

Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., Cheshire, CT

Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., Waterbury, CT; Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc., Naugatuck, CT

It was during a beautiful New England Fall day in 2023, when a chance encounter would lead to an on-going demonstration and educational program developed by a collaborative effort of the funeral directors and embalmers of the Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. of Cheshire, Waterbury and Naugatuck, Connecticut.

Funeral director Nicole Paquette, and her son, Crichton, dressed in their 18th century colonial clothes to attend "time-traveler" day at the annual Renaissance Faire held in Lebanon, CT. Walking amongst the lords, ladies, knights, princesses and pirates, they spied a small group of festival goers who happened to also be donned in colonial style attire. Naturally, the mother and son approached them.

After a lively discussion of wools, linens, frockcoats and petticoats, Nicole and her son, had learned that the group were members of Ye Olde Lebanon Towne Militia (YOLTM) www.lebanonmilitia.com. This CT based group's mission is to recreate and perpetuate the military and civilian history of the American Revolutionary War Period from 1775-1783. Nicole and Crichton were invited to join the group of men, women and children, and they attended their first meeting in January of 2024. Soon they learned that YOLTM was much more than muskets, cannons, battles, mustering, drilling and marching- the group conducts very rich historical programs and educational demonstrations ("demos") that they bring to events and schools throughout Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

After performing mock heavy artillery (cannon) drills during an early-Spring meeting, Nicole was asked by the President of the militia group, Captain Steve Sanna, if she had any demos. He mentioned battlefield deaths as a possible topic after seeing a sign for a lecturer at a different event. The portrayal of the roles and occupations of women in the late 1800's was indeed limited, but Nicole took the suggestion back to her co-workers at Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. and research in a program for "Death Care Practices in New England during the late Colonial Era" began.

The program took several weeks of review, discussion and research amongst the funeral directors and embalmers. Our collective memories were called into lively discussions about the history of early American funeral directing and early embalming practices. Subsequently, a sense of comradery was felt as the staff enjoyed sharing reminiscent times of our mortuary college days, classes and professors. Old outdated mortuary schoolbooks were pulled out from dusty storage, (with regrettably limited information) Wikipedia provided some additional insights and we offered some practical common-sense speculation due to the limitations on certain specific details in the colonial home from the Revolutionary time period.

Due to its unique on-going educational component, Daniel J. Ford, the owner of the Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. embraced the opportunities for this program as a way to reach out to various communities to learn about early funeral directing and death care practices. The program not only explains the care of the deceased in battle and at home, but also, very importantly, describes the role of women who were mostly housewives, nurses and mid-wives. However, other women, who might be family, neighbors, or hired help, could be a "layer out of the dead" and/or a "watcher of the dying". This provided the opportunity for funeral director/embalmer Nicole, licensed in both CT and RI for approximately 30 years, to portray her role. But first, she had to "pitch" the demonstration and program to the YOLTM and have the officers approve of it during a later meeting. Luckily, their vote was a unanimous "yes".

With her new home-made linen black petticoat, Nicole transforms into "Goodwife Nicole", a widow who, in order to earn an income, is available for hire as a layer out of the dead. During the demonstration, she uses a folding table covered in linens and wool to accommodate a six-foot tall male mannequin, a wooden pail for water, soap made from tallow and potash, linen wraps/cloths for shrouding, Y-shaped stick to aid in mouth closure, heavy hemp ligature, metal needle, colonial era scissors and knife for internal organ evisceration. She explains the care of the deceased when brought into the home: washing, mouth closure and eyes closure with coins on the eyelids, orifice packing, organ(s) removal during the summer months, shrouding, and placing in the coffin. The roles of other tradesmen and townsfolk are also

explained, such as, the local cabinetmaker for the coffin, clergyman, sexton/bell-ringer/gravedigger, under-bearers, pallbearers and stonecutter. Also incorporated are the community expectations and the negative impacts on the family to have meal and drink, gloves, gold rings, (and sometimes jewelry made from the decedent's hair), along with additional funerary gifts, which led to England passing sumptuary laws to place restrictions and limitations on funerary associated items and clothing.

The Alderson-Ford Funeral Homes, Inc. has provided support with this unique educational program for time and necessary materials, including linens, research time, and gas mileage to CT events for Nicole to attend. Dan Ford and the staff feel that this is a creative way to promote the funeral industry's history, practices and rituals in a comfortable family setting. The gained knowledge from the program may even inspire younger generations to pursue their curiosity, or better yet, an interest in a career within the funeral services industry, as Nicole has been asked about more modern death care practices. This could positively impact the (perceived) shortage of qualified funeral director and embalmer licensees in Connecticut and other Southern New England states.

Thinking ahead, the funeral home staff have had further discussions to possibly expand the educational program, or create new programs, to include additional related topics in New England concerning: grave robbing or "resurrectionists", the Mercy L. Brown exhumation in Exeter, RI in the late 1900's (which was part of the New England vampire panic), Puritan/Colonial grave art, and death care practices during the American Civil War (with modern arterial embalming).

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors Pte. Ltd., Singapore

Kickstarted since January 2024, Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors collaborated with My Community on a monthly program – “My Boon Keng Heritage Tour”.

My Community is a non-profit organisation founded in 2010 and has made its mark in the arts, cultural and heritage sectors. Its work has spurred the growth and development of a common-man approach to history where every day experiences of Singaporeans are chronicled and celebrated. Since then, My Community has continued to capture and preserve community stories, reconnect people to places and social networks, and deepen heritage appreciation and expression across the country.

The discussion on collaboration between Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors and My Community started in October 2023, where both parties agreed on the synergies “My Boon Keng Heritage Tour” will bring.

“My Boon Keng Heritage Tour” is a community event held on every last Saturday and Sunday of the month, exploring the intriguing stories of the Kallang-Boon Keng area. Most times, we welcomed about 20 persons which is the maximum number of persons for the tour in order to have conducive learning. Participants uncover tales from days gone by and explore diverse communities living near its banks while passing through iconic places like the Geylang Bahru Industrial Estate where our 112 years old Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors funeral home is.

Ang Chin Moh Funeral Directors saw the need to shift our focus back to increasing brand awareness and education about dying, death and funerals among the general public. We host the participants at no cost for about an hour each time to share about the company’s heritage, funeral profession and a view of our funeral home. Participants learnt on importance of funeral preplanning and what funeral directors do when a death occurs. They were also given souvenirs and photos to remember us and their visit to our place. Surveys received which were conducted after the tour were positive and encouraging. Results show the public would like more of such tours as it enhances their knowledge on dying, death and funerals. It also helps to dispel any inaccurate myths about death. Most importantly, it encourages people to start their own end-of-life conversations with their loved ones.

Through “My Boon Keng Heritage Tour”, we advocate the importance of having end-of-life conversations with loved ones. It is a collective responsibility that benefits individuals and communities.

The funeral profession in Singapore is still considered a “dirty” profession. By showing that a funeral company likes ours is actively doing good, we are also contributing to the uplifting of the funeral profession in Singapore.

Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes and Crematory, Canal Winchester, OH
Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes and Crematory, Pickerington, OH

In 2024 the Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes due to several circumstances, had to make the difficult decision to give up their annual Shred Days which had been for the past 11 years at the two locations – Pickerington and Canal Winchester. Many members of the local communities were disappointed with this decision and had looked forward to this annual event. The funeral home wanted to find another event to give back to these communities.

In December of 2022, a member of the Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home's extended family was in a serious industrial accident. While at Bethesda Hospital in Zanesville, Ohio and Ohio State Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio fighting for his life, this person received 80 plus units of blood, which contributed greatly to saving his life. His wife Melissa Siefker, our Accounts Payable Manager, was very grateful to the American Red Cross and those individuals who donated blood that now one of her life missions is to encourage everyone to donate blood. She heavily promotes blood donations on her personal Facebook page, at church, and with family and friends.

