

A Sacred Choice Funeral Home, Houston, TX

A Sacred Choice is proud to be a founding board member for Twilight Wish Houston Chapter.

Twilight Wish is an organization that grants wishes to seniors and there are three categories.

The first, is a Simple Needs wish which can be an object such as medical equipment. The second is a Living Life to the fullest which can be a ticket to a baseball game or football game. The final wish category is Celebrating a Life which is an experience such as flying the senior from Houston to Italy where her husband's plane was shot down during World War II.

The team at A Sacred Choice knew they would make a difference in the senior's life but also their family. This was a perfect way to serve the community and extend an opportunity for others to serve. It is also an opportunity for organizations to use Twilight Wish Houston as a resource for their seniors. This year we implemented a new strategy to target organizations that have direct contact with low income seniors. Twilight Wish spoke with civic clubs, hospices, local neighborhood centers and food banks. The organization has facilitated the application process. We realized seniors will not want to do this on their own as they may not have the skills or resources to submit the application online. However, the caretaker or the person that heard about Twilight Wish may be able to assist with this process. Our new goal is to teach others how to start the process and explain who would be an ideal candidate. They also have our personal information and can reach out if there are any questions.

Many connections have been made and the senior community has felt the genuine love we have for them. We have not turned away a senior's wish which is really amazing for a big city such as Houston. A Sacred Choice is still working on creating opportunities to receive more wishes. There are trade shows we will attend to spread the word and hopefully receive more wishes. The organization has applied for a non-profit award with the Better Business Bureau in hope of raising awareness and letting others know we are a resource to them.

Our social accounts have also been active and the activity it receives from the Facebook community is truly wonderful. We have had families reach out to us because they say this is too good to be true. It brings joy to our hearts when they realize we are the real deal and are not going anywhere.

A Sacred Choice is truly making a difference one wish at a time.

Funeza Servicios Funerarios, Mexico City, Mexico

Funeza Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, Mexico; Funeza Nezahualcoytl, Nezahualcoytl, Mexico; Funeza La Raza, Mexico City, Mexico; Funeza Los Reyes, Mexico City, Mexico; Funeza Zaragoza, Mexico City, Mexico

Treating older adults with dignity

Since 2019, government entities in Mexico have implemented policies aimed at fostering and promoting universal rights, with the purpose of building a more egalitarian society for all people at different stages of their lives, aligning with efforts at the international level paying special attention to the rights of the older adult; such as the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991), the Proclamation on Aging (1992), the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (2002b), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons (2023), among other documents.

These collaborations have led to significant changes in the way older adults are approached and cared for in the different social fields (family, society and State), for example, the modification of the welfare approach used at the end of the 20th century, characterized by voluntary and community self-management actions aimed at this sector of the population with an approach focused on the vindication of their rights, especially their social and participation rights (Wasiek, 2022).

This new paradigm acknowledges the current and potential contributions of the population aged 60 and over to the collective well-being, cultural identity, the diversity of their communities and the economic, political and social development of nations, ensuring their right to a life of dignity in old age. It also highlights the importance of analyzing life trajectories, recognizing that the inequalities that intersect and accumulate over time become more evident and intensify in old age. These efforts have also included priority subjects, such as the eradication of violence and abuse (Law on the Rights of Older Adults [LDPAM], Article 3, Section XII; Article 5, Section I, paragraphs c and d; as well as Articles 9 and 10).

Mexico has been undergoing a demographic transition on a national and state level since 1950. The relevance of this phenomenon lies not only in the increase in life expectancy, but also in the forecast for the year 2030, where it is estimated that the population of older adults will reach 20.6 million, representing 15% of the national total. In this proportion, the State of Mexico will be positioned as the entity with the largest number of older adults, reaching 2.7 million. At the state level, Mexico City will stand out as one of the most aged entities, with 21.1% of its population comprising people aged 60 and over, that is, 21 out of every 100 inhabitants of this geographical region (National Population Council [CONAPO], 2023).

