families where it still operates today. The additional 6,000 square feet of space was completely renovated into office space to house our CFO, Controller, Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable and Billing Departments, and our Human Resource manager. (See pictures Attached *pictures 1-4) This change has given this part of our operation a more private place for these staff to work in, close to the post office, our bank, and still only less than two miles from our main funeral home campus.

Our original funeral home and now our business office, sits across the street from where a large redevelopment project is just cleared for demolition/construction that could prove to be an anchor for future good development. Bringing our business office back into the center of town has positive community effects and brings five of our staff there to support local restaurants and our presence is a strong signal for other local companies to come back to the town center.

Cozean Memorial Chapel & Crematory Farmington, Missouri

At Cozean Memorial Chapel we pride ourselves in putting forth the utmost effort in making the funeral service a loving and memorable tribute for the family of the bereaved. When making arrangements, we work with the family to make certain that they choose their most cherished music selections and readings for the funeral; and that they select certain members of the family that they want to give eulogies or read special poems. We seat the family and the pallbearers together in the front of our chapel near the floral arrangements that have arrived in honor of their loved one. Many times, if the individual in state is a military veteran, there is a Military Honors team who performs a ceremony and flag presentation during the service.

Taking all of the above components into consideration, the family is most generally very proud of the tribute that they have planned and what better way for us to preserve the celebration for their loved one than to permanently memorialize those moments with a video.

Many establishments are capable of recording a service. Most frequently those funeral homes have a standard tripod set up in their funeral chapel for capturing the service. We, however, have instituted a much more sophisticated method of recording the funeral service. We use three cameras in our chapel which are capable of being moved and turned about and have a zooming feature for zooming in and out. While playing the music, we many times zoom in on the flowers which is a nice effect. Our specially trained staff members have become proficient in making a high-quality recording which is given to the family on a disc with a specially designed label.

Before the service starts, the staff member who is recording that particular day begins preparing by pre-setting the captions for the service. We set a caption to be displayed on the screen for the officiant, special speakers and any vocalists. We also set a caption that says: COPYRIGHTED MUSIC BEING PLAYED along with the title of the song and the performing artist. At the beginning of the service, we caption the screen with CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF along with the name of the decedent and their birth and death date. At the end of the service, we post a caption on the screen that credits production of the video by our funeral home and displays our logo as well.

We gift the family with a complimentary copy of the funeral service video which is presented in a personalized disc booklet. We have received great feedback from the families as to how proud they are to have a copy given to them for a lasting memory of the service of their loved one. If more family members or friends want a copy of the service, we prepare a copy for a minimal cost.

This has been one of the best programs we have instituted at our funeral home and we are proud to have so many compliments regarding the professional manner in which we produce these funeral videos which are a lasting memory that families can take with them.

Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home
Canal Winchester, Ohio

Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home, Pickerington, OH

Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes and Crematory started off 2022 as the “Year of the Dog (or cat)” in April of 2022 as a major sponsor of the Pickerington Lions and Leo Clubs’ PAWS 5K and 1 Mile Run / Walk with proceeds going to Pilot Dogs of Columbus, Ohio for their guide dog program. The funeral home continued this theme by asking for donations for the Fairfield County Humane Society during the funeral home’s Pickerington Community Shred Day in June 2022 and finished by asking Funeral Directors Life for a matching donation which led to a total donation of \$850 to the Fairfield County Humane Society by the end of June 2022. Five books were also donated to the Pickerington Public Library concerning pet loss for children and adults. The funeral home continued this theme at our September 17, 2022 Canal Winchester Community Shred Day and the June 3, 2023 Pickerington Community Shred Day and again collected a van full of donated items for the Fairfield County Humane Society along with cash donations totaling \$407.

Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes’ staff love their pets and wanted to come up with another way to express to the community that pets are a very important part of our lives and families. Tracy McAdams, the managing partner, thought the funeral home should do something around the Christmas season for the families who entrusted us with their pets’ cremations throughout the year similar to how the funeral home honors the loved ones of the families served in the past year with Angel trees during the winter holiday season.

Melissa Siefker took over this task to come up with an idea to create a program for the families of pets. Melissa did not want to take away the dignity of our Angel trees, so she came up with the idea of a separate display apart from the Angel trees in the funeral home. She looked for a different type of ornament for the pet families and decided on crystal globes which would reflect light like a prism and create a rainbow effect in reference to the “Rainbow Bridge” poem.

Melissa ordered the crystal globes along with small pawprints and heart charms and created ornaments depending on the type of pet being honored. Melissa then began to look for materials to create this display. She ordered snow flocking for the base of the display and a plastic jewelry frame to hang the ornaments on. The display included pillar candles, a color changing pillar lamp, small spotlights to shine through the ornaments, a crystal pet remembrance heart and a rainbow sculpture. Finally, Melissa created a framed copy of the Rainbow Bridge poem to have on the display.

In November when the funeral home sent out the invitations to the families served for the Angel trees, Melissa also sent out invitations to the pet families inviting them to come honor the lives of their pets. The family was able to write a short thought on a white tag and attach it to the ornament that was placed on the display and given an identical ornament to take home for their home Christmas tree along with a copy of the Rainbow Bridge poem.

Although the turnout was not large this first year (about 30 families came to the funeral homes), those pet families appreciated this thoughtful remembrance of their family member. Melissa decided to use part of this display as a permanent area in the Pickerington office to honor pets when the family comes to claim the cremated remains of their beloved pets.

Elton Black and Son Funeral Home
White Lake, Michigan

Elton Black and Son Funeral Home, Highland, MI

The staff at Elton Black & Son Funeral Home are always looking for new and innovative ways to serve our families. This year, we have implemented a variety of new seating options in our chapels for families during visitations and funerals. This decision was made with the understanding that in the year 2023, many aspects of funeral service have evolved. However, the values that our clients have continued to hold dear—family, togetherness, and the sharing of memories—remain constant. As the general public’s

focus when planning funerals began to gradually shift away from formal religious services in a church setting, it became an important project for our funeral directors to create an environment that is welcoming to all; regardless of religious affiliation.

Our clients have begun to focus more so on the memorialization of their loved one's life than the formal religious aspect of funerals. Knowing this, our staff sought to create a more contemporary environment within our venues to transform the experience for our families. In an effort to meet our clients where they are most comfortable, we made the decision to offer two new floor plans to the standard rows of seating for visitations and funerals in our chapels. The new seating options in our venues incorporate round tables that seat eight people. By doing this, we are creating spaces that inspire people to interact, share memories, and celebrate the legacy their loved one has left behind.

By introducing round tables, Chiavari chairs, cream colored linens, and elegant centerpieces, our space is light, airy, and far more welcoming. During a funeral service, guests are no longer looking at the backs of heads. They are able to make eye contact with the guests sitting across from them; creating an environment of connection and support. This seating arrangement encourages the sharing of memories and the togetherness that families are seeking.

Since the implementation of this program, the response from families has been overwhelmingly positive. Our clients continue to vindicate the reasons for this change; they feel more comfortable within this environment and they are more prone to engage in conversation with other guests. Many guests have praised our new seating arrangements for reasons we had not even anticipated; for example, families of young children enjoy being able to sit more cohesively with their kids.

All in all, this has been a successful endeavor for our funeral home. Ultimately, it allows us to serve our families more effectively by creating modern, inviting spaces for them to celebrate their loved ones' legacies. Our new seating arrangements also add more options for our families, allowing us to transform our venues into spaces that are the most meaningful and personal to each family.

Finch & Finch, Inc. Funeral & Cremation Service
Altavista, Virginia
Finch & Finch, Inc., Gladys, VA

Over the years, our firm, like most other firms, has noticed a change in what individuals expect to experience at a funeral or memorial service. Lately, even in our small community, we have had to adapt our “typical” funeral service style to cater to the needs of various growing trends that have begun to emerge

Most notably, we have had an increase in the number of individuals who have a relationship with a church, but then also do not have a service at the church. We have also seen this true in regards to our facilities. While we take great pride in the comfort, ease of access, updated look and feel of our own facilities, we are noticing a trend that some of these same families do not want to have a service at the funeral home.

Perhaps in years past, we would have suggested to the family to just have a service at the graveside. That way, we could still honor the request to have the funeral neither at the church nor the funeral home. But, at Finch & Finch, Inc. Funeral & Cremation Service, we could not settle for this “cookie cutter” approach to funeral services, so we began to activate the connections in our community to offer families a neutral venue of neither a church nor the funeral home.

To date, we have had traditional funeral services held outdoors on the grounds of the Avoca Museum (a local historical society), English Park, farms and even front yards; but increasing in popularity is the use of the Altavista Fire Company for larger gatherings. The use of these spaces gives the family flexibility to truly create the memorial experience they need to both honor the life of the one who lived, but also find the closure needed in creating a fitting celebration.