Melissa is a regular blood donor at the local VFW in Baltimore, Ohio but wondered if there was something more she could do for her cause. She contacted the American Red Cross of Central Ohio to investigate whether Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Homes could offer their facilities for a local blood drive. The American Red Cross was delighted with the opportunity to be able to use these buildings. Melissa worked with Jane MacMillan, the Central Ohio Blood Services Manager, to set up the first blood drive on December 19, 2023 at the Pickerington location from 10 am to 4 pm.

Melissa made flyers and postcards to place in various locations in Pickerington, posted information on the Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home and her personal Facebook page, the funeral home's web site, emailed our staff, placed the flyers and postcards throughout the funeral home buildings, advertised the event through the Pickerington Chamber of Commerce website, and asked local churches to mention the blood drive in their church bulletins. She spread the word throughout the community in as many ways as she could.

The American Red Cross used the large visitation room at Pickerington to set up 5 donor cots, all their machines and 2 interview booths. The canteen with food, water and a resting spot for the donors was set up in the second visitation area. Chairs for individual donors to wait for their donation appointment were set up in the hallways along with the sign in table. Alice Young and Emma Sillings, Dwayne R. Spence Funeral Home employees, manned the sign in area, checked IDs for the individual donors, and gave out important information donors needed before donating.

The American Red Cross set a goal of 25 units of blood for this first blood drive on December 19, 2023. Thirty-six donors came to donate blood and 33 units of blood were collected. The American Red Cross was thrilled with this turnout as December is a month when they struggle for donations due to the holidays. The American Red Cross was also impressed with the recruiting skills Melissa demonstrated for this drive. Since this blood drive was a success, the American Red Cross and the funeral home decided to schedule more drives at the funeral home throughout 2024.

The second blood drive was held on May 14, 2024 from 10 am to 4 pm again at the Pickerington location. While this blood drive was again widely publicized, 15 donors were able to donate 17 units of blood. Many individuals at blood drives can donate Power Reds which count as 2 units of blood.

The funeral home has 3 more blood drives schedule for 2024 on July 9th and December 17th at the Canal Winchester location and on September 10th in Pickerington. The goal is for this community event to grow in the following years as the funeral homes are established as regular sites for blood donations throughout the year.

Empresa Vila - Crematório e Centro Funerário São José, Natal, RN, Brazil

Promoting Care While Still Alive: The Impact of the 'Always With You' Event on the Community

"Sempre Com Você" (portuguese for: Always With You) is an initiative by Vila, through its main brand "Sempre Assistência Familiar," aimed at making healthcare accessible and closely connected to the community. Recognizing the importance of our mission to provide lifelong care to our clients, we decided to bring this care directly to public squares and open-air markets, ensuring easy accessibility for everyone. We believe that promoting prevention and well-being is essential, and the best way to achieve this is by being present where people are.

As part of the "Sempre + Benefícios" (portuguese for: Always + Benefits) implementation strategy (Vila's innovative idea in 2023), Vila developed the "Sempre Com Você" event, a traveling initiative that offers a variety of health and well-being services to the community. We set up stands providing basic medical consultations, blood pressure and glucose measurements, nutritional guidance, and information on healthy habits (attachment 2). Additionally, we collaborate with local partners to offer services such as eye exams and prescription glasses maintenance. All services are free of charge and accessible to all participants.

Since its inception in September 2023, "Sempre Com Você" has held four successful editions, strengthening our Family Assistance in the cities of Assú, Caicó, and Jardim do Seridó in the Rio Grande do Norte state countryside (attachments 4 and 5). More actions are in development for 2024.

This initiative not only reinforces the company's image as an organization dedicated to community well-being but also provides tangible benefits to employees. Participation in the event allows employees to engage meaningfully with the community, enhancing job satisfaction and team spirit (attachment 3). Furthermore, it demonstrates the company's social commitment, boosting morale and aiding in talent retention.

"Sempre Com Você" offers families and the wider community access to quality health and wellness services, free of charge and conveniently located. People often neglect their health due to barriers such as lack of time or financial resources. By bringing these services to street markets and city centers, we significantly reduce these barriers, enabling everyone to access basic medical consultations, healthy habit guidance, and well-being services during a simple trip to the market or town center.

Moreover, by promoting prevention and self-care, the event helps improve community health, reducing the incidence of diseases and encouraging healthier lifestyles. It also provides an opportunity to present our funeral assistance services, often linked to promotions or special payment conditions, enhancing our credibility and pioneering spirit in the segment.

As highlighted by Gilson Oliveira, who used the services: "It was great to see the positive impact that 'Sempre Com Você' had in Caicó, here at Market Square. It's really an opportunity to take advantages and do everything right here in one place, buying what you need for home and also taking these exams for free!"

Sharing innovative ideas such as this with other companies amplifies community impact, enhances reputation, and optimizes resources through collaboration. It improves service quality, fosters a culture of continuous innovation, and builds strong networks.

By emphasizing prevention and self-care, this initiative not only plays a significant role in promoting community health but also reaffirms our mission to care for people throughout their lives. It showcases our unwavering commitment to being there for the community at every stage of their lives.

French Funerals and Cremations, Albuquerque, NM

French Funerals and Cremations, - Lomas Chapel, Albuquerque, NM; French Funerals and Cremations – Wyoming Chapel, Albuquerque, NM; French Funerals and Cremations – West Side Chapel, Albuquerque, NM; French Funerals and Cremations, Rio Rancho, NM

Scatter Day

French Funerals and Cremations, in partnership with Sunset Memorial Park, initiated their first Scatter Day on August 26, 2017. This event was designed to provide families with a respectful way to inter the cremated remains of their loved ones that have been kept at home. Offered free of charge, this service includes a complimentary engraving of the person's name on a memorial. From its inception until 2021, French and Sunset have annually collaborated to offer families a permanent place to honor their loved ones.

According to industry statistics, approximately one in five homes in America keeps cremated remains of a loved one. This statistic includes at least 10,000 homes in the Albuquerque metro area, as noted by Kevin Fuller, former communications director for French Funerals and Cremations in 2017. There can be several reasons for this. The family had intentions of interring or scattering, they wanted to be close to their loved one or they wanted to avoid the cost of a cemetery plot and many other reasons. The service provides a permanent place for cremated remains, ensuring they are not forgotten or improperly disposed of, and exposes families to the beautiful grounds at the park and potential future services. French's mission to "honor and remember every life" is directly supported by this program.

During Scatter Day, volunteers and employees assist families with paperwork and the decision of where to scatter their loved ones. Sunset Memorial Park offers two options: The Kiva, an adobe structure with an underground vault, and the Rose Garden. The staff is available to assist and guide in the scattering and giving tours of Sunset Memorial Park. Families are also offered a free engraving of the person's name in various locations around the park, particularly in the Rose Garden and Kiva. These engravings create a lasting memorial for loved ones to visit. The event allows families to hold private ceremonies and find peace in the process.

In its first year, the program interred the remains of 238 people and 39 pets. Although the number has decreased over the years, the commitment to honoring every life remains steadfast. French and Sunset continue to offer families options for a final resting place free of charge. Every family served by French is given a Cenotaph Certificate, which can be used at Sunset Memorial Park to choose a scattering location and a place for an engraving to permanently memorialize their loved ones.

Jardim da Saudade Assistência LTDA, Pinhais, Paraná, Brazil

Sustainable Running Circuit Project – Valuing Life and Memory

The challenge of marketing funeral services is to remove the stigma that people have regarding death. It is common for people to think about hiring a funeral plan or a cemetery when they are going through a moment of mourning, or when they receive news from doctors that some family member is close to death. In order to reinforce its brand and capture new leads, Grupo Jardim da Saudade developed the project “Sustainable Running Circuit – Valuing Life and Memory”, the purpose of which is to associate cemeteries and funeral services with life, health and well-being.

The project aims to promote health and well-being through physical activities by inviting its employees, customers and the community in general to participate in running circuits that are held within the cemeteries.