By the year 2050, population aging will be more accentuated; the proportion of people aged 60 and over at the national level will constitute a quarter of the total population (24.1%), that is, 1 out of every 4 people in Mexico will be 60 years old or older. In this scenario, in terms of volume, the State of Mexico will continue to be the entity with the largest number of old people at the national level, reaching 4.7 million. Mexico City will continue to be the entity with the highest

proportion of older people in relation to the total number of residents in this territorial unit, with approximately one third of its population being 60 years of age or older (CONAPO, 2023).

The vulnerability of older adults to discrimination, whether conscious or unconscious, motivated by age, and how this discrimination can be aggravated when it intersects with other factors considered grounds for discrimination, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among others. It is important to highlight these forms of intolerance, since they affect human rights and fundamental freedoms and are also a breeding ground for acts of violence. Discrimination against the older adults, as revealed by the data discussed, manifests itself mainly through stigmas and prejudices associated with statist practices, affecting their autonomy, health, inclusion and participation in society.

Within all the problems for this vulnerable segment of the population, we can highlight the following aspects:

1. Ensuring quality of life based on timely access to preventive medical care in a comprehensive environment: nutrition, physical and mental activity, social activities, nutrition and mental and emotional health.
2. To ensure economic stability by being able to be productive to society and have a fair and adequate economic remuneration to maintain a decent life with independence.
3. Ensure access to a closing of the life cycle through professional, dignified and humane funeral services that do not represent an economic problem for the older adults or their families.

The solutions available to cover this type of needs, such as Life Insurance, Medical Expense Insurance, Pre-need Funeral Plans and/or Funeral Insurance, currently the companies that offer this type of solutions have restrictions or limitations based on age, with the age limit established at 60 years of age. Leaving out this segment of the vulnerable population, which will have a significant growth in the following years.

In FUNEZA, we understand the current needs of this vulnerable social group and aligned with our commitment and vision to serve and help families through support, assistance and guidance for a life well-lived, we developed a comprehensive program focused on addressing the needs of the older adult population in Mexico City and the State of Mexico, where we have a presence.

The SOMOS TU COMPAÑÍA program includes the following actions that have impacted in 2023 and 2024 more than 60,000 older adults who have been incorporated into the program:

1. Elimination of the age restriction in the coverage of funeral services.
2. Incorporation of a comprehensive preventive telemedicine services platform called FUNEZA e-Doctor, which is included free of charge for all our users and offers 24-hour service through a cell phone app or via telephone for preventive medicine, nutrition, psychological care and legal assistance services.
3. Program "Al ritmo del corazón FUNEZA" which sponsors and organizes jointly with civil associations and local, state and federal government agencies, physical activation, recreational and social integration programs free of charge for older adults.
4. The "FUNEZA Emotional Recovery Center" program, which offers psychological consultations free of charge to the general public, as well as a calendar of activities aimed at integral health and social interaction through the creation of communities and support groups. After one year of

operation of this pilot test and due to the success and acceptance obtained, we will close 2024 with the opening of 2 additional Emotional Recovery Centers located in the State of Mexico.

CRECE CON FUNEZA Program, through this program we seek to reincorporate older adults into the economy, allowing them to create an income from the commercialization of our pre-need plans and funeral insurance. We have initiated a recruitment, training and education program that allows older adults to carry out this remunerated activity according to their time availability.

With these actions, and the growth of the program, we expect to be able to increase our reach in the following years to add to our network of affiliates at least 500,000 older adults, which will be an estimated 10% of the population of older adults in Mexico City and the State of Mexico, seeking to align ourselves with the actions of Dignification of this segment of the population in vulnerability.

Hughes Family Tribute Center, Dallas, TX

Hughes Family Tribute Center realizes that grief can come prior to the death of a loved one. For those that have a loved one with dementia, grief and loss can come years before a loved one dies. The heartache families face while a loved one begins to forget and struggle with daily activities is a life-altering experience. Many times, the caretakers of dementia patients are family members who still must live their daily lives now with the added responsibility of caring for their once independent spouse, parent, sibling, or grandparent. This acquired responsibility can leave these caretakers feeling more and more isolated as they lose time they once had with friends with caring for their loved one or the loss of commonality with people who just don't quite understand the complexities of caretaking such as parenting a parent.

