

Bradbury Memorial Center, Lake Havasu City, AZ

Bradbury Memorial Center staff strives to serve. Maintaining a relationship with the community, law enforcement, and emergency personnel is a lifelong commitment. When law enforcement from the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) / Cold Case Division asked for our help, we agreed to accommodate to the best of our ability. Assisting the SIU has been rewarding and serves a unique purpose.

We take great pride in helping the families whose loved one was listed as missing, or as a cold case, and their case has now been resolved. Unfortunately, the news may come as a shock. For many, they have looked so long for closure or to know what happened to their missing loved one. Unfortunately, some may not be with us any longer to hear the news. This only deepens the pain for the surviving family members and friends.

SIU has selected us because of the outstanding customer care, discounted pricing for resolved cold cases, and extended aftercare. We make sure each person cremated is returned in a respectable urn, and if the case requires burial, we provide a casket and services at discounted prices. If the person is a veteran, we will retrieve the DD214 from the military archives to assure military honors are completed.

This can be a very trying time for the surviving individuals, and the staff at Bradbury Memorial Center will offer a list of community resources if extended services are needed. Sometimes the family members want to tell their story and share memories. Our staff will take the extra time to listen and extend the gesture of giving our time and compassion. We enter the survivors' lives at a very intimate time, and how we care for them will contribute to the family's healing process.

Our funeral home is located in the Mohave Desert. This area has desolate places that have been known to hold many secrets, including homicides, suicides, and unfortunate accidents. From July 2023 to June 2024, Bradbury Memorial Center has had the privilege of serving five families. Four selected cremation and one selected burial. The age of the cases ranged from the years 1989 to 2021. The Sheriff's Office has a number of cases that they continue to work on. Once the DNA profile has been established, the family found and notified, and the remains are no longer required to remain in custody, they are released to Bradbury Memorial Center. When a case is solved, and the family is notified, the sheriff's office creates a press release.

The trauma is overwhelming for some, and the staff at Bradbury Memorial Center is honored to be entrusted with this important task. The staff is also proud to serve the community and law enforcement through this program.

Copeland Funeral Service, Beaufort, SC

ANNUAL FIRE SERVICE BAR-B-Q

In 2011, we sponsored our first annual Fire Service Bar-B-Q for ALL career and volunteer fire service personnel in Beaufort County. The annual Bar-B-Q is held during Fire Prevention Week in October. The event is held at the Lady's Island Fire Department Headquarters on Lady's Island, South Carolina. There are twenty fire departments in Beaufort County. A few weeks before the Bar-B-Q, we send an invitation to all the fire chiefs in the county to let them know the day of the event and to ask them to provide us with a count of the personnel who will be eating.

Our menu includes a half of bar-b-q chicken, potato salad, baked beans, bread, ice tea and cake for desert. Prior to the day of the BBQ our funeral home orders and pays for all food and supplies. We take all food and supplies and meet at headquarters bright and early on the morning of the BBQ. We assist Chief Bruce Kline of the Lady's Island/St. Helena Fire Department and Chief Josh Horton of the Fripp Island Fire Department with the cooking. While some of us are cooking, the others are setting up the tables and chairs, packaging the baked beans and potato salad, and cutting the cake. Some of the dinners are take out. In 2013, we added the Copeland Funeral Service logo to the carry- out containers. In 2015, we had some employees from the South Carolina State Firefighters' Association, Columbia, South Carolina, come and witnessed what we do for the local firefighters and first responders. In 2014, at the South Carolina State Firefighters Annual Convention, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, J. Edward Gamble III, CFSP, received the Citizenship Award.

In 2013, (our third year), we included all communications, Fire Commissioners, and Emergency Medical Services staff persons. We also added Daufuskie Island Fire Department. The only way to get to Daufuskie Island is by boat and or ferry. It is approximately a fifteen minute ride by ferry. By feeding the ferry captain, we bartered with him to deliver the Daufuskie Island Fire Department their meals. In 2014, (our fourth year) we included firefighters from Paris Island, United States Marine Corps and from MCAS (Marine Corps Air Station). In 2015, we included on duty personnel from Lady's Island on the day of the BBQ. We also added personnel from the Beaufort County Coroner's office. In 2016, we added some of the Military Police at Paris Island, United States Marine Corps. We are trying to gradually increase our invitees and one day plan to include all the law enforcement officers in our county. In 2017, we were able to include members of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Department who were on duty and patrolling Lady's Island and we also added the Military Police at the Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station. In 2018, we were able to include some officers from other fire departments to see what we do for our local first responders. This included members from North Charleston Fire Department, Newberry City Fire Department and Clarendon Country Fire Department. Our first year, there were approximately one hundred fifty dinners served. This year our Bar-B-Q was held on November 7, 2024. This past year, 2024, we served a little over 420 dinners.