In addition to the health proposal, there is a supportive and sustainable nature linked to the project, participants must donate cans of soft drinks or beer, these donations are reverted into resources to help recyclers in the city of Almirante Tamandaré-PR to acquire new carts to carry out their work. Race participants are also encouraged to donate a pair of sneakers, which are sent to low-income athletes from the same city.

The project proposal is to hold a running circuit in each of its cemeteries during the year 2024. The first sustainable circuit took place at Cemitério Jardim da Saudade de Pinhais-Pr on 03/17/2024 where we had 580 participants, the second circuit took place on 06/16/2024 in Blumenau-SC with 630 participants, and the third circuit will be held on 09/24/2024 at Cemitério Jardim da Saudade in Curitiba-PR, registrations for which are already taking place.

In the circuits already carried out, around 5000 cans were collected for donations, in addition, among all those present who participated in the race, there was recognition that the cemetery can indeed bring actions associated with life, and bring a special moment to reflect on mourning, without be in mourning: “The project brings benefits to the general health of the community, given its involvement in leisure, health, it also helps low-income people with the donation of solidarity sneakers, recyclable cans that are collected, benefiting the environment due to the encouraging the practice of recycling and resulted in recognition of the Jardim da Saudade Group as a company that encourages sustainable well-being actions, enabling us to impact people to think about death before they are in mourning, recognizing the importance of the funeral service , not associating it only with death.” – Bruna Louisse Garcia Miranda – CEO of Grupo Jardim da Saudade.

“The race was excellent, great for us, a victory for us to be here!” – Race Participants.

“The race was very challenging, it was a day to bring life here into a place that sometimes people only associate with death, but today was a moment to celebrate life here at Jardim da Saudade ” André Leão – Marketing Manager at Jardim da Saudade.

“A feeling of gratitude to all the partners, sponsors, athletes, who came to cooperate with this sustainability action, with this sporting issue and especially in the place where we have all the affection, especially we came here to celebrate life.” - Lucas Schilichta – Event Promoter

The “Sustainable Running Circuit – Valuing Life and Memory” Project recognized the Jardim da Saudade Group for encouraging activities that promote a healthy and conscious lifestyle. The events already held highlighted the brand as a company that promotes sustainability , in addition to generating new leads and sales due to bringing people closer to the topics of mourning and funeral services, highlighting cemeteries as a space for reflection and preservation of memories.

Due to the great success in 2024, the Group intends to repeat the racing circuit in the following years, making the events a landmark in the calendar of the cities where it provides services.

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory, Ellensburg, WA

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory, Cle Elum, WA

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home has a close relationship with one of our local non-profit groups, The Gretchen Weller Foundation. We have worked closely with the Gretchen Weller Foundation since 2020, helping to raise money (and match contributions) for their cause. A letter from GWF Board President Cathie Day is attached to this entry as well, describing the entirety of our support of their organization.

For the purposes of this criterion, I want to highlight the car wash that we hosted to support the foundation. Our Ellensburg funeral home is located in the downtown core and is just a few blocks away from the weekly Farmer's Market and other downtown events that happen on Saturday mornings. As such, we're in a great position to host events (other than funerals) when an opportunity presents itself.

On Saturday, June 15, 2024 the Central Valley Rodders car club hosted a car show in downtown Ellensburg, with proceeds to benefit the Gretchen Weller Foundation. In tandem with that, our funeral home advertised and hosted a car wash at the same time to also raise money for GWF.

We set everything up in our back parking lot, had music going, pink and white balloons to draw attention, and we did a Facebook live video (LINK: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/2gzwaXmKjPAXQGCP/?mibextid=WC7FNe>) the morning of the event to encourage people to come down and get their car washed for a good cause. People would pull their car in, we'd give it a wash and dry, and also visit with them while we worked.

This was beneficial to both the funeral home and staff AND our community at large because it gave all of us (staff and community) an opportunity to interact with with each other outside of the "normal" (aka at funerals/memorials or in circumstances that aren't always pleasant).

Because we partnered with the Gretchen Weller Foundation for this fundraiser, people were very generous in their donations for us washing their car. We handled all of the logistics and provided all the staff and equipment for this event. GWF provided us with a sandwich board to draw attention and also helped cross promote the event on their social media.

In fact, the social media presence for this event was phenomenal, with the original post announcing the car show being shared 23 times from the funeral home page, and many more re-shares from others.

All in all, we raised \$392 in four hours across 25-30 cars (we got so busy we quit counting). The funeral home matched that amount as an additional donation to GWF for a total raised of \$784 for the foundation and presented that amount to GWF in a "big check" presentation about 10 days after the car wash happened.

Overall, this was a fun event to support a great cause in our community, interact with those who stopped by, and a way to present ourselves as real people and not just suit-wearing stuffed shirts that sometimes people think that funeral directors are.

Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Southfield, MI

Kemp Funeral Home has participated in several news stories over the years. Many surrounded the subject of being a Last Responder during the height of the COVID Pandemic. Another was in the instance of assisting families with outstanding issues when a local funeral home closed its doors. The partnership between the media and Kemp Funeral Home helped the public manage through difficult times. Another partnership with the media yielded positive results, this time not only for the public but specifically for local funeral homes.

The relationship between funeral homes and local medical examiners' offices is important so that families served by the funeral home can be assured in adequate time for funeral plans that necessary laws are followed, and cause of death questions answered. The medical examiner issues cremation permits to the funeral home indicating that there is no legal reason for the deceased to be cremated. The permit, along with an authorization to cremate signed by the next of kin, are the two documents needed for a cremation to take place.

Investigators in the medical examiners' offices also serve the public by locating next of kin for accident victims and ruling out a cause of death caused by foul play.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner's office (WCME), located in Detroit, Michigan was under fire for several reasons, however the one critical to local funeral homes including Kemp Funeral Home, was the 3-4 day turn around for a cremation permit. The investigators were not customer or funeral home friendly over the telephone and the delays with cremation caused by late permits angered families.

A local reporter and television anchor, Karen Drew of WDIV Chanel 4, investigated and exposed the problems of the WCME. Stephen R. Kemp, President and Owner of Kemp Funeral Home was interviewed by Ms. Drew where he explained issues that relate to the funeral home and other staff took her through the cremation permit request process and described the poor service and delays at WCME.

This is an example of how a collaboration between the media, funeral homes and public concern can impact procedures in the death care industry. Many funeral homes were afraid to report the WCME issues for fear of retaliation from the investigators—then we would never get a cremation permit.

Our participation armed Karen Drew with information she needed to help the WCME understand why receiving cremation permits in a timely manner is important to families we both serve.

However, when the media shines a light on what is wrong with the process, two things happen:

1. The WCME must correct the legal aspects, and
2. The public no longer believes that the problem resides with the funeral home.

Karen Drew's reporting of the issues at WCME lead to a change in oversight responsibility, the Chief Medical Examiner was replaced, and several communication and timing issues were fixed or improved.

Lake Lawn Metairie Funeral Home & Cemeteries, New Orleans, LA

Heaven's Pets at Lake Lawn Metairie, a full-service cremation and bereavement center for pets, hosted the 6th annual NOLA Dogs Race to the Rescue 5K at Metairie Cemetery in conjunction with their annual Blessing of the Pets celebration on October 15, 2023. The Ehrhardt Group developed a public relations plan to generate community awareness and garner media interest around these events in support of pet owners and animal rescue organizations across Greater New Orleans and South Louisiana.

This was the second year Heaven's Pets hosted NOLA Dogs Race to the Rescue 5K, providing a safe and enclosed space for race participants, while also bringing visibility to both Heaven's Pets and Metairie Cemetery. The morning of fitness and fun — celebrating the lives of local pets and raising money for no-kill, animal rescue organizations in our region — included a pre-race dog parade and Heaven's Pets' annual Blessing of the Pets after the race.