How much better would it be if caretakers had a support system of people who understand their problems? If caretakers had resources or knowledge of dementia, self-care, or coping mechanisms, would the weeks, months, or years of caretaking be more fulfilling than draining? The staff at Hughes Family Tribute Center opened our doors and hosts our first Dementia Care-Partner Support Group in the Fall of 2023. The support group spanned across 12 weeks with 10 gatherings as we went through Dr. Edward Shaw's *The Dementia Care-Partner's Workbook*. We invited a chaplain from VITAS Hospice to come and lead the gatherings while the funeral home supplied writing materials, printed note sheets, had a staff member on hand to work videos, and occasionally had refreshments provided during special meetings (like the first gathering). We offered a Facebook Group for members to stay connected in between gatherings and after the course was completed. The information and sense of community was invaluable to the attendees of the Dementia Care-Partner Support Group.

With our first-ever support group, our staff gleaned many valuable insights. For some of our staff members, this was the first time they interacted with families outside of large events, funeral services, or pre-need meetings. It was a wonderful way to build connections and bonds between the caretakers and our staff. For other staff members, the course provided twice the benefit—not only for our company, but also in their personal lives as they had loved ones struggling with dementia. For our company, it also gave us a way to speak and work with hospice chaplains outside of the death of a patient. The benefits to the attendees and to our staff were so great, that we plan to continue our Dementia Care-Partner Support Groups each year with future plans to increase the number of support groups to 2 to 4 within a year.

Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home & Crematory, Inc., Est Pittsburgh, PA

Patrick T. Lanigan Funeral Home & Crematory, Inc., Turtle Creek, PA

Andrew Novak's Headstone

On March 3, 1958, Andrew Novak was born in Pittsburgh, PA., the son of Bernadine Novak. He died 2 days later on March 5. His little body was buried in an infant section of St. Mary's Cemetery on Sharp's Hill in Pittsburgh. There was no money for a marker or headstone.

Bernadine is now 85 and has always lamented that there was no way to find Andrew's grave because it was unmarked. As a divorcee and single mother who raised her 2 other children, she couldn't afford a marker.

In September 2023, Pat Lanigan was contacted by his neighbor, Debbie Fiumara, who works for Twilight Wish. Twilight Wish is a non-profit that grants wishes to senior citizens, similar to Make-a-Wish for children. Debbie explained that Bernadette approached Twilight with a wish that her son Andrew's grave be marked with a headstone. It was a very unusual request, one that Twilight Wish had never received before. Debbie asked Pat for any assistance that he might provide. Pat agreed to help to make sure Andrew's grave was properly marked.

First, Pat contacted the cemetery to confirm the burial of Andrew and the grave's location. After speaking with Tom Berta of the Catholic Cemetery Association, Tom said he would help in any way to mark Andrew's grave.

Second, Pat visited Kevin Kanak who owns Ragan Monument in Turtle Creek. After explaining the request of Bernadette, Kevin agreed to help, even though the cemetery was far from his market area. Pat pledged to fund the cost of the marker and any related fees.

With those two pieces in place, Pat contacted Debbie and asked when she would like to have the stone placed. The target date was September 20, Bernadine's birthday. Kevin could have the stone ready and would deliver it on that day. But first the grave needed to be located. The cemetery foreman Randy Fox, and Patty McDonough of Twilight Wish, researched handwritten cemetery records and located the grave. The deadline date could be met.

On September 20, Paul Borgony, a funeral director with Lanigan Funeral Home, delivered the stone marker with Kevin Kanak to the cemetery. The intent was to place the stone and conduct a brief graveside service. Gathered with Paul and Kevin were Bernadine, her two daughters and a granddaughter. Kevin properly placed the stone on the foundation and Paul led a prayer service for Andrew and his family.

The cost of the stone was paid by Lanigan Funeral Home and the cemetery agreed to waive its foundation fee.

Andrew's grave was finally marked, 65 years later. Bernadine said, "My heart is filled with joy".

Thorson-Popp Funeral and Cremation Services, Viroqua, WI

The loss of a spouse is a unique and deeply personal loss for the surviving partner and a niche of grief therapy deserving special attention. When Thorson-Popp Funeral and Cremation Services hosts our annual Service of Remembrance during the holiday season, it became apparent that many living without a spouse were experiencing difficulties on their grief journey. Regardless of how long it had been, widows and widowers who joined us shared that it was an emotional struggle to be there, and even with family by their side they felt isolated. While ultimately a gratifying ceremony, a Service of Remembrance at Christmas felt like it was more about their loss as a family rather than coping individually without a life mate.