This is a service provided by our funeral home and is done without any cost to our friends in public service. This has been a very positive outreach for our funeral home. We have received a large number of "thank yous" from the departments and individuals. On March 15, 2012, Copeland Funeral Service received a plaque from the Beaufort County Fire Chiefs Association. On the plaque it states "We present this plaque to show our gratitude for generosity and support to the firefighters of Beaufort County." This past year we received a letter for Mr. Gordon Bowers, Commission Chairman of Lady's Island-St. Helena Fire District, thanking us for the service we provide to the men and women.

We are committed to continuing with this appreciation dinner.

Also on May 12, 2020 Copeland Funeral Service made a donation to Burton Fire Department in order for the department to complete their goal of placing a Jacobkit in every one of the country schools and in every classroom. The trauma kit was named after Jacob Hall, a 6 year old student wounded in a 2016 school shooting in Townsville, SC. Jacob survived the wound but died three days later due to massive blood loss. The Jacobkit is an individual first aid bleeding control kit that is specially equipped to provide essential medical supplies to help stop life threatening bleeding.

Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Home, Pennsauken, NJ
Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral Homes, Camden, NJ

We at Falco, Caruso & Leonard Funeral home have become a drop off location for the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Grandma's Attic Neo-Intensive Care Unit. Grandma's Attic is a program at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia that collects various essential items for families with babies in the NICU. These items can consist of blankets, swaddles, onesies, booties, mittens, hats, bows, and more. Often times when families find themselves with a baby in the NICU, they might not have had time to prepare to bring items with them to the hospital for their baby or their baby is too small for the items they brought. They also might have a longer than anticipated stay in the NICU and need additional clothing and other items for the duration of the baby's stay. By collecting donations, Grandma's Attic helps to alleviate the stress put onto families of finding and getting additional items brought to the hospital during an already stressful time. If their baby needs to stay in the NICU for an unknown period of time, it can be very stressful for families not knowing what might come next. As a way to help this wonderful organization, we organized a drop off location at our Pennsauken Funeral Home as a way for members of the community to have a central location to donate items. We advertised on Facebook and throughout our community about our drop off location with the deadline of June 30th. The community rallied together and dropped off hundreds of items. The benefit to our funeral home is simply knowing that we made a difference for many families at a time when they need it most in a way that is different than funeral services. Although being a funeral home typically helps families when they lose a life, we wanted to make an impact where families are gaining a life. The funeral home also has a personal connection to this organization, as the owner's own daughter, Ashley and her husband, Robert who are both funeral directors at our funeral home, experienced the kindness of Grandma's Attic when their own daughter, Anastasia was a resident of the NICU for 127 days. During this time, they personally were able to utilize this program because Anastasia was too small for the clothing they had brought. By collecting these donations, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia will be able to supply hundreds of families with items during their stay in the NICU. It is our intention that by providing these donations, it helps to alleviate the stress these families experience while in the hospital with their babies.

Grace Funeral Home & St. Lazarus of Bethany Memorial Garden, Covington, LA

In a world where the demands on law enforcement officers grow ever more complex, it is essential that communities find meaningful ways to show appreciation for the sacrifices these professionals make every day. At our funeral home, we have embraced this sentiment through our innovative Law Enforcement Appreciation Luncheon, a heartfelt initiative designed to honor the officers of St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, Mandeville Police Department, Covington Police Department, and the Town Marshall of Abita Springs. This program, held annually during Police Week, serves as a powerful expression of gratitude through the simple yet profound act of sharing a meal.

The Law Enforcement Appreciation Luncheon was conceived with the aim of celebrating Police Week and demonstrating our deep appreciation for the tireless efforts of our local law enforcement officers. Each year, this program culminates in a festive Fish Fry Lunch, a tradition that seamlessly blends southern hospitality with community solidarity. Our cemetery supervisor, Vincent Williams, takes center stage as the culinary maestro of this event, personally frying up a selection of fresh fish on-site. This personal touch not only ensures high-quality, delicious food but also fosters a warm, informal atmosphere where officers can relax and enjoy a well-deserved break.