Heaven's Pets at Lake Lawn Metairie is a proud member of Service Corporation International (SCI). Since 2018, The Ehrhardt Group has partnered with SCI, North America's leading provider of funeral, cremation and cemetery services, to generate awareness and media coverage for New Orleans area properties, including events, partnerships and community outreach. In partnership with SCI, The Ehrhardt Group also supports Heaven's Pets' community initiatives.

GOAL The Ehrhardt Group's goal was to generate awareness, drive traffic and registration for NOLA Dogs "Race to the Rescue" 5K Run/Walk and Blessing of the Pets, while also educating the community at-large about the services Heaven's Pets provides for local pet owners. The event also raised money for no-kill animal rescue organizations in South Louisiana.

TARGET AUDIENCES

- * Pet owners and animal supporters
- * Runners and walkers
- * All ages
- * Families

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

- Host a morning of fitness and fun to celebrate the lives of local pets and raise money for no-kill, animal rescue organizations in our region, which included:
 - * Dog Walk – 8:00 a.m.

The festivities kicked off with a 30-minute dog walk around Metairie Cemetery, starting and finishing at Heaven's Pets, offering an opportunity for animals and people alike to stretch their legs and see the property. Local second-line music group, Soul Brass Band, was hired to lead the parade around the cemetery. Costumes for dogs and their owners were encouraged.

NOLA Dogs "Race to the Rescue" 5K Run/Walk – 8:30 a.m.

Race participants ran through the beautiful, oak-tree lined streets of historic Metairie Cemetery while helping to raise funds and awareness for animal rescue organizations in South Louisiana. Virtual participation was also available. The run/walk was for humans only, while pets and their caregivers cheered on race participants from the sidelines.

Memorial Cemitério e Crematório Ltda., Paso Fundo, Brazil

Project: The Faces of Farewell

Date: from August to December 2023

Description: The project "As Faces of Farewell" (in portuguese we say "As faces da Despedida") was designed with the aim of exploring and understanding the different ways in which mourning is viewed and experienced in the most diverse religious traditions. Recognizing that death and grief are universal experiences, but that they are interpreted in different ways depending on the cultural and religious context, the project seeks to offer a comprehensive and respectful view of these delicate moments.

To achieve its objectives, the project was divided into several stages. including:

1. Bibliographic and Documentary Research: Investigation of sacred texts, academic literature and religious documentation that address the topic of mourning.
2. Interviews and Testimonials: Collection of reports from religious leaders, experts in religious studies and people who have gone through the grieving process in different religious contexts.

Religious Perspectives on Grief:

The project "As Faces of Farewell" began with our director, Felipe Badotti, opening this series of videos, talking about the journey of grief and its stages, and that Memorial Vera Cruz is available to help:

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BdCm_lyMB0

Then, the second phase addresses the theme of mourning from the perspective of the following religious traditions:

1. Christianity: Explores the Christian view of death as a passage to eternal life, highlighting rites such as the funeral, seventh-day masses and prayers for the dead.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laMmTyBLkjc>

2. Buddhism: Examines the Buddhist view of the non-permanent and the cycle of reincarnation, with an emphasis on practices such as meditation and transition ceremonies.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3TwOeinE4A&list=PLehRt_dbwrKObBs-olo_Nvhpe6_DKs2qP&index=2

3. The Evangelical Lutheran Church: has a specific view of grief that is deeply rooted in its theological beliefs and pastoral practices. Here is a summary of the view of mourning in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is founded on the belief that death is a consequence of original sin, but that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, death does not have the final say. Lutherans believe that death is a gateway to eternal life with God, and this hope in the resurrection is central to comfort and hope during grief.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjPJ-cgnaLk&list=PLehRt_dbwrKObBs-olo_Nvhpe6_DKs2qP&index=4

4. African-based religions: Considers the traditions of religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda, which have specific practices of reverence for ancestors and farewell rituals. Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlhqHI4vt0Q&list=PLehRt_dbwrKObBs-olo_Nvhpe6_DKs2qP&index=3

5. Spiritism: Spiritism's view of mourning is marked by the certainty of the continuity of life after death and the belief in reincarnation. These concepts offer a comforting and hopeful perspective for the bereaved, highlighting that physical separation is temporary and that bonds of love persist. Through spiritual practices, education and community support, Spiritism seeks to help people face the pain of loss with faith and serenity.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmrdK5u80xQ&t=23s>

All the work was made by our marketing team. The videos last between 7 and 12 minutes and they were released one per month at all social medias we have.

"The Faces of Farewell" is a project that promotes intercultural and interreligious understanding by addressing how different religious traditions deal with death and mourning. By providing a platform for the expression and understanding of these diverse perspectives, the project contributes to greater respect and empathy between communities, helping to alleviate suffering and promote healing in times of loss.

The Importance of the "The Faces of Farewell" Project:

Memorial Vera Cruz's "Faces da Despedida" project (in english called The Faces of Farewell) has played a significant role both for the community in general and for the partners involved. This project stood out for approaching the topic of mourning from the perspective of different religions, providing a space for understanding and acceptance in moments of loss.

For the community, it represented a significant advance in the way grief is perceived and experienced. Considering that we live in a plural and diverse society, where different beliefs coexist, the project brought to light the importance of respecting and understanding the varied practices and rituals associated with death.

By offering lectures, workshops and educational events, it also provided a space for dialogue and learning, in which people could share their experiences and listen to others, creating a network of mutual support, which proved to be essential for overcoming pain.

The presence of religious leaders and experts from different traditions at the project was a highlight. Their contributions helped to demystify many aspects of grief and death, offering enriching perspectives that are often not addressed in everyday life. This has not only increased understanding between different religious groups, but also strengthened respect and empathy in the community.

For project partners, which included faith-based organizations, educators, and healthcare professionals, "The Faces of Farewell" offered a unique platform to collaborate and expand their reach. Participating in this approach allowed these partners to share their knowledge and also learn from other practices and beliefs. This exchange of information and experiences was extremely valuable, broadening perspectives and enriching the work of each participant.

Furthermore, the partnership with Memorial Vera Cruz brought visibility and recognition to these organizations and professionals, as well as helped our company too. Participation in the project showed each partner's commitment to the cause of humanizing grief, which strengthened their credibility and reputation in the community. Many reported that the collaboration in this project opened doors for future initiatives and work, thus expanding its social impact.

In summary, the "The Faces of Farewell" had a profound impact on both the community and the partners involved. By approaching grief in an inclusive and respectful way, the project helped create a more welcoming and understanding environment for everyone. Through education, dialogue and collaboration, "The Faces of Farewell" transformed the perception of grief and strengthened community ties, as well as promoting a culture of respect and empathy. Memorial Vera Cruz, with this initiative, stood out as a true catalyst for positive change, benefiting everyone involved and society as a whole.

Memorial FH – San Juan, San Juan, TX

Memorial Funeral Home Supports Palm Valley Animal Society

This past year, Memorial Funeral Home sponsored Palm Valley Animal Society's annual event, Puppy Love The Golden Gala. This event was held Saturday, February 17, 2024, at the McAllen Convention Center and celebrated 50 years of lifesaving efforts by the society.

Palm Valley Animal Society is a nonprofit organization that is committed to the welfare of animals across Hidalgo County. They have two centers in Edinburg that provide care and shelter to over 10,000 animals annually, including stray, sick, and injured animals. The goal of the Palm Valley Animal Society is to save animals through adoption, foster care, and transfer programs. They offer pet resources, rehoming, medical services, and food services to help all pets in our community, whether they be in their shelter or in someone's home.

Some of the programs that Palm Valley Animal Society offers include the Community Cats Program, a spay/neuter return program that helps control the cat population; the Community Clinic, held the second Saturday of each month that provides preventative veterinary care such as vaccines and microchipping; and a Drive-Thru Pet Pantry. They also have a fee-waived adoption program and a Rescue and Transport Program, which transfers animals throughout the state of Texas and the United States.