For the purpose of this essay, we would like to highlight the use of the Altavista Fire Company for the memorial service of the recently retired Fire Chief, John Tucker.

John and his family fit into the group described in the first paragraph perfectly. He was a devout Christian, an active member of the community, one of the leaders of his faith community, and fostered an intimately private home life with his wife and daughter.

When John died on April 8, 2023, we were able to coordinate with the local fire department to assist us in transferring his body from the care of the family, into the care of the funeral home. By the time we arrived at his home and had spoken with the family, two fire trucks, an ambulance, and various other department vehicles were ready to lead John’s body in procession from the house to the funeral home.

While very few individuals witnessed the procession at 4:00 a.m., the family was touched by the fitting tribute rendered by the same men John had mentored over the years.

At the arrangement conference, it was noted that while John had worked with us in the past, loved the way we typically carry out funeral services, they knew they needed something different. Again, activating our community connections we were able to put together a celebration that honored both the service of John Tucker, but acknowledged the personal loss of his wife and daughter. In the timeframe of 7 days, we were able to plan one of the largest and unique services our town of Altavista has ever seen.

That next Saturday, we met John’s wife, daughter, and a handful of close friends at the family farm, where our staff had set up a cemetery tent and chairs at the highest point on the property, overlooking all John had built and fostered in this life. There, we had an intimate service, where we played songs, shared stories, and heard words of scripture and comfort from the family’s minister. At the conclusion of the service, we scattered a portion of John’s cremated remains on the property.

When the service was complete, we directed the family to their vehicles for a procession from the home to the Fire Company, where a public celebration would be held. At the end of the family’s driveway, the

current Fire Chief and local sheriff were stationed to escort us along the procession route. Having mapped the procession ahead of time, the Fire Chief led us to a nearby on-ramp to the highway running by Altavista.

Immediately before entering the highway, a long line of stationed and prepared fire apparatus fell into the procession to form what resembled a parade, with lights lit and flags waving. Having coordinated ahead of time, we closed off the main road of our town to allow the procession to take place unheeded. Slowly, the parade made its way up Main Street, with streets lined with townspeople paying their respects to John.

Upon arriving at the Fire Company, flanked by two large fire trucks with their ladders extended, holding a gigantic American Flag, the family processed from their cars to their designated seating area. That morning, our staff had set up our portable stage and sound system (which our firm has previously submitted for this essay requirement, during the COVID Pandemic), as well as tables, 600 chairs and two large TVs for the picture tribute video.

Having coordinated between the fire department, county and state organizations, the minister, and local community members, what followed was a service that honored and paid tribute to the man John was and the impact he left on our community.

Following the service, the family was processed out of the fire company to be greeted by a "Sea of Blue". All of our Altavista Fire Department, neighboring fire departments, and different local law enforcement agencies formed a tunnel for the family to walk through, while they rendered one last salute to their fallen brother.

The family was then escorted back to a private room, where they could rest and collect themselves, while the Fire Company was transformed from the service set-up to a cocktail style reception hall. After 15 minutes and with the help of local caterers, we were able to welcome the family back into the Fire Company where a time of food and fellowship was enjoyed into the early hours of the evening.

John's family was touched by our staff's flexibility and community connections in arranging such a unique memorial for them. Their grief journey was acknowledged and fostered by their intimate family gathering, and the public life of their husband and father was honored in the public celebration that followed.

At Finch & Finch, we take pride in honoring the unique wishes of every family we are honored to serve. While not every community member would receive the parade and fireman's honors conferred upon John, we now have a new service style we can offer to families that seek this neutral gathering space. One that both honors the intimate loss of the family, honors the public life their loved one lived, and provides a space for continued informal gathering with food and fellowship in the same venue.

G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes and The Gardens at Olive Branch Cemetery Indianapolis, Indiana

G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes – Madison Avenue, Indianapolis, IN; G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes, Greenwood, IN

For 13 years now, our 4-legged therapy dog friends have been roaming the halls and chapels of our funeral homes. Their morning routine starts like ours, getting ready for work! Once their service vests go on, they know playtime is over and their workday starts by comforting those in need.

The idea for this K9 Grief therapy program came to Mr. Herrmann after talking to a long time friend, Kevin Knartzer, Director of Training and Client Services at Paws & Think. One day, Kevin stopped by our funeral home with Lady, a golden retriever he had been working with. A family was leaving the funeral home, after planning the services of their father/grandfather. Once they saw Lady they were able to smile and focus their attention on her instead of the loss of their loved one. Mr. Herrmann was amazed by the “power of the pup” and knew right then he had to incorporate them into our everyday lives here at G.H. Herrmann Funeral Homes. The next day we adopted Lady and from there the program was born!

Our staff sees first hand that the presence of our pups has a healing affect on hearts of all ages. It is proven that dogs can help reduce agitation in patients with dementia. The American Heart Association has found that a 12-minute visit with a dog helped lower blood pressure in healthy and hypertensive patients; as well as decreasing anxiety in hospitalized patients. Something about interacting with a dog makes most people feel better! Not only do our furry friends help comfort our families who are mourning, they are also there for our directors and staff to help cheer them up after an emotional day.

Sadly, on November 20, 2020 we had to say goodbye to our sweet Bubsie. He crossed the rainbow bridge almost 2 years exactly that we lost our Jax. They comforted many families during their lifetime with us. When Jax passed away, we were blessed with Libby and it took a while to find the perfect fit, but we now have our playful pup Winston. He has been with us for a little over 2 years and his personality fills the room. He enjoys visiting families at Anew Hospice and spends time in the summers at the library helping with the local reading program! His handler, Patience keeps him very involved in the community and with the kiddos!

Life here at G.H. Herrmann would not be the same without our favorite furry friends! They always put a smile on our faces as well as the families we serve. Besides, they are some of our best employees. They work for Kibbles and Bits and they never complain about overtime! Woof!!!

Grupo Gayosso
Mexico City, Mexico

Gayosso Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, Mexico; Gayosso Mexicali Lopez Mateos, Baja California, Mexico; Gayosso Mexicali Madero, Baja California, Mexico; Gayosso Tijuana Del Rio, Baja California, Mexico; Gayosso Tijuana Santa Gema, Baja California, Mexico; Gayosso Sullivan, Mexico City, Mexico; Gayosso Mausoleos Del Angel, Mexico City, Mexico; Gayosso Lomas Memorial, Mexico City, Mexico; Gayosso Colima, Mexico City, Mexico; Gayosso Felix Cuevas, Mexico City, Mexico; Gayosso Torreon Allende, Coahuila, Mexico; Gayosso Torreon Periferico, Coahuila, Mexico; Gayosso Santa Monica, Edo. Mexico, Mexico; Gayosso Irapuato, Guanajuato, Mexico; Gayosso Lopez Mateos, Guanajuato, Mexico; Gayosso Francisco Villa, Guanajuato, Mexico; Gayosso Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico; Gayosso El Carmen, Jalisco, Mexico; Gayossos Capillas Vallarta, Michoacan, Mexico; Gayosso Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico; Gayosso Monterrey Capillas Marianas, Neuvo Leon, Mexico; Gayosso Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico

PROTECCIÓN FAMILIAR GAYOSSO® A TURNING POINT IN INNOVATION FOR THE FUNERAL SERVICES INDUSTRY.

In Grupo Gayosso we have decided to stop being just a funeral home and become a companion throughout our clients' lives.

Gayosso changed and as part of the new positioning and leadership strategies of the funeral industry in Mexico, we have created Protección Familiar Gayosso® a new strategy, where we offer different services such as Telemedicine and preventive, in addition to them we have the service of a Second Medical Opinion with certified doctors and residence in the United States remotely, this helps to bring more Mexicans the possibility of having first class services that undoubtedly can make a difference and even save the lives of many of our customers. We call this product Gayosso Med. On the other hand, we have developed a loyalty club called Gayosso Contigo, where customers who have a Gayosso funeral plan can redeem coupons, for discounts in stores, entertainment, travel, beauty, products, among many others. This loyalty club helps us to gain an understanding of the stage of life they are in because, with our platform, we can analyze their different phases, tastes, and habits, and that helps us to generate better content for them and that helps us to generate better content and products for the brand.

To achieve this, these two sub-brands: Gayosso Med and Gayosso Contigo, have a web service, 01800 and apps that can be downloaded to the cell phone and can instantly enjoy all the benefits that both offers.

With this, in addition to improving and maintaining a good relationship with our client, we manage to maintain a healthy portfolio, since all these benefits can be used when payments are up to date, additionally it helps to improve brand perception and demystify that funeral homes only want to redeem; on the contrary, we promote preventive health, that Mexican families can enjoy life with benefits designed for them and improve life expectancy with a second opinion.