The Fish Fry Lunch is more than just a meal; it is a community gathering that brings together local law enforcement personnel and members of our funeral home staff in a shared space of appreciation and camaraderie. Alongside the expertly fried fish, we offer a variety of traditional sides and refreshing drinks, all of which contribute to the event's festive and welcoming environment. This celebration embodies the spirit of southern hospitality and serves as a tangible expression of our gratitude for the officers' unwavering commitment to keeping our community safe.

The benefits of this program extend beyond the immediate enjoyment of a good meal. For our funeral home and its staff, the event is an invaluable opportunity to acknowledge the vital role that these officers play in our lives. From ensuring public safety to providing funeral escorts at no charge, their contributions are indispensable. Through this annual event, we communicate our heartfelt thanks, reinforcing the bond between our institution and the dedicated professionals who serve our community.

For the broader community, the Law Enforcement Appreciation Program fosters a culture of recognition and respect for law enforcement officers. By publicly honoring these individuals during Police Week, we help to shine a spotlight on their hard work and dedication, encouraging others to join in acknowledging the crucial role they play in maintaining the safety and well-being of our neighborhoods.

In 2024, we introduced a significant enhancement to our program, To-Go Orders. The introduction of the To-Go Orders System in 2024 has allowed us to extend our appreciation even further, ensuring that no officer is left out of this communal celebration. Recognizing that many officers are on duty and unable to attend the lunch in person, this new feature allows us to extend our appreciation to those who are actively serving the community at that very moment. By offering to-go meals, we ensure that every officer, regardless of their shift or availability,

receives a token of our gratitude. This improvement not only broadened the reach of our appreciation efforts but also helped us deepen our connection with the entire law enforcement community.

In conclusion, the Law Enforcement Appreciation Program stands as a testament to the power of community spirit and gratitude. Through the annual Fish Fry Lunch, we celebrate Police Week with a meaningful gesture that honors the hard work of local law enforcement officers. As we continue to build upon and refine this program, we remain committed to fostering a culture of recognition and respect for those who dedicate their lives to protecting us all.

Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Chapels, Hutchinson, MN

Hantge-McBride-Hughes Funeral Director Kelly Roberts is a member of the McLeod County Toward Zero Death "TZD" Safe Roads Coalition/Fatal Review Committee. The committee includes public safety officials and other public members. Their mission is to create a culture in which traffic fatalities and serious injuries are no longer acceptable through the integrated application of education, engineering, enforcement, emergency medical and trauma services along with everyone with an interest and investment in traffic safety.¹ The committee review facts and photos collected after fatal collisions. Based on what is learned, the group recommends actions that might help prevent future crashes, resulting in fewer serious injuries and/or no deaths.

The McLeod County "TZD" Coalition/Committee Members attend various events to promote safe driving awareness. Such events may include Police, Fire Department, Hospital, and School Open Houses, Career Fairs, and County Fairs. Another key event that "TZD" sponsors and has found to be quite effective, is the Mock Car Crash that is presented to area high school students.

Kelly is instrumental in working with other emergency agencies in helping organize the Mock Car Crash. The demonstration is held in the spring, shortly before Prom or Graduation time. Students are brought to the presentation area and are given a brief introduction before the "scene of an accident" is unveiled. They soon discover that some of the accident victims are their friends or classmates. The students will witness Emergency response professionals from the County Sheriff's Department, City/State Police and Fire Departments, Life Link III, and Ambulance Service conduct rescue efforts in real-time. Since there are several factors that may be involved in motor vehicle injuries/deaths, including but not limited to: inexperience, risk-taking, speeding, distracted driving, cell phone use, intoxicated/impaired driving, weather conditions, road types, construction zones, and/or not wearing seat belts; students may see their friends/peers being handcuffed and put in a police vehicle, immobilized and placed in an ambulance or helicopter, or placed in a body bag by a funeral director and driven away in a hearse.

The Mock Car Crash sends a strong message to students, aimed at influencing their driving decisions in the hope of reducing crashes, injuries, and deaths involving younger drivers and their passengers. Having teen children herself, Kelly is very conscientious of making sure that her children and their friends practice safe driving decisions and skills. Kelly plans to continue attending meeting and being involved with this group. Her input and background in funeral service is greatly valued in this organization.