Although the facility accepts contributions throughout the year, the annual gala is its main fundraiser. The event includes cocktails, a photo booth, a raffle, online auction, and live auction. During the gala they honor individuals who have gone above and beyond for the Palm Valley Animal Society throughout the year and recognize sponsors who have made the event possible.

Memorial Funeral Home is proud to support Palm Valley Animal Society. As owners of Memorial Pet Passages, a pet funeral home and crematory, we understand the importance of giving back to the community we serve, including the animal community. Not only do we help sponsor Palm Valley Animal Society's events, we also make contributions to their facilities; we donate grooming supplies, food supplies for their drive-thru pet food pantry, and we make monetary contributions.

It is also important for our staff to participate in such events because we are here to serve the community as a whole. Through Memorial Pet Passages, we have served many pet parents and pet families who have lost a beloved member of their family. It is very touching for us to see pet families grieve for their fur babies. We have come to realize that although they are pets, they are still very important members of one's family and losing them causes just as much heartbreak, especially for pet parents who have no family other than their pets.

Memorial Funeral Home looks forward to continue to support Palm Valley Animal Society. We hope to be able to come together and assist at more of their events throughout the year. It would be a great way to serve our animal community and promote the caring thought of Memorial Funeral Home and Memorial Pet Passages.

Mitchell-Wiedefeld Funeral Home, Inc., Baltimore, MD

Death is an inevitable part of the human experience and often lurks in the shadows of our conversations, avoided and feared. Yet, our reluctance to discuss death openly only serves to intensify our anxieties and diminish our ability to cope with its reality. Imagine a world where conversations about death and funerals are as natural as discussing the weather or weekend plans—where the taboo is replaced with understanding, acceptance, and even innovation. Rather than shying away from the topic, imagine community gatherings where people share stories of their deceased loved ones, celebrating their lives and reflecting on the legacies they left behind. These conversations can serve as powerful reminders of the richness that comes from embracing our mortality. In a recent study published in the National Funeral Directors Association Memorial Business Journal, 39.4% of people surveyed stated they would attend a Death Café like event if one was offered in their community (NFDA Memorial Business Journal July 2024, p. 3). The article also brought up a good point: if you are not having these conversations with your community then how are they being educated? This was the idea behind the event: Demystifying Death.

Here at Mitchell-Wiedefeld Funeral Home we have a mature staff with decades of experience in the profession. Most of our staff is older and the type of community interactions they are used to having is a pre-need talk at a nursing home. While this is a valuable way to connect with the community, having a luncheon at a nursing home is a archaic and limiting. As stated in the previous paragraph, 36.4% of people would attend a Death Café like event if it was offered in their community. These kind of events are more likely to get the younger demographic involved, whereas if you host an event in a nursing home it is limited to their residents.

We decided to host our event in a third-party space (i.e. not a funeral home, nursing home, etc.) because we felt people would be more comfortable and more open to asking questions. We plan on having this event every month to month and a half, each session having a different topic. For our first event, held on June 26 2024, we decided on a broad topic: death anxiety and funerals. The event started with a 15 minute talk which included discuss about what death anxiety is and how it translates to our society being death avoidant especially when it comes to the funeral planning process. We felt this would be a great opening topic, as we experience families every day who are overwhelmed by funeral planning due to not having these crucial talks with their loved one while they're still alive. This was then followed by a question and answer session where participants were not limited to asking questions on the topic of the evening.

We found this stimulated conversation not only between the public and the funeral home but between the attendees at the event afterwards. The benefits of conducting an on-going event like this cannot be understated. Almost every attendee (about twenty five people) approached our host, Kelsey Ricci (M02005), and said how excited they were that something like this was being offered in the community. They noted that the transparency and honesty while both giving the talk and answering questions helped restore their faith in funeral service and helped them face their own fears about talking about their or their loved ones final wishes. We are hoping to continue with this momentum, drawing a larger crowd and getting more of the community involved in future Demystifying Death talks. Since summer is a hectic time between vacationing and preparing for the upcoming school year, we are not hosting the next one until September.

Talking to the public about death and funerals is not about confronting our fears; it is about embracing life more fully. By fostering open, honest conversations and integrating innovative approaches, we can redefine how we commemorate the departed and support those left behind. Let us envision a future where discussions about death are met with understanding and where funerals are transformed into meaningful celebrations of life. Together, we can cultivate a culture that honors our shared mortality and embraces the profound beauty of our fleeting existence.

Moments Funeral Home, Lucedale, MS

Moments Funeral Home, Leakesville, MS

All of us at Moments Funeral Home are extremely honored to live where we do and have the freedoms that we have. We are proud US Citizens and try hard to not take these freedoms for granted. We are honored to serve military families during their time of grief and give back to Veteran programs as much as possible. We are humbled to arrange military honors at services and have a hard time not tearing up during the playing of Taps. We assist military families with ordering markers through the Department of Veteran Affairs. We allow those markers to be delivered to our facility and set them at no charge to the families. We have also hosted various events focused on military families in the past. This year, we once again had the honor of being able to host a Flag Retirement Ceremony. The United States Flag Code, Title 4, Section 8k states- "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

No, this is nothing new. However, this is an event that our community loves and for a funeral home such as ours in the area, we are able to provide the perfect venue. We provided drop boxes at both of our locations, Lucedale and Leakesville. We promoted to donation of flags through social media, or radio program and the local newspaper for a few months. The purchased elephant trunk drop boxes at Home Depot and had a local print shop wrap those for us. See the photo below. We received several inquiries about the boxes. Other organizations such as the local VA and others were interested in offering the same. We received several flags and had to empty the boxes on several occasions. We solicited the help of local Veterans to make sure our program was done properly and with the utmost respect. Hammer Fallon is the current JROTC instructor at George County High School. Mr. Fallon retired from the United States Army after several years serving domestic and abroad. Mr. Michael Walker served in the United States Marine. We also took care of services for his wife, Mrs. Vickie Walker, when she passed away some time ago. We keep in contact with many of our families, and have become good friends with Mr. Walker. These two gentlemen assisted us in t preparing the flags for retirement. We gathered all the donations and carefully went through each one. We did, of course, receive some flags that did not qualify for the program. We received state specific flags and military branch specific decorative flags. We also received many flags that were decorations in nature only. The American Flags were each folded and made ready.

Our event was hosted late one evening so the sun was low and the temperature was not so hot. Bro. Stephen, from our staff, was our host and kept the ceremony moving. The veterans who participated lowered the flag from in front of our building and raised a new one. We had the performance of Taps and all recited the Pledge of Allegiance. We offered bottled water and a variety of tea. Everyone in attendance was encouraged to participate in the burning of the flags.

We had a wonderful Flag Retirement Ceremony. We received positive feedback from the community and will continue to host this event again in the future. aces the profound beauty of our fleeting existence.

Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre, Madison, IN

With today's overload of continuous information from all types of communication channels, people often feel no relevance to the messages and instantaneously move on to the next feed.

The mental health findings of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2023, however, definitely let Morgan & Nay Funeral Centre connect. According to the CDC report, more than 50,000 Americans died by suicide last year, the highest ever on record. Rodney Nay, president/owner of Morgan & Nay and the county coroner for eight years, unfortunately knew some of those statistics belonged to his community. In Jefferson County (Indiana) which sports a small population of approximately 20,000, official records show seven suicides and 10 overdoses in 2021, three suicides and 10 overdoses in 2022, seven suicides and 11 overdoses in 2023 and so far zero (0) suicides and two overdoses in 2024 as of June 30. When two ladies who had lost loved ones in separate incidents to suicide and overdose formed a group and sought public assistance, Morgan & Nay gladly joined the effort to bring awareness and hopefully solutions to the problem. The funeral home ...

- funded an employee to take a two-day suicide prevention course to learn about effective approaches
- offered free facility space in its monument center for weekly meetings
- purchased mental health material for reference and/or free distribution, as well as self-esteem and motivation posters for the meeting area
- designated an employee on behalf of the funeral home to attend a state legislative hearing in support of more funding for suicide prevention awareness, as well as review statistics with the town mayor in hopes of increased local support
- promoted the group's meeting dates on the funeral home's Facebook page
- connected with a local counselor to provide 1:1 service for possible referrals
- and organized and hosted a public reception for the group's first anniversary on June 19, 2024.