With this initiative, Grupo Gayosso marks a clear differentiator within the funeral industry. It seeks growth in profitability and brand perception with these new initiatives. We also believe that these additions will mark a turning point in the funeral industry in Mexico due to their level of novelty and, above all, their usefulness.

In this way, our families will be protected through different benefits such as health, prevention, monthly savings by redeeming coupons with the different commercial partners we have and whose benefits will increase over time.

In this way, we also achieve a continuous communication with our customers, as well as a better understanding of what phase of life they are going through, which will result in being able to offer them more and better services.

**Holman-Howe Funeral Homes
Lebanon, Missouri**

On September 30, 2022, the eyes of the world fell on Balmoral Castle in Scotland. The world's longest reigning and most respected head of state of the modern era had left this life and stepped into eternity. Just one day before, she had received her prime minister, Boris Johnson at which time he resigned his premiership and in the same day received Liz Truss and ask her to form a new government. Little did anyone know that these historic tasks would be among the last official she would make as Queen.

Tim Purves, Senior director at William Purves Funeral Directors, Edinburg, Scotland began his day as he did every day with the news that the Queen was in residence at Balmoral and would be busy with the affairs of state. The very next day he received official word that the Queen was failing fast and that he should be prepared to leave Edinburg soon at what seemed to be the inevitable assignment that he had been prepared to undertake in advance planning for years. He was shocked to get the message as the media had broadcast the events of the previous day worldwide and the Queen seemed in good spirits and fit given her age.

Following the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, I decided to reach out and contact Tim Purves. Much to my surprise he was extremely pleased to take my telephone call and we visited a great length about the details of the funeral he conducted in Scotland. Many details were shared that were very moving and interesting. He spoke with such humility as he told the tremendous responsibility he felt as he left the secluded gates of Balmoral onto the public road where the media of the world began broadcasting the funeral procession. I was literally chilled as he described his feelings on the telephone. I immediately thought how awesome it would be to have him give our study group the same personal narrative in our upcoming meeting which was the first week in March.

Much to my surprise, he agreed immediately to address our group via zoom call and once again his story was shared with the entire group. Each person listening was spell bound by the description he presented of every detail and nuance of the assignment. Out of this presentation came the idea of how interesting it would be for our entire NFDA to be able to hear the inside story of what became the most watched event in history to date, the funeral of the Queen. His refreshing down-to-earth nature was caused both awe and inspiration, as our group became keenly aware that such a monumental task was accomplished by someone so normal. It allowed everyone in the room to reflect on their own ability to meet such needs in their own communities.

The invitation was given for Mr. Purves to speak at NFDA in Las Vegas as well as an invitation for Mr. Purves to address the leadership meeting via zoom. Through this time I have enjoyed numerous emails and telephone conversations with Tim Purves He is looking forward to NFDA and I was particularly pleased that he received that first telephone call.

**J. Garcia Lopez Casa Prim
Mexico City, Mexico**

Vision of Leaders ... new annual coverage at low cost

**MODO SEGURO -SAFE MODE- Funeral Protection
that Integrates Economic Benefits for Families**

- In CDMX, households spend an average of \$14,887 USD 784 pesos per quarter on food, beverages and tobacco, leaving funeral protection aside.

- Currently, young adults are beginning to have a greater interest in acquiring some type of coverage, in the face of an unfortunate event.

It has been shown that investing in protection, anticipating unexpected events, is not present in the priorities of Mexicans, especially young adults, since the tendency is to spend on tangible material things, but not on some type of insurance and much more. less than a funeral covering; thinking that they will not face such a situation.

What do they spend their money on? According to the results of the 2020 National Household Income and Expenditure Survey, in Mexico City households spend an average of \$14,887 USD 784 pesos per quarter on food, beverages and tobacco, while on clothing and footwear \$1,008 USD pesos 53.

Registering little interest in acquiring services that guarantee some protection, in this sense the National Survey of Financial Inclusion, indicates that only 21% of the population has some type of insurance, while the culture of funeral forecast only registers 3% of penetration; Therefore, it is urgent to move the population from unsafe mode to SERUGO MODE, through the new initiative of J. García López that protects and provides economic benefits to families.

This panorama, added to what happened in the pandemic, where some families faced the death of two or more people in their close circle without having the support of a funeral service plan, affected their finances and in other cases put their assets at risk. ; even so, it is not a priority to acquire a funeral plan in the future, given the traditional acquisition schemes in the market.

In this context, J. García López undertook the task of designing a new national funeral coverage product accessible due to its practical model of monthly payment with annual coverage plus the included economic and pet benefits.

MODO SEGURO is a unique product in the market due to its affordable cost from \$50.00 pesos USD 2.5 monthly annual payment, with life insurance for \$50,000.00 USD 2,630 up to \$200,000.00 USD 10,527; more funeral service for pets, with the ease of acquiring it from the Web.

Price, ease of payment, annual renewal, national coverage, care for pets plus an economic benefit similar to an inheritance, MODO SEGURO today makes a difference in Mexico in comprehensive funeral services.

Opening a new line of business that young adults are accustomed to acquiring, being the case of cable television or cell phone insurance, which in comparison cost-benefit are more expensive, and that do not solve \$50.00 pesos USD 2.5 monthly annual payment, one situation as complicated as a death.

MODO SEGURO integrates:

FUNERAL PROTECTION for owner, spouse and children under 21 years of age.

- Attention and personalized advice 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Vigil room in Funeral Agency or service at home
- Government procedures

- Coffin and/or basic urn
- Cremation or burial in a grave owned by the family

THE FUNERAL SERVICE is provided in the 32 states of the Mexican Republic through our 997 correspondents that cover the 2,480 municipalities of the country.

LIFE INSURANCE from \$50,000.00 pesos USD 2,630 up to \$200,000.00 pesos USD 10,527.

- The insured amount covers the benefits of a small inheritance.
- Protects for any cause of death
- Up to five beneficiaries
- Commitment to deliver the insured sum within a maximum period of five days, otherwise an extra \$1,000.00 USD 52 pesos will be paid for each day of delay.

FUNERAL SERVICE FOR PETS

- Telephone assistance 24/7
- Recovery of pet at home or veterinary
- Protection in refrigeration chamber
- Farewell room
- Individual cremation
- Basic urn
- Cremation certificate

MODO SEGURO operates with the support of J. García López, one of the most recognized funeral companies in Mexico.

MODO SEGURO It has been widely accepted in people with an average age of 44 years. Hired by 57% of women compared to 42% of men.

Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services Southfield, Michigan

Creating the dream team: KEMP ACADEMY

Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services learned a lot about its operations, systems and suppliers by analyzing the effects of the pandemic on its operations. We learned that we had insufficient capacity when it came to cremation services; we needed to further explain the governor's mandates to families so that they understood that they weren't our policies, yet here is why they are important.

Perhaps the biggest shortage during the pandemic was a shortage of licensed funeral directors. In fact, an adequate market for licensed professionals (funeral directors and embalmers) continues today to be a problem in this tight labor market. After months, even years of a cycle of hiring staff with a license, training them to serve according to our standards, investing in their continuing education, and then they leave our firm, we had to shift our strategy.

A large part of our emphasis to create a dream team to surround our families, is to first identify personnel with the right work habits, aspirations and teamwork and then provide the framework that is supportive of that employee becoming a licensed funeral director all while learning the Kemp Funeral Home way. Our current Kemp Academy students include a former part time director's assistant who was looking for additional experience while enrolled in mortuary school. We learned more about his work ethic and education background and brought him on full time to continue as a director's assistant and to begin arranger training. He has now completed school and we all await his success on the national and State boards.

Another student in Kemp Academy called our offices to see if he could do his apprenticeship prior to starting mortuary school. The mere phone call that essentially said, "I live 40 minutes away, (passing several other funeral homes) and I'd like to work toward licensure with KFHM", said we must bring him on. He began his apprenticeship where the rubber meets the road, in the Prep Room. He earned the respect of the licensed funeral directors he worked with and is now making arrangements with families while the other Kemp Academy student is in the Prep Room. He is actively enrolled in mortuary school.

Our third Kemp Academy student, inspired by family in the funeral business, began mortuary school while working on administrative systems. While her inquisitive approach to improving how we operate more efficiently was exceptional, her desire to become a licensed funeral director waned. She has instead decided to enter the Forensic Pathology program and become a Medical Examiner.

Finally we have a high school student who is job shadowing and his possibilities are endless. He has never refused an opportunity to be involved in the funeral process. Whether it is assisting while dressing a decedent, assisting at a funeral service, he stands prepared in a way that makes us proud.