H.E. Turner & Co., Inc., Batavia, NY

Bohm-Calarco-Smith Funeral Home, Batavia, NY; Marley Funeral Home, Attica, NY; Burdett & Sanford Funeral Home, Oakfield, NY; Robinson & Hackemer Funeral Home, Warsaw, NY; Eaton-Watson Funeral Home, Perry, NY; Gilmartin Funeral Home, Batavia, NY; H.E. Turner & Company, Bergen, NY

Honoring Local Law Enforcement: A Commitment to Community and Remembrance

H.E. Turner & Co., Inc. takes great pride in our longstanding role within the communities we serve, particularly in our collaborative efforts with local law enforcement and first responders. Throughout our history, we have enjoyed a close partnership with law enforcement agencies, receiving funeral escorts upon request and employing retired officers in various capacities, both before and after their active service. And, in times of sadness, we have been called upon to lay those to rest who have fallen in the Line of Duty.

In a heartfelt effort to give back to those who have dedicated their lives to public safety, we initiated a meaningful program in conjunction with our team members from law enforcement. Inspired by the traditions of the New York State Troopers, we created custom flags and flag holders to honor members of the City of Batavia law enforcement community in perpetuity, starting at the time of their passing.

Each year, more than 50 custom flags are reverently placed at the gravesites of former officers by personnel from our funeral home and the police department. This solemn ritual is accompanied by a special ceremony, where we honor and commemorate the life and service of one such officer while reciting the names of all officers whose graves are adorned with flags. As the seasons change, our team ensures the flags are respectfully removed and stored for the winter months, maintaining the dignity of this tribute throughout the year.

The benefits of this program extend deeply into our community. It serves as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made by law enforcement officers, often overlooked in their daily service. By preserving their memory with honor and respect, we not only console grieving families but also foster a sense of gratitude and remembrance within our community.

Our partnership with local law enforcement underscores our commitment to enhancing community bonds and supporting those who protect and serve. Looking ahead, we aim to expand this initiative to include other local departments, ensuring that all deserving officers receive the recognition they rightfully deserve.

In conclusion, our program at H.E. Turner & Co., Inc. exemplifies our dedication to honoring the legacy of local law enforcement and preserving their contributions to our community. By commemorating their service through tangible and heartfelt gestures, we strive to uphold their memory and inspire future generations to appreciate the sacrifices made in the line of duty.

James Funeral Home & Northlake Memorial Gardens, Huntersville, NC

We had a tragic loss of police officers in Charlotte that so many communities have had. Four officers were killed while serving a warrant. The story can be found here: <https://apnews.com/article/officers-killed-charlotte-north-carolina-warrant-64a4a9c849b721631cd2f8872945e08d> The officers lived all around the Charlotte area and many had connections to our town.

We did not conduct the funeral of any of the officers as we are a suburb north of Charlotte but our local officers took this very hard.

Our funeral home wanted to do something for our local first responders and we found that this would be a good time to do it. We already have a wonderful relationship with our local first responders but wanted them to know that we truly support them and we grieve with them as they grieve the loss of these men that they knew.

The support from the community was amazing. We set aside a day where we did raffles, had a large meal, and did a memorial for the men that died. They were so touched by the event. We had around 100 first responders come over the course of the day.

We invited police, fire and medic. We had a professional invitation sent to each of the departments and promoted it via social media. We had representatives from each group come and they came from many towns. We had locals reaching out and asking if they could stop by to show their support. We had the food catered but many kindly offered to make food. When we let them know that it was catered, they offered to come and do the dishes and just clean up. I thought that was kind of the men and women who just wanted to show their support. The folks loved the raffles as well. We got gift cards to local restaurants and drew a name every 30 minutes. The money we spent on the cards, the food and other parts of the day was money well spent to show these hard working men and women that we support them all of the time but especially in these tough moments as they walk through great personal loss.

I know many funeral homes do first responders lunches but we took this to the next level simply because of the tragedy that our community experienced. It was a heart-warming experience and gave the men and women some time to spend together from different departments.

Lakeshore Memorial Services, Holland, MI

During the winter of 2024, we were able to give the local High School Career Technical Center students tours of our Lakeshore Memorial Services Funeral Home. The tours included the chapel, arrangement room, funeral coach, and offices. What does it take on the professional side when someone dies? That is what many people wonder and for those students, we help to bring understanding and interest in this career area within our own community.

A funeral home can be an intimidating place for many – with so many locked doors, hidden panels, and tall velvet curtains on walls, there are many questions as to what goes on. It was this question and the desire to collaborate with allied professionals that was on our mind when we reached out to our local High School Career Technical Center, asking if any of their programs would be interested in visiting the funeral home and learning not only about us, but how their prospective careers could potentially interact with funeral professionals in the future. The school director loved the idea, and sent the word out to instructors.