The first meeting in 2023 netted 27 people, with anywhere from 2 to 17 now attending each week. On behalf of Morgan & Nay, the employee who completed the suicide prevention course also attended an Indiana State Legislature hearing in February 2024 to express the Centre's support for more government funding to combat suicide tragedies. In addition, a private cell phone number is shared for those who need immediate help 24/7, whether it be simply to talk or connect with a mental health agency with trained professionals. These suicide preventive measures through Morgan & Nay are not official work assignments with designated hours and budget but rather a community service initiative that Centre employees/owners have added to their regular, operational responsibilities. Prior to the group's organization and Morgan & Nay's promotion and involvement in the quest, many potential victims of suicide and/or their families did not know the resources available. Suicide does not keep business hours and there is no thought of google or phone directory searches at the time of suicide contemplation. And most have never heard of the new federal government hotline number 988 for mental health and suicidal issues. In addition to the weekly suicide prevention meetings at the Morgan & Nay facility, there also is a second weekly meeting option focusing on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In Mr. Nay's opinion, the impact/aftermath of suicide and overdose death parallel very closely for the survivors. The first program aims to prevent whereas the second entity concentrates on mental stability and recovery when suicides do occur. To celebrate the

endeavor's first anniversary, Morgan & Nay hosted a public reception at the funeral home on June 19, 2024. Mr. Nay, along with the two initial organizers of the group, "Citizens of Jefferson County for Suicide Prevention," spoke about the program's progress and future direction. For each of the 2022-23 suicide victims in Jefferson County, Morgan & Nay formed an attractive photo display, surrounded by fresh flowers. Approximately 50 people attended the event. In front page, headline position, the local newspaper (Madison Courier) covered the event with a very detailed story about the suicidal status in Jefferson County and the new avenue for help. The article, which noted Morgan & Nay's leadership in the endeavor, certainly expanded awareness and reached a diverse, county-wide audience. In his reception remarks, Mr. Nay noted, "We have people living who may not have been living ... without the effort of this initiative. It is Morgan & Nay's community and human responsibility to be part of this constructive quest to preserve life and improve life for others." With the statistic numbers significantly down for 2024, as of June 30, the problem is not over but progress is prevailing.

Morris-Baker Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Johnson City, TN

Bringing Crucial Conversations to Our Small Town

The Rationale

Over twenty years ago, I had a good friend that I would have lunch with every Saturday. He was a local Methodist pastor, and I was an undertaker. During our time together, we would often talk about our work and the struggles our organizations had.

One day, after hearing me bemoan my company's struggles with communication and conflict, he told me that I should read the book *Crucial Conversations*. I did, and it was one of the pivotal decisions of my career.

After reading *Crucial Conversations* I wanted to learn more about how to use the tools. I attended the in-person training and found it very relevant to our profession. As with many caring professions, I believe funeral staff struggle to express our feelings in a way that is both caring and effective.

The in-person training transformed my management style and was key to changing the composition of our staff in a way consistent with our values. It was so important to our company culture, our company committed to train 100% of our full-time staff in *Crucial Conversations*.

For years, I wanted to bring the training that had been so important to me and my company to my community, Johnson City, TN. Unfortunately, my many efforts failed until I met a new friend, Amy Podurgal, in North Carolina who just happened to be a master trainer with *Crucial Learning*.

Partner Organizations

With Amy's guidance, Morris-Baker partnered with our local leadership nonprofit, *Summit Leadership*, to produce a public in-person *Crucial Conversations* seminar. Morris-Baker stepped up as underwriter (committing to covering any financial losses of the event), and helped plan, schedule, and promote the event in our community.

Detailed description of the program, service or activity.

Over two days at the *Summit Leadership* facility, the 30 attendees learned nine powerful skills for working through disagreements to achieve better results. *Crucial Conversations* describes the training like this: "The communication skills we teach focus on a specific kind of interaction: those when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. Ours is not a course on winning friends or winning people to your way of thinking; it's about strengthening relationships and securing results in the moments that matter most."

Some examples of the skills they teach are: getting unstuck, identifying what issues are contributing to poor relationships, keeping composure, considering other people's perspective, communicating respectfully and honestly, making sure everyone feels safe so dialogue continues, cultivating mutual purpose, recognizing the warning signs when dialogue and safety are breaking down, finding common ground, and learning how to move from talking to action.

During the workshop, participants identify and work through their own "crucial conversation" that they need to have. With their workshop partner, they examine the issue and role play the conversation to prepare the attendee for actually having that conversation after the seminar.

Benefits provided to funeral home and staff.

In the stressful environment of funeral service, strong communication skills are essential for building and maintaining a highly-functioning team as well as resolving conflicts with (and within) our client families.

These skills transfer to every facet of a person's life, and it can dramatically change that staff member's world in both the professional and personal arenas. The better my staff is at these skills, the more that all their relationships will prosper.

The sessions also benefit the funeral home and staff by exposing the Morris-Baker staff who attend to the communication challenges that hang up the community leaders in attendance. Staff members have come back from training voicing a new empathy for the challenges managers have communicating with their subordinates and the need for them to "just talk to their people".

An additional indirect benefit of the program has been our relationship with Summit Leadership. The program has led to Morris-Baker becoming a community partner of Summit Leadership and conducting regular, in-person sessions with founder Dave McAuley. These sessions have fostered improved communication and teamwork, and they have led to employees connecting with mental health professionals through their care services.

Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large.

Having the tools to foster a constructive dialogue between parties—especially when the emotions and stakes are high, and opinions vary—can make a massive difference to the experience of both the staff and the customer. Addressing issues in a way both diplomatic and effective can make it possible to preserve relationships with many stakeholders, and this can create outcomes that benefit everyone.

By bringing this training to our community, attendees who may not be able to afford travel or registration fees can have this material provided locally at half the normal cost. This has led to participation by local civic leaders, corporate leaders, and leaders in related professions, such as senior living facilities—establishing Morris-Baker as an organization working to better the community that we all call home.

"Crucial Conversations was beyond what I expected! The materials, interactions and opportunity to actually practice and discuss real situations made this experience invaluable. I have utilized the tools that were presented in this seminar in my professional as well as my personal life. At first it was uncomfortable, but I have learned the more I use the tools the more comfortable I have become and have been able to have some real-life impacting conversations."

Carla Dunn, Executive Director at Dominion Senior Living

Myers Mortuary, Ogden, UT

Myers Mortuary, Roy, UT; Myers Mortuary, Layton, UT; Myers Mortuary, Brigham City, UT

"One time a year, our departed come back to celebrate with us." Día de los muertos or Day of the Dead is a unique Latin American holiday for celebrating death and life, where mourning is exchanged for celebration as the dead are reunited with the living. Offerings or "ofrendas" placed on altars and graves decorated with marigolds, photos of the departed, and displays of their favorite foods and drinks are believed to encourage visits from the land of the dead as the departed ones hear their prayers, smell their favorite foods and join in the celebration.

The idea of organizing a specifically Hispanic event stems from filling an unmet and very real need to acknowledge, honor, and authentically celebrate this most significant holiday, Día de los muertos. Since the inception of Myers Mortuary in 1941, our motto has always been and continues to stand as "The Funeral Directors Who Care." We care about and take special interest in all segments of our community. In Ogden, Utah, the Hispanic population is the fastest growing ethnic group comprising over 35% of the city's population.

Last year on November 1, 2023, we provided the opportunity for the northern Utah Latino community to celebrate one of their most treasured festivities, Dia de los Muertos in a cemetery. To our knowledge, Dia de los muertos, had never before been celebrated anywhere in our state where it traditionally is celebrated in Latin America, namely in a cemetery. Another objective for organizing the Day of the Dead event was to educate our non-Hispanic population about the origin of the celebration, enhance understanding and appreciation between cultures and especially to foster a greater unity in our community.