ALL FOUR A SUCCESS!

No one loses when assisting in training. At a minimum we:

- Improve the skill level of our team.
- Gain new processes whether by design or default.
- Improve the skill level of the community.

**Mitchell-Wiedefeld Funeral Home, Inc.
Baltimore, Maryland**

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is home to the only mortuary science program in the state of Maryland. Our owner, Jack Mitchell, as well as a few of our other funeral directors attended this program and look back on their time there fondly. Many of the students come from all over the state in order to receive their education in mortuary science, taking on the financial burden of transportation in addition to education. With the rising costs we see in everyday life also comes the rising cost of educational materials necessary for success. On average students in the mortuary science program at the Community College of Baltimore spend between five hundred and six hundred dollars on textbooks during their time in the program. In order to ease the financial burden, we are donating five key textbooks to keep in the library of the acting program director, Diane Donaldson, for those students who may not be able to afford them.

With a nationwide shortage of funeral directors, it is vital that funeral homes are involved in their local mortuary science education programs. The support coming from the funeral home will demonstrate to the students that they are seen as more than just potential future employees, that we are dedicated to ensuring their success in the program no matter where they end up. One of our newer funeral directors, Kelsey Ricci, conceived of the idea when thinking back to her time in the program. She received a superb education, however the only way she heard of funeral homes in the state was either through the funeral home owner's child being enrolled in the program or help wanted postings on the bulletin board. This train of thought combined with the skyrocketing cost of education she experienced inspired her to donate her old textbooks to the program.

She chose the books to donate based on cost and usefulness. For example, one of the books she chose to donate was "Embalming: History, Theory, & Practice" by Robert G. Mayer, which is not only useful in instructing how to embalm some trickier cases but retails new for \$300-\$350. Another book she chose to donate was "Funeral Service Merchandising by Phillip D. Armond, which retails for a much more affordable cost of \$75 but educates students on merchandise commonly found in funeral homes. This book is crucial for getting students comfortable with speaking with families about their options in a clear and concise manner, leading the consumer to be more comfortable and trusting of the funeral home. By donating these vital program materials, we are aiding in the success of the next generation of funeral directors. This in turn benefits the funeral service industry as a whole, as many who are considering entering funeral service may be deterred by the overall cost of schooling.

Parque da Paz CG
Campina Grande, Paraíba, Brazil

Free Assistance for Stillbirth and Babies up to 4 Months

Life is an ongoing cycle of encounters and farewells, yet the loss of loved ones is an immensely painful process, particularly when it is connected to the death of someone dear to us. Throughout this journey, we may anticipate the arrival of new human beings, but we are never truly prepared to face the reality of death. We neither desire nor expect it, and the anticipation of death is certainly not accompanied by any form of anxiety.

Given these circumstances, it is crucial to reflect upon a profoundly sorrowful scenario: the loss of those we eagerly awaited the birth of, the heartache of witnessing the beginning of life being directly intertwined with its end. Such a tragic reality is faced by certain families—the untimely passing of their infants.

As we navigate through these moments, we have been inspired to establish a project that empathizes with the grieving families who have experienced such loss. We recognize that the grieving process, in these cases, is uniquely challenging, as it shatters all the hopes and dreams that were cherished for these precious lives.

Hence, our project aims to provide comprehensive funeral services to these grieving families. Right from the initial stages, we offer unwavering support and care, provide appropriate coffins, facilitate transportation services, and ensure all necessary procedures are meticulously handled. Importantly, we want to emphasize that our services are offered completely free of charge to these families, with no financial burden associated with the unfortunate loss of babies up to four months old.

Our utmost priority lies in delivering compassionate support, fully understanding that the pain associated with the loss of a child is indescribable. Unfortunately, the depth of this anguish cannot be quantified, but we are acutely aware of the lifelong impact it has on parents and their grief-stricken journey.

When we think about children, we think about life, vitality, joy, and hope. We create boundless expectations, and when all those aspirations dissipate, how does a mother cope, robbed of the opportunity to play with her child, witness their growth, or hear the sweet sound of "mommy"? This burden becomes even heavier when our legislation fails to recognize the significance of these cherished lives, deeming them as mere hospital waste when weighing under 500g, or neglecting to issue a certificate acknowledging their existence, which held such profound importance to the family during their brief time together.

Our purpose is to provide solace and dignity to these families through our unwavering support, driven by our mission to care for people by honoring and celebrating lives. Every aspect of our services, be it the tender care provided to the departed loved one or the compassionate support extended to the grieving family members, holds immense significance during the final farewells and heartfelt tributes.

In light of these circumstances, our project has emerged to champion this social cause, which catches many families off guard, leaving them vulnerable and unprotected. Our aim is to offer solace and ensure that their children receive a dignified farewell, while bearing no financial burden themselves.

Over the past five years, our project has served more than 200 infants, making a profound impact on over 200 grieving families navigating the turbulent waters of infant loss. As we move forward, our endeavor is to further personalize our services for children, providing even greater support and compassion to alleviate the profound pain experienced by those enduring such tragic losses.

Pedersen Funeral & Cremation

Morris, Minnesota

Starbuck Funeral Home, Starbuck, MN

Monument Open House – 2022

On Monday, September 12, 2022, Pedersen and Starbuck Funeral Homes held its annual Monument Open House at Pedersen Funeral Home in Morris. This is an annual event that Pedersen Funeral Home has been hosting for over 10 years now. It is always held the Monday after Labor Day. We at Pedersen Funeral Home believe that permanent memorialization pays tribute to a life lived, and it also helps provide a source of connection and comfort for loved ones throughout the years. We believe that this is so important, that we have decided to hold a sale in order for families to come and purchase a monument or marker who maybe wouldn't have if they didn't have the funds or opportunity. This is also a very important way for us to show the families and community that our staff at the funeral home can help with monument needs. We feel that it is so beneficial to help families all the way through the process and can help to make their monument or marker personalized to the family's needs. Most often, individuals do not realize that they can purchase these items through the funeral home and seek outside vendors to do so.

Our monument takes quite a bit of preparation work throughout the year to make it so successful. For each family that we serve, we find out if they have a monument or not. If they do have a monument, we make sure to help them with adding the final dates, and if they do not have a monument, we explain to them at the arrangement conference that we are able to help them through that process. Since we have had our sale for so many years, most people know that we hold a sale each fall and tend to ask about it. We start a list of people who show interest and a few weeks before the sale, we send out personalized invitations for the sale. The weekend before the sale, the monument company brings a variety of monuments to our parking lot and are on display for the weekend and the day of the sale for people to look at. The day of the sale, Brown Wilbert brings a couple of tents to our yard, and we serve a picnic style lunch for anybody who comes. Between the funeral home and the monument company, anyone who purchases a monument the day of the sale gets a ten percent discount as well as one other upgrade of their choice. The monument company also brings their designer to the funeral home so they can put a layout together for the family right then and there. We have been so successful with our sale, that this year, we added a scheduler to our website so that people could set up a time to meet with a funeral director to purchase their monument. In the years prior to this, it was first come first serve, and often times people had to wait. This way with an appointment, they were guaranteed a time to meet right away.

This event provides benefits to our funeral home and our staff. It allows us as funeral directors to help serve our families all the way through the funeral process, ending with a permanent memorial of their loved one at their place of rest. It allows us to have a face in the community and to get individuals who may never come to the funeral home to our site. It also provides profit to the funeral home. Last year the staff at Pedersen and Starbuck Funeral Homes sold \$98,396 at our sale! Every year we host this event, we always wonder if we will have a positive outcome, and every year we exceed our expectations.

This event also benefits families and the community at large, in helping them finalize and personalize their loved ones for years to come. We always enjoy working with families and putting together layouts that mean so much to them. With working with a familiar face, it is easy for us to come up with ideas that the family may not have or even known that was available. Monument and marker sales tend to be one of the favorite and rewarding things that the funeral directors do at our two locations. We also have positive feedback in the community with families that we serve, sharing the message on to others in the community. Most often weeks following the sale, we get a lot of calls from the public asking to be added to the list for next year.

The staff at Pedersen and Starbuck Funeral Homes intend to host this event annually. As mentioned before, we are always amazed at how many people come to our sale. This is one of our favorite events hosted at the funeral home every year, and we are always looking for ways to improve. As part of the Vertin Group, we have been able to help other funeral homes host their own monument sales as well!

Pollock Randall Funeral Home
Port Huron, Michigan

Karrer Simpson Funeral Home, Port Huron, MI; Marysville Funeral Home, Marysville, MI

Laura and Nick Godwin adopted Flash, a beautiful black Labrador retriever just before they got married in 2010. Flash enjoyed being Nick's pride and joy and happily duck hunted in the St. Clair River for many years, tolerating being bumped down in Nick and Laura's priority list by three babies. Long-time good-natured guardian of Godwin kids, ducks and home, Flash sadly succumbed to old age during the Godwin's annual "up north family reunion" in 2022 and needless to say, a meaningful farewell ceremony was held on the river.