On multiple dates in early 2024, we were visited by students studying public safety, emergency medical services, advanced healthcare, and aided nursing. During their visit, we talked about why we went into our professions, what it took to be a funeral professional, the many careers in the death care industry, and how we may work together in the future. For our public safety students we even brought our transfer gurney in to show them how it works so that they would see what we would bring to a scene if we were called to do so.

As a part of all of our visits, the students also toured the funeral home. Showing them our funeral chapel and arrangement room got them asking questions about things they saw. We were able to talk about the multiple options families have regarding services for their loved ones, and some of the considerations for both burial and cremation. We then went into the garage, showing them our funeral coach and transfer vehicle. We discussed the many instances in which individuals in the healthcare and public safety professions might interact with funeral service professionals. We discussed things that can be done to assist families as well as how we can collaborate to provide the best services for families at their time of need.

As the final part of the tour, we would bring students into our care center where we prepare decedents for their final viewings. This was very important to us, as this is what many in the general public consider “behind the curtain.” By comparing the space to a surgical suite (with bright lighting, sterilizing equipment for instruments, and an abundance of personal protective equipment), and showing them the precautions we took not only for our safety, but also for dignity and care of the deceased, many students expressed that they were pleasantly surprised and that what they had imagined was nothing like what they saw.

As any tour does, we fielded many questions from the students. Questions about funerals, things we had experienced, and many questions once they saw our care center. We answered each and every one, ranging from the serious (“What kind of PPE do you wear?” and “How do you handle families who do not have the means to pay for services?”) to the silly (“Have you ever seen a ghost or anything weird?”). What was so meaningful too was that most of the time, the bus drivers joined us for these tours, and we took quite a few questions from both them and the instructors as well.

Even though a funeral home can be an intimidating place for many, we would like to think that after touring our funeral home and learning a little bit about the funeral process, the students will be able to care for those going through one of the toughest times in their lives, and be able to walk them through what may happen next. Knowledge is power, and we are so grateful we could give these young people (and their adult companions) this tool.

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Stamford, CT

Leo P. Gallagher & Son Funeral Homes, Greenwich, CT; Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher & Son Community Funeral Home, Monroe, CT

An important part of what we do as a funeral home is connecting with our community. We know that we need to create these connections in order to build relationships and trust with those who live, work and go to school around us. At our Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher and Son Community Funeral Home, we have made a concerted effort to support our local schools and students. This has been done through sponsorships, donations and volunteering at our schools.

Another way that we have supported our local students is through our "Spadaccino and Leo P. Gallagher & Son Community Scholarship." We created this scholarship for local high school seniors who "share our passion for helping others in his or her community." After connecting with a person in the high school's guidance department, we created an application that we sent to this department. This application was then made available to around 250 seniors and their parents. We created an application that asked candidates to provide 2 letters of recommendation, along with an essay asking "In what ways have you made a commitment to serve within the local community?" and, "How has your experience in community service shaped who you are as an individual?" We also asked applicants to provide a list of community service activities. We chose not to ask for any grades since we really wanted to focus on community service and not how academically successful a student may or may not be.

In addition to the school sharing the application with students and parents, we chose to share the scholarship on our Facebook page along with a community Facebook page that has over 7,000 members. This helped our program to get more exposure in the community and hopefully encouraged more students to apply.

When we received the applications, three of our full time staff gathered and read each applicant's packet individually. Through the process of reviewing the applications, we were blown away by the commitment to community that each of the candidates displayed. These students volunteered in many different areas of our community including work with our local food pantry, churches and children. After reviewing the applications, we each decided who we would pick. We were thrilled to discover that we each chose the same student.

One of our team members was proud to be able to attend the awards night at our local high school. She presented the scholarship to our recipient along with a special pen that was inscribed with "Achieve Your Dreams." She was thrilled to hear cheers and applause from our recipient's family erupt from the back of the auditorium. Soon after receiving the award, we received a very kind thank you card from the recipient thanking us for our generosity.

We will continue to give our community scholarship to seniors at our local high school. It provides the funeral home a great opportunity to celebrate the hard work of local students, increases our connection with our community and helps us, as a team, to grow closer through working together to choose our scholarship recipient.

Macz Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Centralia, IL

Macz Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Sandoval, IL; Macz Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Odin, IL; Macz Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Patoka, IL

Isn't it wonderful how as a parent an opportunity will arise that presents a need that may have easily been overlooked had it not been for the best of the best of us, our children. Thanks go completely to the oldest son of Tom and Traci Macz, George Macz for initiating the thought process for this unique idea when sharing the effects the loss of his class pet was having on his fellow students.

