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Innovative Program: Getting Grace (1 I)

On March 30, 2019, Lakeside Memorial Funeral Home, Inc. hosted a showing of the film “Getting Grace.” Funeral Home owner, Charles Castiglia, met one of the lead actors of the film, Daniel Roebuck, at the 2018 National Funeral Director’s Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah, and immediately loved the idea of organizing a screening of the film in our community. He started planning the event right away and Roebuck and his costar, Madelyn Dundon, agreed to travel to Buffalo to meet our staff and be here for the film screening.

This film has been shown by a few funeral homes across the country and is an excellent watch for those who have experienced loss, know someone who has, or will someday lose someone – just about everyone. “Getting Grace” is the story of a teenage girl, Grace, who is fighting cancer. It becomes apparent early in the film that she is losing her battle, and the story follows her journey of coming to terms with her prognosis and getting to know a local funeral director who she hopes will help her understand the process of death and dying. This film tackles a very difficult subject matter in a uniquely candid way, displaying the raw emotion and the beautiful moments of the journey through loss and grief, while also making you laugh a few times. It is a heartbreaking story, but one that is told with a sense of humor and from a different point of view than we often encounter. The funeral director in the story experiences his own struggles, ultimately finding a new passion for his work through the life and death of this girl.

Because of the subject material, we decided to host this event to benefit the Courage of Carly fund, a program of our local Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center that funds research of pediatric cancers as well as providing programs for children fighting these diseases. We worked for several months to organize and advertise for this event, as well as collaborate with other organizations who were kind enough to offer sponsorships and donations to offset the cost of the event and maximize the amount we were able to donate to Courage of Carly. One of our local parishes donated the use of their auditorium to host the gathering. Numerous business offered sponsorships, and even more donated gift baskets for a raffle to help us raise even more.

Our employees spent a lot of time going around to area business to invite them to the movie, pass out flyers, and solicit donations. The community response was wonderful, and we ended up raising and donating about \$6,000 to a very worthy cause.

We had a great response from the attendees as well. We heard people telling us that they had a new appreciation for what we do as funeral directors and how challenging our jobs can be. They appreciated our community involvement and the work we were doing for this charity. It was really encouraging to us for them to see a positive depiction of a funeral director, when so much of the media attention on funeral directors today seems to be negative.

Our staff also took away a lot from this experience. The film itself was great, and helped re-orient us to the needs and experiences of the families we serve. It's easy to get tunnel vision sometimes because we only meet and work with families after a death has occurred, but this film really depicted in a beautiful way the long and taxing journey that many of our families have been on for a while before it ever brings them to our doorstep. The process of organizing this event and the positive reaction we got from so many in the community was also encouraging, because much of the success of this screening was the result of our tireless efforts to forge positive relationships with our community and fellow businesses. And, of course, we are all beyond thankful that we were able to raise the amount of money we did, and can only hope that somehow it will help others in ways we will likely never know.