One of our staff members, who is a widow and facilitates our local GriefShare chapter, brought to light that her "Loss of a Spouse" seminar has the highest enrollment of any of her other activities. Additionally, participants who met at the seminar were forming "coffee clutch" gatherings once a month to maintain connections with others who understood their struggle. All of this made us aware of the real need for an aftercare event that catered exclusively to surviving spouses. Venue, time, and service format were all sensitive questions that weighed heavily as we brainstormed what to do? After much discussion, we determined that Valentine's Day was a tender holiday for surviving spouses. That time of year, with all its abundant themes of love between couples, seemed particularly hard for someone celebrating solo. Furthermore, Wisconsin's winter weather in February delivers a true sense of isolation and seasonal depression for those living alone. A gathering celebrating one love between two people satisfied the need surviving spouses need for special support.

We decided that a supper club would be the perfect "date night" venue for our "Love Lasts Forever" experience, complete with white tablecloths, candlelit centerpieces, and a red satin bag of chocolate kisses at each place setting. The owners of our local supper club thought it was a fantastic idea, closing dinner service to give us exclusive use of their facility free of charge and providing a banquet-style dinner for all attending; limited menu choices were offered compliments of Thorson-Popp. We promoted the event with a press release to local journalists, radio interviews, a Facebook event and running an advertising campaign with newspapers and radio stations. Our ads explained what we were doing and described what to expect, inviting those interested in attending to RSVP. We limited attendance to 100 people with guests welcome, and everyone was encouraged to wear red. Reservations were not restricted to just families Thorson-Popp served, but open to families served by other funeral homes as well. We realized this was an excellent opportunity to ingratiate ourselves to the entire community and garner goodwill among families we had not connected with yet. This proved to be well founded, with the majority of attendants previously utilizing another funeral home and resulting with several of them calling on us since.

Our "Love Lasts Forever" event began with a social hour, giving people a chance to receive name tags, enjoy hors d'oeuvres, and visit with staff. Tables for groups of four, six, and eight were positioned throughout the dining room and people were invited to sit wherever they liked. The lighthearted program consisted of remarks from Nathan Popp and various other staff members, who spoke briefly or read appropriate love poems. Everything was presented in a positive and celebratory manner, making jokes about couples, marriage and the like. An important participant was the local chaplain from St. Croix Hospice, who we invited as our

keynote speaker; popular with those attending and offering special words of comfort. Thanks to our RSVP list, we were able to personalize the service for those attending with a special rose presentation ceremony. The surviving spouse was introduced along with the name of the spouse they were remembering on Valentine's, followed by the gift of a long-stemmed red rose. Laughter through tears abound throughout the hour-long service and subsequent dinner. Feedback from exit surveys state that most people enjoyed everything about the evening, particularly the sense of community among others who could relate.

Our 2023 "Love Last's Forever Valentine's Day Banquet" was well attended and a resounding success. However, a dark February night was not ideal for older people wishing to travel. In response, we adjusted our schedule in 2024 to make it a Valentine's Day Luncheon so more people could attend. A positive move, more people attended in 2024 than the previous year with most 2023 attendants returning to tell us our program has become an annual tradition for them.

Weeks' Funeral Home, Buckley, WA

Weeks' Enumclaw Funeral Home, Enumclaw, WA; Weeks' Dryer Mortuary, Tacoma, WA; Edline-Yahn & Covington Funeral Chapel, Kent, WA; Columbia Funeral Home, Seattle, WA; Haven of Rest Funeral Home, Gig Harbor, WA; Newell-Hoerling's Mortuary, Centralia, WA

Community Resource Fair

For the Weeks' Family Funeral Homes, it all began with the desire to provide our funeral directors with additional tools when serving client families. The original idea was to put together an updated community resource guide to provide information for families regarding clergy, celebrants, musicians, catering companies, and videographers. While working on this we soon realized that families also frequently asked the following questions:

- Where can I donate wheelchairs or a medical bed no longer needed?
- What organizations take donations of used clothing, furniture, or household items?
- Are there local groups who deliver hot meals or food to newly single senior adults?
- What organizations provide transportation and/or assistance for doctor appointments or grocery store trips?
- Where can families connect with nearby hospice services or grief support for multiple ages of family members?
- What local groups have a need for volunteers, and in what programs?