Over a year was spent in researching, planning, developing close ties with collaborators, and reaching out to Spanish-speaking groups in our state. Our goal was to present an authentic, interactive, and uplifting event for all age groups. In the process, we developed a close relationship with Oaxaca en Utah, a non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating, sharing, and preserving the vibrant Mexican/Oaxacan cultural heritage through dance, music, and traditions. A great effort was made in reaching a large audience: church congregations from a variety of faiths received personalized invitations, large banners were displayed, newspaper ads were run for extended time periods, posters were placed in Latino concentrated shopping centers, presentations were shared at several cultural events, and social media was expanded, with all communications presented in both English and Spanish.

Two days prior to the event, the cemetery was bustling with activity; Myers Mortuary staff, cemetery and community volunteers built a large colorful altar for the "ofrendas" and memory photo wall decorated with marigolds. An expansive tent, heaters, lights, photo booth, outdoor movie theater, display tents, chairs and designated areas for food trucks and vendors were set up ready for a large audience.

On November 1st, the official first day of Dia de los muertos, Myers Mortuary funeral directors, administrative assistants, pre-need counselors, and cemetery personnel came dressed in official skeleton clothing and face paintings, ready to direct and assist with parking, photo displays, distribution of wristbands, and answer questions.

After a warm bilingual welcome by the owners of Myers Mortuary and cheerful mariachi music, everyone was invited to join a procession walk along a candle-lit path through the cemetery led by musicians. Prior to starting the walk, a beautiful blessing was pronounced. People carried photos of their loved ones and shared treasured memories of the deceased as we walked together. The 4-hour program also included beautiful traditional Mexican dances presented by Youth Impact, an after-school program and safe haven for at-risk youth. Children, youth, and adults representing Oaxaca en Utah shared their dance talents dressed in colorful traditional clothing specifically hand-stitched for the event and with matching face paintings. Everyone was invited to join the huge puppets in the joyful dance on the grass.

The owners of Myers Mortuary interspersed the musical numbers, mariachi groups, dress-up contests, and dances with brief bilingual explanations about the origin, symbolism and meaning of the Day of the

Dead celebration. Everyone joined in for the sing-along session. During the Catrina dress-up contest, the audience enjoyed participating as judges. The free face paintings, free photo booth, and Coco movie showing outdoors were favorites among all ages. Despite the cold winter temperatures, the enthusiasm was electrifying as more than 1000 people honored, remembered and celebrated their loved ones. The unanimous feedback was one of extreme gratitude and appreciation for catering to their needs and at the same time including our entire community.

Throughout the night, several television stations interviewed the owners of Myers Mortuary and attendees both in English and Spanish. The constant question asked was if the cemetery celebration of Dia de los muertos would be a yearly tradition and the answer was a resounding "si" or yes.

Oliverie Funeral Home, Manchester, NJ
Oliverie Funeral Home, Jackson, NJ

Blood Drive

The Oliverie Funeral Home Blood Drive is an increasingly important event for our community. One pint of blood goes towards saving the lives of three people. The American Red Cross educated the funeral home staff on blood donation and presented statistics that state almost every single person will need blood or blood products at some point in their lives. Despite the urgent need for blood, less than 5% of the eligible population donates. In Ocean County alone, 800 pints of lifesaving blood are needed to sustain the lives of patients.

Although the Blood Drive is a program Oliverie Funeral Home, with the help of the American Red Cross, hosts annually, we were able to quickly adapt to the current global climate and make necessary arrangements in order to not only reschedule the event in a timely matter, but also ensure the safety of all of our helpful volunteers and donors. Oliverie Funeral Home advertised the Blood Drive in our local newspaper, Manchester Times, on the funeral home's website, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and on flyers posted on community bulletin boards in locations such as churches, businesses, and senior communities.

April 17, 2024 Oliverie Funeral Home hosted the Blood Drive from 10:00am – 2:00 pm at the Jackson location. The funeral home was equipped with an online portal through the American Red Cross that allowed non-contact scheduling in fifteen-minute intervals. Walk-ins were also welcomed that day, as blood products -especially plasma-are urgently needed. Donors were screened to see if they were candidates to donate plasma and guided on those procedures if they chose to do so.

The funeral home made sure to take all necessary precautions to keep volunteers and donors safe and healthy. Gloves, and hand sanitizer were placed liberally throughout the building and offered to everyone who stepped through the door.

In accordance with our previous blood drives, Oliverie Funeral Home encourages people to donate blood in memory of a loved one. Donors are welcome to write down the name of a friend or family member on a paper droplet of blood. Our staff hangs each droplet of blood on the "In Memory" board for all to see. This small gesture of recognition for their life-saving donation warms the hearts of many, and is often the centerpiece for our event.

The Oliverie Funeral Home Blood Drive has proven to be of great benefit to our community. It is not uncommon for first-time donors to thank the funeral home and the American Red Cross for introducing them to the blood donation process. Volunteers guided donors through every step of the way to ensure donor comfort while soothing music played throughout the building.

Our staff made it their mission to get to know all who came through the door on a personal level. We felt that this made all of the donors feel more comfortable and it allowed the community to get to know our staff. The Oliverie Funeral Home staff, including our two owners, donated blood as well. This was our fifth year hosting a Blood Drive and we hope to continue to host for many years to come. Oliverie Funeral Home enjoys hosting this event because community outreach is a lifelong passion of our owner and founder, Geraldine Oliverie Henicke. Geraldine has proven to be an asset to her community since her days as a volunteer First-Aid Explorer when she was thirteen years old. Since then, she has continuously and consecutively supported the lives of her neighbors. Geraldine frequently encourages the community to walk through our doors even when a death has not occurred. It does not take a tragedy to get to know your neighbors. This event allows us to share our lives and be a part of the community that has embraced us for years.

The staff at Oliverie Funeral Home looks forward to the Blood Drive because it is an opportunity for them to get to know the fine people of Manchester and get to know the town as more than just a place to work.

We are there to support our local families during the most difficult times, so let's show up to support them during their bravest.

In an effort to combat the blood shortage, the Oliverie Funeral Home rapidly and successfully organized, advertised, and hosted a blood drive during a global pandemic. The Oliverie Funeral Home and the American Red Cross are extremely satisfied with this event. Our total pint donation was an impressive eighty-five pints -our highest in five years!

Oliverie Funeral Home is proud of Manchester and Jackson and all of the courageous donors who showed support for their hometowns' sick population during one of the most difficult times. Donors of all ages came out to make a difference that day, and for that we are tremendously thankful.

Paradise Memorial Funeral and Cremation Services, Milwaukee, WI

Leon L. Williamson Funeral and Cremation Services, Milwaukee, WI

Dr. Camelia L. Clarke and Marcel A. Clarke, MBA, owners of Milwaukee's Paradise Memorial Funeral and Cremation Services and the Leon L. Williamson Funeral Home, launched a one-of-a-kind web series that focused on social media etiquette related to funeral services, grief and loss.

The web series featured education and insights for the friends and families of loved ones who have passed away and how to best navigate social media norms during periods of mourning, rooted in the Clarkes' extensive experiences in the death care profession.

"Social media is such an integral part of our lives, and it is critically important that we approach it with sensitivity and respect when needed. Our web series aims to raise awareness and guide individuals on how to navigate this new social terrain compassionately and appropriately," said Dr. Camelia Clarke.

Said Marcel A. Clarke: "Our goal is to educate and empower individuals to make informed choices when engaging with social media surrounding funerals and death. By sharing our professional experiences and discussing the dos and don'ts, we hope to foster a more mindful and supportive digital community."

In today's world sensationalism plays a major role in the lives of society. Many times people simply want to be the first and things. This includes being the post to post stories, movie nuggets or even death. Often times these post are made even before the immediate family has been informed. This activity prompted us t be proactive and to educate society on why this behavior is unacceptable.