Traci was intrigued by the realization that our youngest generation would not have been exposed to the process of losing a loved one, family, friend or furry friend, and the variety of loving ways to honor a life. This prompted her to take this occasion to pass down her experiences with loss from childhood on through her years of experience as a funeral director. She wanted to implement a program of quality that would bring education to children that would assist them with the memorialization process.

George Macz, along with the guiding hand of his parents, served as honorary funeral director for the celebration of life graveside service for his fourth-grade class's beloved guinea pig, Cheeseburger in February 2024. Arrangements for the service were made by George in his classroom with his teacher, Mrs. Musgrave, and all the students who called Cheeseburger their friend.

George helped the class find the best way to pay tribute to Cheeseburger. It was determined they would have a reading of Psalm 23 at the graveside with everyone gathered. George explained how pallbearers were chosen to carry Cheeseburger to his final resting place. George officiated the service where memories and tears were shared.

In May of 2024, a memorial stone was placed for Cheeseburger and a Musgrave Cemetery Marker was dedicated, designating the final resting place for any class pet loss in the future. Memorial Service Folders were given to the students in memory of Cheeseburger. All the children attending the dedication gathered wildflowers from the grounds behind the cemetery and placed beautiful bouquets at Cheeseburger's grave.

Traci and Tom were happy to take this opportunity to educate this young generation on the importance of funeral service for their grieving process benefit and for opening a way for the students to share condolences with others experiencing a loss. The Macz's shared the Youth and Funerals booklet provided by the National Funeral Director's Association, which was a tender summary of avenues through grieving and memorialization for the student's parents. Cheeseburger's service was the first introduction for most of the students to all that a funeral service entails. The students had an experience relatable to them and felt comfortable sharing their experiences of loss. Traci and Tom told of the importance of attending a funeral service to show support and extend condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one. They also explained how a sympathy card, phone call, text or visit at another time would bring encouragement if unable to attend a funeral. This was a beautiful way to instill the value in honoring loved ones with a celebration of life service.

News of this unique celebration of life quickly spread over the entire school which benefitted the funeral home immensely, as those working or volunteering at the school were able to see the quality of service the funeral home would offer their loved one by the attention to detail given to the student's furry friend. Further benefits included the fact that seeds of value regarding funeral service had been planted in this next generation.

It wouldn't take a death of a class pet for a funeral home to replicate this innovative idea. The younger generations legitimately hold the future in their hands, and wouldn't it be of great benefit all around to be a part of their betterment and the betterment of our society. It would be as easy as gathering the information that will educate, support and assist, and sharing a candid, transparent conversation with students.

Pixley Funeral Home, Rochester, MI

Pixley Funeral Home – John Desmond Chapel, Auburn Hills, MI

It was a typical early Sunday morning this past June. I found myself up well before my family, finding a moment of solitude over coffee before leaving for church. It was a particularly stressful week at the funeral home - the early morning fog and silence was refreshing. As I scrolled through my news feed, the morning turned somber as I read about the emerging story of a young Sheriff's Deputy who made the ultimate sacrifice during the night. I have many friends on the Sheriff's department so I found myself searching feverishly for the name with no resolution. Within a few moments my cell phone rang with a familiar name and number. A member of the Sheriff Department command staff was on the other end. This quickly went from being a news story to our story.

This story doesn't begin on the fateful morning, it began much earlier. One might assume this essay is going to be all about the funeral service we provided, and the unimaginable amount of time, energy and resources that need to be implemented in order to plan a flawless funeral that was attended by 3,500 (most of them law enforcement officers), covered by all major media stations in the Detroit Area and most importantly, the planning of a funeral for a young husband, father and son. Perhaps some of those details may be touched on later, but no, this is not about that.

This is a story about cultivating trust and relationships with those who serve our community selflessly each and every day. This is about an ongoing relationship with the Sheriff Department, but being very intentional on improving that program every year. 2024 was a prime example of that.

Over the years, the Pixley staff has had the opportunity to interact with our local first responders, whether it was dropping off bagels on the morning of International FireFighters day in May, or donuts on National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day in January (yes, donuts instead of bagels to the cops...there is a tradition to uphold). Our most attended event over the last six years has been the annual Law Enforcement appreciation night at the Detroit Red Wings Hockey game. This is a particularly enjoyable event - we charter a bus, provide tickets, and give our local deputies and officers a much needed (and much deserved) night of relaxation and fun!