To help facilitate the gathering of this information, in the spring of 2023 Weeks' Family Funeral Homes hosted their first ever Community Resource Fair in Enumclaw, Washington. That first year we had 20 groups come and take part. On May 1, 2024 we hosted our second event and had 39 community groups participate. That first year we contacted community leaders, nonprofit organizations, local churches, and two different school districts. This year we added first responders, another school district, and expanded the local groups invited.

For this year's event we partnered with our local Rotary club. They agreed to help us tackle the task of inviting all the various groups. The Rotary also provided snacks and drinks for the event. We secured the Weeks' Funeral Home Room at the Enumclaw Campus of Green River College and teamed up with Rotary for set-up and clean-up. Six members of our staff were there that day to greet participants, help them find their spots in the room, and facilitate the event. Our staff present were Charmaine Jovanovich-Miller, Karen Strecker, Chastin Brinkley, Ilah Hardersen, and Kelley Weeks. They were joined by owners Duane and Fay Weeks. Participants were asked to staff a table and provide brochures and information about their group or program.

During the two hour event we had representatives from local service clubs, senior centers, historical societies, schools, churches, non-profit groups, police, fire, and other community groups. The room was full of constant chatter as everyone mingled and learned about each other and their organizations. Gubernatorial candidate Dave Reichert attended and spent a good deal of time connecting with our guests.

We also gave away a couple of prizes via raffle ticket, and invited everyone to participate in our "Ring Toss for a Reason." The ring toss was staffed by funeral director Ilah and she had people attempt to throw a ring onto various stakes labeled with 24 local schools from three local school districts. For every successful "ringer", Weeks' Family Funeral Homes donated \$5.00 to that school.

The event was a great success. We provided everyone with a list of contact information so that they could easily continue to connect, and all participants have asked to be included in future events. We met and connected with new community organizations and helped them network with others as well. Many local schools received money to be used as they see fit and were reminded that their communities care about them. Most importantly perhaps, we helped our community see us as the valuable resource that we are, not only when a death occurs, but every day.

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home, Royal Oak, MI

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Home, Utica, MI

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors has been the proud recipient of the Pursuit of Excellence Award since 2003, was inducted into the National Funeral Directors Association Hall of Excellence, and was particularly honored to receive our 20th award in 2023. The Pursuit of Excellence program is a formal and current way to convey the high standards that our funeral home has held since its establishment in 1906.

We share our status as an award recipient with the Royal Oak and Utica communities through public displays in both of our locations. In the lobby of our Royal Oak location, we display an eagle statue commemorating our first award received in 2003, as well as a framed display of our most recent award received in 2023. Outside the front door of our Royal Oak location, guests pass by a bronze plaque affixed to the building displaying our business name, NFDA logo, and Pursuit of Excellence logo. In our Utica location, a framed display of our 2023 award is centrally located for guests to view when they make funeral arrangements or attend visitations and services. Wm. Sullivan and Son has an active Facebook presence, where we posted an image of the Pursuit of Excellence logo and message of our 2023 award status on August 6th. Our community responded with likes, hearts, comments, and shares of our post.

Michelle O'Hara, Director of Advanced Planning, brought our eagle statue and framed award certificate with her to the Earth Day Fair on April 22, 2024 at the Royal Oak Farmers Market. Fair attendees were able to ask Michelle about the Pursuit of Excellence program while also inquiring about the green burial process and green burial products, including the wicker casket brought to the fair from our selection room.

Through this program, Wm. Sullivan and Son is able to highlight the achievements made by individual staff members as well as company accomplishments. Our staff have varied interests in continuing education, professional engagement, and volunteer activities, which can be well-highlighted through the categories composing the Pursuit of Excellence program. Participating in this program for such a long period of time also gives the benefit of remembering past entries, filled with photos of well-regarded retired staff and opportunities to reminisce on past community events. Preparing our entry each year proves to be a boost in our company's morale, as does receiving the award and sharing it with the Utica and Royal Oak communities.