Some people believe that they are helping the family by getting the word out but in actuality, unless the family has instructed them to do so, they may be actually harming the family. The stress level and grief that can come as a result of premature posting could cause stress beyond measure. By creating this series, it is our hope that we can eliminate a small layer of stress in one family at a time.

The series consists of multiple episodes and feature the following important topics, among others:

- Privacy and consent
- Emotional well-being
- Sensationalism and exploitation

The viewers are able to access the series on our website paradisememorialfuneralhome.com as well as on our Youtube, LinkedIn and Facebook pages. It is our belief that this series will not only provide impact on social media posts locally but may be able to reach across all states in the country.

Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Traverse City, MI

Rationale behind the idea: Our funeral home celebrated its 130th anniversary on July 20, 2023. We combined our historic building's anniversary celebration with The Friendly Garden Club's 40th annual Garden Walk. This combined effort helped promote our funeral home's beautiful, unique gathering or funeral service options along with the garden club's educational, fundraising event.

Description of the activity: The event had a history appreciation theme entitled "40th Annual Garden Walk Celebrating History and Gardens". Tickets were \$15 each and hours were from 10 am to 5 pm. There were months of planning meetings that resulted in a fabulous event! There was a Garden Walk Preview and Reception pre-event on July 16, 2023 for all home and garden owners hosted at Dan and Peg Jonkhoff's home.

The day began with an hour of rain but guests were happy to tour three floors of the funeral home first. There were knowledgeable guides on all floors and garden club members were hostesses in the garden. Refreshments were served in our garden tent with all tables, linens and beverages donated by our funeral home.

Benefits provided to the funeral home and staff: There were 800 guests that toured both the gardens and funeral home building. Fourteen members of our staff participated with shifts in the building either from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm or 1:30 pm to 5 pm. Nicole and Brooke took turns manning the funeral preneed information table and collected names for a special gift basket. All staff that participated as building guides enjoyed the day and were gifted a custom label, Hannah Home and gardens gift box of Fustini's oil and vinegar.

Benefits provided to families and/or the community at large: The guests enjoyed an all five senses educational experience in both the gardens as well as the home. A garden guide card was provided to all guests to learn about the "gifts" from our family and friends in the garden of perennials, trees, bird houses and even the anonymously donated gazebo! Local florists provided floral arrangements in the building as follows: Flower Station (lounge with garden gazebo history) Premier Floral (second floor dining room with Hannah House dinner plates) and Underground Floral (Mahogany Room). They also learned more about The Friendly Garden Club's mission as well as membership opportunities. Les Dalgliesh played his guitar and sang on the porch with chairs available for guests to set down and enjoy his music.

Partner organizations: The Friendly Garden Club was the key partner organization of which Peg has been a member since 1984. There were Gold, Silver, Bronze and In-Kind sponsors of the event as detailed in the supporting documentation. Club members Nancy Rhoadarmer and Peg were on the Ron Jolly morning radio talk show program sharing the news about both the Garden Walk and the funeral home's 130th anniversary too. There was extensive press in print media including Baylife magazine.

We were on the Garden Walk before in 2012. However, it was different this year as we also used our new garden tent for refreshments and gardening related educational space. Another huge change was the record net profit of \$15,000 raised to benefit grants and scholarships awarded by the garden club. We also helped promote the Zonta Club's Festival of Trees event with save the date cards in our attic along with several Christmas trees. Our funeral home is so honored to have two garden stepping stone gifts (2012 and 2023) from The Friendly Garden Club in our award winning gardens.

The historic appreciation theme continued when The Friendly Garden Club celebrated its 100th anniversary with a very special event on September 26, 2023 at Hagerty Center in Traverse City, Michigan. Peg co-chaired this event with Nancy Rhoadarmer with photo highlights from Baylife magazine attached. Peg is a 40 year garden club member this year with so many wonderful memories and dear friends over the decades.

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory, New Castle, DE

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

Going Above and Beyond in our Service; Reflecting the Love of our Community When They Need It Most

As the second smallest state in the U.S., Delaware is a tight-knit community by nature. Neighborly bonds are cherished and support systems are vital, which is why it's critical that Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory is more than just a service provider in times of loss. Their commitment to the community transcends their professional duties, positioning them as an integral and active member of the state they call home. Day after day, the Spicer-Mullikin team demonstrates that their service goes beyond business; it is a mission rooted in empathy, support, and communal growth.

The Need For Community Engagement Has Never Been Greater

Spicer-Mullikin has long understood the intrinsic value of communal support and interconnectedness. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, they've noticed a distressing trend of increased isolation and related mental health issues. This national trend has been well-documented⁽¹⁾, especially as it relates to rising cases of depression and anxiety. They felt they needed to concentrate on connecting with others in their community because they're more than just a business. They're neighbors, friends, and family. Spicer-Mullikin aimed to increase their involvement in local clubs, safety organizations, and cultural events in order to strategically build a robust support network.

2023-2024 Programs and Activities

One of the most visible ways Spicer-Mullikin shows its dedication to the community is through its sponsorship of local clubs and events. In the last year, they've expanded their sponsorship of various fundraising events for the Appoquinimink Ruritan Club, including the 50/50 Raffle, the Superheroes Raffle, and the Wagon of Cheer Raffle. These events are not merely fundraisers but communal gatherings that foster unity and shared purpose.

Spicer-Mullikin also expanded their support of safety and emergency services through their sponsorship of "Crime Stoppers Delaware" tickets and the Delaware City Fire Company events, including the 50/50 and the Shrimp Feast. They also chose to support the Delaware City Volunteer Company Banquet and the Delaware Valley Fire Chiefs Raffle, celebrating the efforts of emergency service volunteers and leaders. Supporting these noble heroes who protect our community was a natural choice.

Additionally, Spicer-Mullikin worked with God's Power & Light Theater Company, a Christian theater group that works with local actors in presenting two shows a year at the Historic Everett Theatre in Middletown, Delaware. The team was more than happy to sponsor the printing of all programs for productions so that this cherished group could continue to uphold time-honored traditions.

To build on this position as a true community partner, the Spicer-Mullikin team worked to develop a referral relationship with Royal Pet Cremation, a family-run service created in 2007 to fill a local need for professional and dignified pet aftercare. While that's not a service that the Spicer-Mullikin team offers, it brings great comfort to grieving pet owners when the team is able to make an introduction to another trusted business in the community.

Many of these initiatives have been summarized in a non-exhaustive list on the website here:
<https://spicermullikin.com/about/community/>

Neighbors Taking Care of Neighbors

For Spicer-Mullikin and its staff, these community activities create a sense of pride and fulfillment. Being an active participant in the community reinforces the funeral home's reputation as a caring and compassionate institution, which can lead to increased trust and loyalty among community members.

Staff members experience enhanced job satisfaction knowing they are contributing to the community's well-being beyond their professional obligations

The community at large benefits significantly from Spicer-Mullikin's initiatives. Their sponsorship of local raffles and events helps raise essential funds for various causes, ensuring that these organizations can continue their valuable work. For instance, funds raised through the Appoquinimink Ruritan Club raffles support community service projects and scholarships. The support for emergency services organizations ensures that these vital services remain robust and well-equipped. And by sponsoring local traditions such as the theater company's bi-annual programs, Spicer-Mullikin enriches the community's cultural life, providing opportunities for residents to engage in and enjoy the arts.

Continuing The Legacy

Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Homes & Crematory's consistent and multifaceted involvement in the Delaware community highlights a business model that prioritizes empathy, support, and active participation. Their actions speak volumes about their commitment to more than just providing funeral services, they are dedicated to uplifting and sustaining their community. Through sponsorships, referrals, and continuous support of local events and organizations, Spicer-Mullikin exemplifies the true spirit of community service, embedding themselves as a cornerstone of Delaware's fabric and ensuring the community remains connected, supported, and thriving.

(1) The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use, KFF.org, March 2023.