Flash was purchased from the Brockdorff family who have trained hunting and more recently therapy dogs in our town for many years. Nick and Flash attended many training sessions with the Brockdorffs, demonstrated for younger dogs and marched in numerous parades. In recent years, Lori Brockdorff became active with therapy dogs serving in numerous local schools and senior homes, with law enforcement and in court, and in other non-profit venues. The dogs came often to work at visitations at our funeral homes in particularly tragic or student related situations. The local therapy dogs were always led by Lori's favorite dog, "Brockdorff's Pirate Princess Pearl", better known as Pearl.

As fate would have it, the Brockdorff's were planning a retirement move from Michigan to Florida and were concerned about how Pearl, at 8 years old, would adapt. Just about that time Flash died and Lori offered Nick & Laura the opportunity to take Pearl, suggesting she would not only be great with the children at home, but perfect at the funeral home as well. Therapy dogs are actually certified by their handlers, but we can refer to Pearl as a "retired therapy dog" without handler certification. She comes to work with Laura daily, wears a pearl necklace collar when she is working, meets families, attends visitations when requested, goes on our weekly Grief Walk, and graces our advertisements as "The newest member of our team". This digital sign campaign has been one of the most recognizable and popular we have done. We have received rave reviews on Facebook and in notes from families enamored with Pearl, our staff adores her, and people recognize her when she walks around town.

By adopting this older, already trained dog, we avoided the high purchase cost of an official "grief dog", got a reliable and already tested animal and a great pet. Pearl still loves to swim in the lake and retrieve fake ducks on her days off. She is prone to overdo it a bit as she is getting to be an older lady and has some arthritis. She is fond of butting her head at us to be petted and charmingly placing her paw on your leg for attention. However, we recently learned from Lori that these cute behaviors are actually demonstrating dominant pack dog mentality toward our staff and it is not good for Pearl to think she is running the funeral home. Lori is coming to do a staff training on appropriate therapy dog interaction next month.

Primaveras
São Paulo, Brazil

NFC became very well known through the approach payment that are used in credit cards and mainly in mobile payments. It is this functionality that allows the movement to be carried out.

We at Primaveras, through the team's network, partnered with the company Ori.Gatou, responsible for the development of Tap N' Tech technology. Through this tool, it is possible to communicate with our customers at any time they wish to obtain information, with a simple approach to the cell phone that has the NFC functionality on the smartphone.

In our All Souls event in 2022, we included Tap N' Tech, technology in the freebie photo that we deliver to our customers. By bringing the smartphone closer to the photo, a web page opens where the customer can perform some registration update actions, in addition to obtaining more information about us. This communication can be updated as often as we wish and we participate in having information on whether or not customers are accessing the content.

In this technology, there is no customer tracking, so there is no danger for the customer or for us. It is fully compliant with LGPD laws, as the customer receives instructions on how to use it and will always depend on his action to access any content.

How it works?

- Smartphone must have NFC functionality available and enabled;
- When approaching the tag with the same functionality, the link automatically appears that can be clicked to take to some action;
- There are no limits on approximations, and the content can be changed whenever you want, through the software that Ori.Gatou offers in the package.

What benefits?

- Through a single tag it is possible to forward various information;
- It is a sustainable product, as it avoids printing and excessive use of paper;
- It is possible to apply the tag to different surfaces;
- There are no link exchange limitations;
- More accessible cost due to the longevity that the product offers.

Are there harms?

There is no harm in using it, but there are some alert points such as understanding whether the public has this functionality on their smartphone, however, very soon, this will no longer be a concern, as companies are placing NFC as an item of factory on your appliances.

Another point of attention is about developing a product that draws attention so that it is always triggered by the customer.

What information is possible to obtain?

Although it is not a technology that uses tracking, it is possible to understand where the customer is geographically located, that is, it is not possible to obtain the precise address, but we are able to understand the city from which it is being accessed.

In addition, we were able to find out how many times a given tag was accessed, so we understand whether the customer is engaging with the content they are receiving.

**Robinson Funeral Home & Crematory-Downtown,
Easley, South Carolina**

Robinson Funeral Home & Crematory-Powdersville Road, Easley, SC; Duckett-Robinson Funeral Home & Cremations, Central-Clemson Commons, Central, SC

At a seminar in March 2022, Chris Robinson heard a presentation by Jake Johnson of Johnson Consulting on the book by John R. DiJulius III entitled *The Customer Service Revolution*. Jake talked about the book's main theme of the emphasis and importance of businesses built on employees maintaining good customer relations and the challenge of maintaining customer loyalty through excellent customer service. The book contains training examples of well-known companies such as Chick-fil-A and Ritz-Carlton and their consistent efforts to provide excellent customer service. Chris had heard about the book prior to the presentation, but the structured format that Johnson Consulting offered to formally implement the book and its concepts to the staff of Robinson Funeral Homes was very appealing.

Johnson Consulting Group has been around for over 20 years and has helped numerous businesses better develop their relationships and rapport with the families they serve. Their firm is comprised of experienced industry experts who have owned, operated, and managed hundreds of funeral homes and cemeteries.

At Robinson Funeral Homes, we have been striving to achieve excellent customer satisfaction as evidenced by our consistent customer survey results. However, to take it to the highest level, Chris felt it would be best to introduce the book to our team. It helped him tremendously when he read it, and he was convinced of the benefit of giving our entire staff the information in the book to help us all provide the best customer service possible.

Chris, along with assistance from Johnson Consulting Group, created a "Steering Committee" comprised of seven staff members from each location and different positions. This "Steering Committee" were given copies of the book, *The Customer Service Revolution* to read prior to a 2-Day Workshop given by Johnson Consulting Group. Over those two days, the committee discussed heavily into different aspects of the company's customer service and how to exceed customer expectations in order to continue to achieve excellent customer satisfaction.

After the workshop, Chris Robinson provided a copy of the book to all staff members who interact with customers. The committee met regularly to discuss the company's standards in different stages of customer interaction, how to prevent defects, and how to go above and beyond in each stage. Once the committee had developed a effective plan to help associates to feel more comfortable in exceeding expectations, we held a "Roll-Out Event" to present the plan to all staff members on January 17th, 2023.

The event theme was "Being On-Stage" with the decorations similar to a red-carpet movie award ceremony along with movie popcorn, candy, and catered dinner. There were approximately 65 staff members present. The committee presented the plan to all staff prior to eating. Each staff member participated in the presentation. Everyone left with a mousepad with our new Customer Service Vision Statement that the committee created during the workshop, handouts from the presentation, and movie award trophy. Everyone left feeling uplifted and anxious to go above and beyond for our families.

After the initial "Roll-Out Event", the committee wanted to make sure that the momentum did not fade out. We started having quarterly meetings called "CX Huddles" (Customer Experience Huddles) to discuss the different stages of customer interaction deeper and in smaller groups. The first meeting was in March of 2023 and discussed first impressions. We had three meetings. One at each location and different times to accommodate around potential funeral services. The smaller groups allowed more discussion amongst associates for better feedback and suggestions. There were several great suggestions made from full and part-time associates that were considered and implemented.

The second "CX Huddle" was with funeral arrangers only as it discussed the arrangement conference. We met all together at the Downtown location in the beginning of May. The format was similar to the previous meeting, with members of the committee discussing the standards we hold for the arrangement

conference and potential ideas for going above and beyond. The meeting also provided time for round table discussion with examples and suggestions on ways to exceed expectations for our families.

The third "CX Huddle" was about the visitation and ceremony. Because this meeting was with all staff members again, we had the smaller group meetings at each location similar to the first huddle. This took place in the middle of June. Again, starting with the committee discussing our standards, but also mentioning potential defects to watch out for and going above and beyond. More discussion after the presentation to allow all associates' suggestions and feedback to be heard. Also, we took this opportunity to give recognition to specific staff members we have noticed implementing methods to go above and beyond, encouraging other associates to do the same.

The Steering Committee's goal is to continue with these quarterly meetings to keep the momentum going for staff members to provide us with suggestions with exceeding customer expectations and also feedback on items that we need to correct or better. Currently, the committee is comprised of Greg Rice, Funeral Director/Embalmer and Duckett-Robinson Location Manager, Lee Miles, Funeral Director/Embalmer of the Powdersville Road location, Nathan Miller, Funeral Director/Embalmer of the Downtown location, Maggie Whalen, Funeral Director/Embalmer Apprentice, Allison Gantt, After-Care Coordinator, Steve Crowe, Part-Time Funeral Associate, and Jimmy Wilson, Funeral Director and Operations Manager.

