

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 1 st , 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 "sí" or yes.