We became involved with the Oakland County Deputy Sheriff's Association Family Benevolent Fund in December 2023. The goal is to raise funds to assist deputies and their families as well as suddenly displaced members of the community. In April 2024, Pixley Funeral Home partnered with the association to sponsor a Comedy Night fundraiser. With several of the Pixley staff in attendance, we saw the organization raise over \$20,000 on the spot. It was a night of great food and entertainment but we all walked away with a greater sense of purpose - why we do what we do.

Similarly, over the years we have developed a close relationship with the Sheriff Department Honor Guard Team, which consists of 30 members and is known throughout the region for participating at funerals as well as public events. As our relationship deepened, we became a 'resource' for all things funeral related - and even some things that were not. It's not always the "heavy" topics of life that bring us together, though. As their team was discussing an upcoming

appearance at the National Law Enforcement memorial in Washington, D.C., Vern Pixley overheard the conversation about their lack of matching sunglasses. He surprised the entire team with matching sunglasses, which you can see in some of the photos attached.

As the Honor Guard Team began discussing their training regiment, we extended an offer to open our doors for their training and they readily accepted. Training commenced in 2023 with the most recent training occurring in March 2024 at our Rochetser location. We were able to obtain and custom a casket that had the bed removed and was weighted to simulate a decedent. This was to allow the guard that would serve as pallbearers a realistic simulation. Flags were also provided to practice folding as was a funeral coach to rehearse the casket placement. Every movement was simulated to perfection, including the Rifle Volley. We were also able to provide breakfast and lunch for these trainings. We could have never imagined that just ninety days later, these trainings would go from simulations to real life.

We were contacted in April 2024 by a Lieutenant at the Sheriff Department Main Corrections complex who inquired if we would be interested in participating in National Correctional Officer Week in May. Unfortunately the deputies who work at the jail complex are often overlooked on the major law enforcement days of honor, and this year the command staff wanted to see if they could garner support of any kind whether it be bagels, donuts, or snacks. Our team immediately answered the call and wanted to come up with an offering greater than a few random snacks. We were granted permission by the Sheriff's Department to provide a catered buffet luncheon to the entire day shift of 110 deputies. On Thursday, May 9, 2024 Vern Pixley and myself met the caterers at the Corrections complex to assist in setting up the luncheon. As the Deputies and command staff entered for lunch, we were able to greet them and enjoy great conversation. It was our honor to participate.

On May 15, 2024, Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard honored the Pixley Funeral Home at the National Peace Officers Annual Award Day Ceremony, which was held in the main auditorium at the Oakland County Complex. The Sheriff Department Citizen Citation acknowledged Pixley Funeral Home, Vern Pixley and myself (Tim Summerford) for our support of the agency. The Award day ceremony is the largest event held for the Sheriff's department as deputies are honored for their heroism over the past year. We were truly humbled to be recognized at such an event.

Now we fast forward back to June 23, 2024. Within just six hours of that early morning phone call, we found ourselves in a funeral coach leaving the Medical Examiner's office. We weren't alone - As we followed 30 deputies on motorcycles and numerous sheriff squad cars, to the funeral home as well as surrounded by police agencies at every intersection and accompanied by a helicopter flying above.

Over the next five days, our staff hosted an around-the-clock honor guard at the funeral home (including providing 24/7 support and meals to the honor guard), set up a Motorcycle Memorial that was visited by members of the community, interact with local news and media agencies on a daily basis, coordinate all aspects of a public funeral service, and most importantly create space for the family to grieve in private. The week culminated with the funeral service held on Friday, June 28, 2024.

That week was different. That week our staff shared hugs, tears, laughter, and yes, even a toast with friends who happen to wear a uniform and put themselves in harm's way every day. Community relations is not just about the services we offer or the facilities we provide. It's simply about relationships. Real people sharing in those important moments of life - whether it's sharing in some laughs at a comedy fundraiser and attending a sports game or sitting together in grief.

Excellence in service does not have a begin or end date, it's the result of meaningful relationships with those within our community.

As I sit here on a warm Sunday night ,finishing my thoughts about this essay, I smile as my mind drifts to the bus load of firefighters we'll soon be taking to a Tigers Baseball game. But that's a story yet to be written for a future pursuit of excellence.

Waitt Funeral Home and Cremation Service, Morganville, NJ

Old Bridge Funeral Home, Old Bridge, NJ; Bedle Funeral Home, Matawan, NJ; Murphy Funeral Home, Ewing, NJ; Mathis Funeral Home, Medford, NJ; Huber-Moore Funeral Home, Bordentown, NJ; Moore Funeral Home, Browns Mills, NJ; Inglesby and Sons Funeral Home, Pennsauken, NJ

Hometown Hero 5K Race

Old Bridge Funeral Home demonstrated its commitment to the community by organizing a remarkable event, the Hometown Hero 5k Race, in collaboration with various local entities. On April 20, 2024, despite the rainy weather, the race brought together over 420 participants who showed their support for this meaningful cause.