Roller Funeral Homes (Roller-Chenal Funeral Home)

Little Rock, Arkansas

Roller-Drummond Funeral Home, Little Rock, AR; Roller-Owens Funeral Home, N. Little Rock, AR; Roller-England Funeral Home, England, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, West Memphis, AR; Roller-Swift Funeral Home, Osceola, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, West Helena, AR; Roller-Citizens Funeral Home, Marianna, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Conway, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Greenbriar, AR; Roller-McNutt Funeral Home, Greenbriar, AR; Roller-Burns Funeral Home, Yellville, AR; Roller-Christeson Funeral Home, Harrison, AR; Roller Funeral Home, Mountain Home, AR; Roller-Crouch Funeral Home, Batesville, AR; Roller-Coffman Funeral Home, Marshall, AR; Roller-Coffman Funeral Home, Mountain View, AR; Roller-Crouch Funeral Home, Mountain View, AR; Roller-Daniel Funeral Home, Searcy, AR; Roller-Farmers Union Funeral Home, Jonesboro, AR

Crisis Inspires Innovation – A Story of Resilience by Roller Funeral Homes

It has been said that “necessity is the father of innovation.” However, Mother Nature has her own ways to inspire.

Adversity is no stranger to the Roller family, which traces our roots back over 100 years in the funeral profession. One of the more public examples was in 1971 when Roller Funeral Homes made Paul Harvey news for building Arkansas’ first crematory. We then made Paul Harvey news for that same crematory burning to the ground the next day. Sadly, this would not be our only experience with fire. Roller-Farmers Union Funeral Home in Jonesboro, AR, burned to the ground in 2012. In December 2019, we successfully navigated an aggressive cyber-attack. 2020 was, of course, the year of COVID-19, when we all learned a new way of serving families.

We do not mention our previous trials as a badge of honor for our family-owned firm. We highlight them because of the lessons learned from each challenge. Those important lessons have strengthened Roller Funeral Homes to respond to adversity with wisdom, resilience, and innovation.

March 31, 2023, would be a day when the strength of Roller Funeral Homes would be put to the ultimate test. At 2:20 PM, an F3 tornado with 165 MPH sustained winds began its path through Little Rock, AR, approximately 300 yards behind Roller-Chenal Funeral Home and the business office building. In 30 seconds, 15 vehicles, 37 trees, and millions of dollars worth of damage were done to Roller-Chenal Funeral Home and the business office building. We are grateful to God that nobody was killed and the deceased we served at the time remained untouched, safely within our walls. Local first responders were on the scene in minutes, assisting our staff in securing the deceased and taking them safely to other local Roller Funeral Homes. At 5:30 PM, the staff of Roller-Chenal Funeral Home would fulfill their promise to a family to hold a visitation, albeit not as originally planned. The wisdom to immediately call the family before the phone systems became too congested and move the deceased out of the dangerous building before the traffic became impassable proved to be decisions that would make this visitation possible. Backup data systems maintained offsite that were implemented after the cyber-attack made it possible to access and reprint material needed at Roller-Drummond Funeral Home to honor our deceased properly. Showing this type of resilience and dedication to our profession in the midst of shock is a true inspiration.

With the help of Answering Service Direct (ASD) and cellphones, the Roller-Chenal team took two additional families into their care that night despite having their funeral home destroyed hours earlier. Roller-Owens, Roller-Alcoa, Roller-Drummond, and Roller-McNutt Funeral Homes, have all continued to assist our Roller-Chenal team as they continue to serve the public. The mindset we embodied that day of teamwork and innovation to meet challenges is what has been required every day since the storm.

An immediate challenge to continue serving families in West Little Rock was no longer having a chapel. We began an outreach campaign, partnering with local event venues such as churches, Chenal Country Club, and even a local duck lodge to hold creative and extremely personalized services for our families. We began meeting families in their homes, local businesses, and churches to meet the needs of our West Little Rock families. We have used tools and skills learned through the covid pandemic to meet virtually with families. Zoom and DocuSign have become critical components of our arrangements once again.

Another challenge we face is the public perception. Thousands of people in our community see our damaged building every day. We have gone door-to-door meeting with caregiving facilities, social workers, and hospice organizations, making it known that we are still here serving the public. We have participated in many interviews on local tv stations, radio stations and utilized our social media pages to get the word out that we are still here serving our community. We have also leaned on our exclusive partners at Life Celebrations (see category 6D) to help us transform our traditional funeral services into a custom funeral experience that they cannot get anywhere else. This has played a major role in differentiating ourselves from nearby competitors with a functioning chapel in the area. We are honored that the community continues to ask for the team of Roller-Chenal. It is a testament to the meaningful relationships we have established and the trust we have earned.

It is impossible to summarize the challenges we have overcome since the tornado in a short essay without also minimizing the monumental effort of the Roller team. However, if nothing else is retained from this paper, we hope to communicate this. The staff of Roller Funeral Homes has displayed excellence during an extraordinary time. In the face of crisis, our group of funeral professionals responded with wisdom, innovation, and resilience. Our building can be taken, but our calling to serve our community will always be answered.

**Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory
New Castle, Delaware**

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Delaware City, DE; Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Newark, DE; Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, Middletown, DE

Ours is a profession that demands the management of many moving parts, each one as vital as the one before and after it, and all anchored in service.

The moment a family member crosses the threshold of our funeral home, there is a tangible transfer of trust. They are in grief, shock even, mourning the loss of a loved one, and enduring significant sadness and pain. As their funeral home of choice, we are tasked with curating the final goodbye and life celebration of a beloved person who is no longer in their life.

This responsibility is humbling and a great privilege.

We know as Funeral Directors that our most useful asset is not just a “head full of knowledge, but a heart full of love, an ear ready to listen, and a hand willing to help and lead others.”

Funeral professionals will tell you in a heartbeat that arranging a life celebration is like organizing a wedding in 3-4 days, along with providing grief support, and completing a considerable list of other important legal, compliance, and social tasks.

The service our communities need when faced with the death of a loved one is immediate, which makes us a 24/7 profession. And whether it is midnight or midday, our families expect and need the most trusted, thorough service. As funeral directors, we are continually having to navigate challenges brought on by regulators, state services, and even the mail system, and trying to problem-solve these issues. I like to think of us in our profession as true innovators.

New Program Rationale:

Our professional responsibility as Funeral Directors gently ends once the family member is buried or the remains of the loved one are safely in the hands of the next of kin. The latter has become a challenge when involving mail or couriers.

The funeral profession has seen an exponential increase in the demand for cremation services, which has paralleled the slow and steady decline of our postal services.

We have had a few instances where cremains that were mailed to loved ones took far longer than anticipated to arrive at their destination. The experience was agonizing for the entire Spicer-Mullikin team, and the loved ones. We decided we had to do something to mitigate this risk, and created our cremains distribution program, “Coming Home.”

“Coming Home” Program Description:

Spicer-Mullikin’s owner, licensed funeral director Matthew Smith, led the initiative to solve the problem of cremains delivery. To him, this was very personal. He kept asking the question, “How can Spicer-Mullikin circumvent the deep-rooted organizational challenges being experienced by the USPS and some other courier services?” He felt it was essential that Spicer-Mullikin got ahead of the issue that he and many of his peers were concerned about.

Spicer-Mullikin researched many options, including personal couriers (the cost was prohibitive). An ardent traveler, Matthew then explored the technology behind luggage tracking and analyzed that data. Luggage may not always arrive when it should, but at least the travelers could see where their luggage was – and make suitable arrangements to get it back.

Matthew and his associates reviewed all the global technology options involved in luggage tracking and started actively investigating possibilities they could use locally to track cremains. Reliability was key.

After considerable due diligence, they decided to source Bluetooth Trackers from a company called Tile and create a service offering to their families, at no additional cost to them, that ensures the safe delivery of their loved ones' remains.

The technological logistics were straightforward and immediately implementable:

1. Spicer-Mullikin activates the tracking device, placing it alongside the cremains in the package for mailing
2. Spicer-Mullikin provides access & login info to the family
3. The family is able to simply & easily track the exact location of their cremains as they are mailed to them.

Making the "Coming Home" Cremains Courier Program a reality:

The Spicer-Mullikin team felt a close affiliation with this new service they were providing. Everyone was invited to submit names for the program, and Coming Home was voted the most popular by all.

We went to work with our creative partners in developing a program logo for Coming Home – something that would be visually respectful, calming, and peaceful. We also wanted something that would stand the test of time ... Like our very own Spicer-Mullikin logo.