The Hometown Hero Race was the brainchild of Old Bridge Funeral Home, who partnered with the Mayor's Health and Wellness Council and Mayor Debbie Walker of Old Bridge Township to make it a reality. The event also received support from Old Bridge Medical Center and Giuseppe's Pizza, a local restaurant, further highlighting the community's unity. To ensure the race's success, Old Bridge Township played a crucial role in shutting down county and township roads, allowing participants to navigate the course safely. The collaborative effort involved the participation of the Old Bridge Township Police, the Office of Emergency Management Services, and local volunteer fire and EMS services, ensuring the overall safety of the event.

Notably, the Hometown Hero Race aimed to achieve more than just raising funds for local groups. It sought to bring the community together, promote a healthy and active lifestyle, and create lasting memories for everyone involved. After the fair many local vendors of from both medical and mental health were there to exhibit. Free check ups, heart screening, and blood pressure exams were given. Old Bridge Funeral Home understood the power of experiences, recognizing that they can have a more profound impact than any marketing campaign or digital media presence.

In today's fast-paced world, marketing has become essential for funeral businesses to reach their target audience and build brand recognition. Traditional marketing methods, such as print and digital media, still have their place, but more and more funeral homes and cemeteries are realizing the power of creating memorable experiences for their families. These experiences leave a lasting impression, foster goodwill, and establish top-of-mind marketing.

Traditional marketing techniques rely on advertisements, social media campaigns, and other promotional content to reach consumers. While these methods can effectively generate awareness, they must leave a lasting impact on the audience. With the constant bombardment of advertisements, it's easy for consumers to become desensitized and overlook these marketing efforts. On the other hand, creating memorable experiences allows businesses to connect with their clients on a deeper level. By providing unique and engaging experiences, companies can positively associate with their brand in the minds of consumers. These experiences can range from hosting events and workshops to offering personalized services or surprise gestures that go beyond typical customer expectations.

One key benefit of experiential marketing is its ability to foster goodwill among clients. When a business goes the extra mile to create a memorable experience, it shows that it genuinely cares about its customer and values their loyalty. This goodwill not only strengthens the relationship between the business and its clients but also encourages positive word-of-mouth referrals within the community.

Moreover, memorable experiences have a higher chance of being shared and talked about. In today's digital age, where social media dominates, people love to share exciting and unique experiences with their friends and followers. By creating an experience that stands out, businesses can generate organic buzz and increase their reach without relying solely on paid advertising. Experiences also significantly impact brand recall. When consumers have a positive and memorable experience with a brand, it becomes ingrained in their memory. This creates top-of-mind marketing, where the "funeral home" brand is the first to come to mind when a specific product or service is needed. By building this association through experiences, businesses can position themselves as the go-to option in their industry.

Furthermore, experiential marketing allows businesses to showcase their values and personality. It provides an opportunity to convey the "brand's" story and emotionally connect with future families and previous ones. By aligning the experience with the brand's core values, businesses can create a meaningful connection that resonates with their target audience.

It's important to note that creating memorable experiences requires a well-thought-out strategy and execution. Funeral Homes, in particular, must understand their target audience and tailor the experience to their preferences and interests. The experience should align with the funeral home's identity and leave a positive and lasting impression on participants. Experiential marketing has proven to be more impactful and memorable for clients. Businesses create goodwill, generate buzz, and establish top-of-mind marketing by going beyond traditional advertising methods and creating unique, engaging, and personalized experiences. These experiences leave a lasting impression and build a strong connection with clients, leading to increased brand loyalty and advocacy. In today's competitive business landscape, investing in experiential marketing is a powerful way to differentiate from the competition and create a lasting impact in the minds of consumers.

As part of the event, Old Bridge Funeral Home designed custom medals and finisher shirts to commemorate the participants' achievements. These mementos served as tokens of recognition and helped raise funds for local groups in need. One such beneficiary was the Junior ROTC club, which had lost funding. Thanks to the race's success, over \$12,000 was raised and will be dedicated to supporting the Junior ROTC.

Old Bridge Funeral Home believes its service to the community goes beyond its role in times of need. By organizing the Hometown Hero Race, we believe it has shown our commitment to bringing the community together and promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. Through this event, they have created a lasting impact and established themselves as a funeral home that truly cares about the well-being and unity of their community.