Creating this visual depiction of the program was very inspiring. Some of the looks we created for the Coming Home program are attached as samples.

How Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Home Benefits from the Coming Home Cremains Courier Program:

Like everyone in the funeral profession, we are all very connected to the communities we serve and take to heart the task of memorializing their loved ones. This is both our duty and our honor.

Our job as professionals in this highly complex, demanding profession is to ensure that each and every life celebration is performed from beginning to end without adding any stress or discomfort to those grieving their loved one. That means we must be diligent in our execution of duties, and make sure we do everything in our power to prevent any hiccups or preventable errors.

When even the smallest thing goes wrong, we see it as an interruption to the usual above-and-beyond services we provide, and that is extremely stressful for everyone. Even when what went wrong is entirely out of our scope of responsibility, it is hard not to take it personally.

The Coming Home Cremains Courier Program offers peace of mind to Spicer-Mullikin employees and the families we serve. We know that should there be a delay in the cremains reaching their destination, the Coming Home system can track them and share updates with the next of kin – easing their frustrations and anxieties.

That is such a helpful contribution to everyone's well-being.

We see this as a gift to each other and our families.

How Families Benefit from the Coming Home Cremains Courier Program:

A death in a family brings with it a surge of emotions, demands, and deadlines. It is such an extraordinarily stressful time for loved ones. Once the funeral or cremation service is over, families tend to grieve more deeply, feeling the true impact of the absence of that loved one. Receiving their loved one's cremains is the last step in the life celebration process and a vital one. It closes the door on that life.

Many families choose to have the cremains mailed to them, rather than journey back to the funeral home. They want to be in the privacy of their own home for this final step, this moment of closure. Delays caused by mail and courier services create untold distress for the families (and the funeral director)!

Knowing that their loved one's remains are trackable provides the families with an added layer of trust and security, or as we see it, additional peace of mind. Our Coming Home Cremains Courier Program delivers closure with love, sanctity, and a guarantee!

**Vila Memorial - Centro de Velório São José
Natak, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil**

Sempre Family Assistance: from evolution to innovation in family benefits

The Vila company, founded in 1948, has had Sempre Assistência Familiar (Always Family Assistance) in its structure for 19 years, taking care of families with affection and professionalism. The brand is present in the three main regions of the Rio Grande do Norte state: Natal and the metropolitan area, Seridó and Oeste-Potiguar. In addition, it has been established for 10 years in the Paraíba state and, recently, it has resumed operations in the capital João Pessoa.

For us, care is essential because it involves commitment to well-being and life quality. Thus, the Sempre, as a pioneering brand of Vila Company, was planned to offer support and protection to bereaved families in times of need. We believe that it is essential to take care of and be constantly committed to people, recognizing and valuing the importance of each one.

By investing in our clients, we create a bond of trust and loyalty, because when people feel that they are being cared for and supported in a constant and effective way in their lives, they automatically establish a solid relationship of trust. Sempre remains present in the daily lives of more than 100,000 Brazilian families, who recommend our services and assume a daily commitment to us.

After a rebranding process, we moved from the funeral assistance segment to family assistance, with a change in the visual identity, message and strategic communication positioning. The key point was to improve the relationship with our clients and humanize our services, to protect and take care of these families in life, going beyond the difficult moments of loss.

In this scenario, innovation was achieved through the introduction of a dynamic and regionalized benefits club, called "Sempre + Benefits", designed to provide an exclusive experience with advantages to Sempre customers, in addition to other services incorporation.

This new business model offers a variety of discounts on services in different categories, such as: health, wellness, education, leisure, among others, which are updated on a cyclical basis to adapt to the needs of families that are part of Sempre. Such discounts may even exceed the amount paid monthly for the insurance.

Access to the Club is carried out through the online portal (<https://areadocliente.planosempre.com.br/>), which has an agile and intuitive interface, and for those who have not yet joined the Sempre insurance, there is the possibility of register on the platform and enjoy 7 days of free access. For Sempre's customer, Francisco Lucas, using the service was an opportunity to get discounts on products, an economical way to enjoy benefits and save money on purchases.

"I used Sempre + Benefits in a drugstore. Every month I bought more than R\$300.00 worth of medication for continuous use for my father, who has a heart condition. The discount was very good, and I already took advantage of this promotion twice. The amount saved was quite significant," says Francisco.

Along with the Benefit Club, Sempre has in its benefits program the provision of branded mobile telephony services and the offer of exclusive payroll loans for its customers, with advantageous interest rates, which serve as aid for planned investments or to cover unexpected expenses.

We improved our funeral assistance offered in the insurance, allowing the customization of the funeral service, where it became practicable to select the products and services that meet the particular needs of each family, that suit the budget of each one, bringing a complete solution to the Sempre's customer.

As well as the wide range of customizable options, it is possible to include additional services that provide a complete solution for bereaved families, such as the rent of vertical burial places with ossuary, human cremation and pet cremation.

By opting for customization and the acquisition of additional services, we offer the client the possibility of planning, anticipating the decision-making process. In this way, this helps to bring peace and comfort at the time of the loved one's loss, since most bureaucratic demands have already been resolved, allowing family members to focus on emotional demands.

This model adds to the company's competitive positioning in the market, attracting more customers and retaining old ones. We also value our employees, who benefit from the model with exclusive discounts on services that are already deducted from their payroll.

Sharing good ideas is a way of disseminating knowledge among companies and, therefore, other funeral homes will also be able to adopt them to help more people, offering more benefits to their customers. In this way, by expanding the variety of services offered, customers with different profiles will be able to be served according to their needs.

Thus, with a commitment to the continuous pursuit of excellence, by raising the quality of services and improving customer relationships, we daily earn their trust through a humanized approach through innovative services and technologies. And so on, we show that we are present in the most difficult moments, but we also do not forget the other moments in the lives of the families that rely on Sempre - Family Assistance.

Content links:

https://www.instagram.com/p/ConpSnFDs_g/

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoxVqBeDyu8/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoswdRSug6i/>

Waitt Funeral Home and Cremation Service
Morganville, New Jersey
Mathis Funeral Home, Medford, NJ

Preventing Compassion Fatigue Among Funeral Directors

After enduring the hardships and uncertainties brought upon us by the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, this year, 2023, has finally felt like life and our surroundings have normalcy again. It is a year that feels like a breath of fresh air, as our lives slowly but surely return to a semblance of what we once considered normal. Various aspects of our lives that we took for advantage of are now seen as the gift that they are, social interactions, economic progress, travel, education and group settings, and mental and emotional well-being.

Having had the blessing of being nominated to become a Mentor at NFDA's Meet the Mentors which is sponsored by the Funeral Service Foundation, I was confronted with a sobering thought, "Am I putting my team's emotional wellbeing a the forefront of my organization?" All too often as operators the focus is on financial gains, market share, staff benefits (payroll, health plans, retirement) but how many funeral homes are actively focusing on Compassion Fatigue, Mental Health Awareness, and Manager training to help identify compassion fatigue.

At Meet the Mentors we had an amazing presentation by Lynda Cheldelin Fell, Founding Partner at the International Grief Institute about compassion fatigue, resilience, and managing grief in the workplace. I left convicted yet motivated to institute immediate change. The Mentor became the mentee, you are never done learning.

As Founder and Operator of Jersey Memorial Group, with assets across funeral homes, crematories, pet services, insurance agency, and publication services in multiple states, I met with our Michael Grandi and our leadership team to develop a comprehensive Staff Support Plan to ensure the team's well being. We quickly found that one plan would fall short, we needed TWO plans. One for our staff members and equally important, one for our location managers to be able to help identify and promote wellness. Operating numerous roof tops presented challenges in that we needed to be able to scale, make financial investments, and educate team members. Also having the honor of previously being award NFDA's POE and Best of Best our intent was to make a plan that can be easily adopted and shared with our colleagues throughout our profession. We wanted a plan that would work for a single rooftop or multiple roof tops, family firms or corporate locations, as well as with suppliers.

We decided to roll out the program in each firm but started with furniture, equipment and building modifications in two of the locations with plans to roll out companywide furnishings and be finished by the 4th quarter of 2024.

We experienced such an overwhelming response that something else happened, something we had not anticipated. We started to receive resumes from funeral directors, apprentices, and non-licensed support staff. Word got out. We may have lived through a health pandemic, but funeral service is in another pandemic, and Employment Pandemic. We learned quickly that our profession has overlooked the very same thing we promote, guidance in dealing with loss and grief, just on a professional level. But when an operation places their priority in their team and their well being by identifying overall mental and emotion health moral skyrockets.

As a testament, Jersey Memorial has been able to fill every position across each funeral home with resumes continuing to come in. I have had the pleasure of adding to the team Funeral Directors, Managers, Crematory Operators, Dually Licensed Advanced Planning Directors, Administrators, Apprentices, and Accounting team members. My hope is that these simple steps outlined in a plan for staff and the mangers would be able to be replicated and funeral homes that take make compassion fatigue a main focus will be able to separate from other firms and employ the very best practitioners.

A Comprehensive Staff Support Plan

Introduction:

Funeral directors play a critical role in providing compassionate care and support to grieving families during one of the most challenging times in their lives. However, the continuous exposure to grief and loss can lead to compassion fatigue, a condition that affects their emotional, mental, and physical well-being. To ensure the well-being of funeral directors, it is crucial to implement a comprehensive staff support plan that addresses their needs and prevents compassion fatigue. This plan outlines various strategies and resources, including massage chairs, quiet rooms, collaborative areas, mental health days off, and reading materials, to promote self-care, relaxation, and mental health support.

1. Implementation of Massage Chairs:

- a. Provide massage chairs in designated areas to offer relaxation and stress relief during breaks.
- b. Collaborate with professional massage therapists to provide occasional on-site massages to alleviate tension and promote relaxation.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to take advantage of these resources during their downtime.

2. Establishing Quiet Rooms:

- a. Designate specific rooms or areas within funeral homes as quiet spaces for funeral directors to take short breaks.
- b. Furnish these rooms with comfortable seating, dim lighting, soft music, and calming scents.
- c. Encourage the use of these spaces to facilitate relaxation, meditation, or simply to find solace during challenging moments.

3. Creating Collaborative Areas:

- a. Designate specific spaces within the funeral home that encourage social interaction and support among funeral directors.
- b. Furnish these areas with comfortable seating, coffee machines, and a relaxing ambiance to promote informal discussions and bonding.
- c. Encourage open communication, sharing experiences, and seeking advice from peers to foster a sense of camaraderie and support.

4. Mental Health Days Off:

- a. Recognize the importance of mental health by implementing a system that allows funeral directors to take mental health days off without stigma or guilt.
- b. Develop a policy that outlines the procedure for requesting and approving mental health days off, ensuring confidentiality and understanding from management.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to utilize these days for self-care activities, seeking therapy, spending time with loved ones, or engaging in hobbies that bring them joy.

5. Access to Reading Materials:

- a. Establish a library or resource center within the funeral home that provides books, articles, and other reading materials on grief counseling, self-care, and mental health.
- b. Collaborate with local libraries or grief counseling organizations to curate a collection of relevant resources.
- c. Encourage funeral directors to make use of these resources during their breaks, helping them enhance their knowledge and coping strategies.

Conclusion:

The demanding nature of the funeral director profession makes it crucial to prioritize staff well-being and prevent compassion fatigue. By implementing strategies such as providing massage chairs, quiet rooms, collaborative areas, mental health days off, and access to reading materials, funeral homes can create a supportive environment that promotes self-care, relaxation, and mental health support. This comprehensive staff support plan not only benefits funeral directors but also ensures that they can continue to provide compassionate care to grieving families with empathy and professionalism.

Executive Coaching Plan for Funeral Director Managers to Support Teams Dealing with Grief and Stress

Introduction:

Funeral director managers play a crucial role in supporting their teams, who are exposed to grief and stress on a daily basis. To ensure the well-being and effectiveness of the entire staff, it is essential for managers to possess the necessary skills and knowledge to provide effective support and guidance. This executive coaching plan outlines a structured approach to develop funeral director managers' abilities in addressing their teams' needs, managing stress, fostering resilience, and promoting a healthy work environment.

1. Assessing Managerial Skills and Knowledge:

- a. Conduct an initial assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement in funeral director managers' abilities to support their teams dealing with grief and stress.
- b. Utilize surveys, interviews, and feedback sessions to gather insights from managers, staff, and external stakeholders.
- c. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the managers' current skill set, challenges, and areas requiring development.

2. Providing Education and Training:

- a. Organize training sessions or workshops to enhance funeral director managers' knowledge and understanding of grief, stress, and their impact on individuals and teams.
- b. Collaborate with grief counseling experts, psychologists, or mental health professionals to provide specialized training on supporting employees dealing with grief and stress.
- c. Ensure that managers are equipped with effective communication techniques, active listening skills, and strategies to address team members' emotional and psychological well-being.

3. Developing Resilience and Self-Care Strategies:

- a. Provide executive coaching sessions to funeral director managers focused on developing personal resilience and self-care techniques.
- b. Explore stress management strategies, mindfulness practices, and exercises to help managers maintain their well-being while supporting their teams.
- c. Encourage managers to model healthy self-care habits and prioritize their own well-being, setting an example for their staff to follow.

4. Enhancing Emotional Intelligence:

- a. Conduct coaching sessions to help funeral director managers develop their emotional intelligence skills.
- b. Assist managers in recognizing and managing their own emotions while empathizing with their team members' feelings.
- c. Train managers to navigate difficult conversations, handle conflicts, and provide appropriate support to their teams based on individual needs.

5. Implementing Team Support Strategies:

- a. Collaborate with funeral director managers to develop strategies for supporting their teams dealing with grief and stress.
- b. Encourage managers to foster a supportive and empathetic work environment by implementing regular team check-ins, open-door policies, and confidential communication channels.
- c. Provide managers with resources such as grief counseling referrals, community support networks, and educational materials to assist their teams in accessing the necessary resources for coping with grief and stress.

6. Ongoing Coaching and Support:

- a. Provide regular coaching sessions and check-ins to funeral director managers to ensure the continued development of their skills and support strategies.
- b. Create a safe space for managers to discuss challenges, seek guidance, and share best practices.

c. Offer opportunities for managers to share their successes, lessons learned, and personal growth experiences with their peers through workshops or team-building activities.

Conclusion:

By implementing this executive coaching plan, funeral director managers can develop the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support their teams dealing with grief and stress. Equipped with enhanced emotional intelligence, resilience strategies, and a supportive work environment, managers can create a culture that prioritizes the well-being of their staff while maintaining professional excellence. This plan not only benefits the funeral director managers but also contributes to the overall success and satisfaction of the entire team, resulting in improved service delivery to grieving families.

Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes
Ososso, Michigan

Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Durand, MI; Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Perry, MI; Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Laingsburg, MI; Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Bancroft, MI; Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Corunna, MI; Watkins Brothers Funeral Homes, Howell, MI

We are the only funeral home in our area that has a professionally trained grief therapy dog. JoJo is a two year-old Labradoodle that was professionally trained at Ultimate K-9, she has been a great asset not only to the community that we serve but also the funeral home staff. We decided to purchase a therapy dog to help bridge the gap between the funeral home and the public and make an easier transition in the grief journey with the families we serve. She has been taken to our local hospital (Memorial Healthcare Center) and to our local schools for March is Reading Month where we read a book to the children about a therapy dog that became a super hero

Grief is a natural and inevitable experience that results from the loss of a loved one or a significant life event. It can be a devastating experience that causes emotional and physical distress, which can last for a long time. However, the use of grief therapy dogs has shown to be beneficial in easing the burden of grief and providing the required therapeutic support for individuals who have suffered a loss.

A grief therapy dog is a trained dog that is used to provide comfort, support, and emotional assistance to people who are grieving. These dogs are specially trained to detect and respond to emotional distress and provide a sense of calm and comfort to the grieving individual. They have a calming effect on people and are able to provide unconditional love, comfort, and companionship to individuals going through a difficult time.

Grief therapy dogs help in reducing anxiety and stress, which is a common side effect of grief. They provide a sense of calm and reduce anxiety and help to prevent depression. They are also able to motivate individuals to engage in activities like walking, running and playing that can help in improving overall mental and physical health. Grief therapy dogs ensure that the person grieving does not feel alone and isolated, creating a sense of human connection that can be crucial in the healing process.

Furthermore, grief therapy dogs are also able to provide a sense of safety and security. They can help to reduce feelings of vulnerability, fear, and loss of control that can arise from the grieving process. These dogs are trained to provide the physical presence needed to keep the person feeling secure and safe.

In addition to having emotional benefits, grief therapy dogs also provide physical benefits. They have been shown to improve immune function, lower blood pressure, and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases. They have been proven to lower stress hormones such as cortisol, contributing to a stronger immune system, especially during times of physical and emotional stress.

In conclusion, the benefits of grief therapy dogs are numerous and significant. These dogs provide a comforting and calming effect to individuals during a painful time. They have been known to reduce depression, anxiety, and stress levels in individuals. They also provide a sense of safety and security, physical activity, and socialization, which can contribute to overall mental and physical health. Grief therapy dogs are an essential tool in the arsenal of therapeutic modalities that can be used to help in the healing of individuals who have experienced grief.