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The purpose of the funeral industry is often seen as a means of closure to one's life. While this is undoubtedly an essential component of the services provided, A Sacred Choice is committed to a holistic view of what end-of-life services mean to families and the larger community we are all connected through. As a part of that community, we are committed to creating initiatives that serve as a force for good today and for generations to come.

We believe that being an active caregiver of our community includes caring for our environment. Out of this belief, we began a project to protect and cultivate an endangered species while providing a meaningful, unique memorial option for bereaved family members.

The idea for our initiative emerged when on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the U.S. Wildlife and Fisheries Service officially classified the monarch butterfly as an endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This classification allows for proper tracking in an effort to curb the years-long decline of the species. While monarch butterflies are indeed beautiful, their essential role in the overall ecosystem may not be as well known. Monarchs are a beautiful representation of the circle of life—they serve as both pollinators for many different plants as well as a food source for small animals, other insects, and birds.

We felt that our organization could have a role in protecting this species, so we set out by first researching the best ways to help protect the monarch population and how we might incorporate this into our business model. We found that the most viable option with the biggest impact would be for us to grow caterpillars and then release them at memorial services once they have reached their final stage of metamorphosis as adult butterflies.

We brought this plan to life by designating space to take part in the monarch butterfly cultivation process from beginning to end. Families plant seeds for milkweed plants, the natural habitat for monarch's lifecycle. They then receive 14-16 caterpillars in small cups that are typically in their third larvae stage—a few days before they reach the pupa stage. These caterpillars feed on the planted milkweed plants and pupate (or develop a chrysalis to begin their metamorphosis) within 10 days. After another 10-14 days, the beautiful adult monarch butterflies emerge.

Families can choose to take part in this beautiful representation of the enduring cycle of life. It is a meaningful, memorable experience for family and loved ones of all ages, including young children. We offer the option for families to participate on our property on multiple occasions for the full lifecycle or continue the process in the backyard of their own homes.

We are proud of the initiative's positive impact on our planet, as well as the significance it has for the families we serve. As one of our families put it, "Monarchs are beautiful when they have reached the end of their cycle, but they are even more beautiful when you're able to grow them."

Beyond benefitting the families we serve and the environment, this initiative has had a positive effect on our staff as well. Out-of-office and outdoor activities have been shown to have a wealth of benefits for employees, including fostering creativity, enhancing teamwork and communication skills, strengthening interoffice relationships, improving innovation skills, and even unveiling hidden potential. Our staff's morale has been truly enhanced by the emotional and transformational components of this project. They believe in the process and hold it as a sacred part of what they do.

We are proud to do our part to conserve the beautiful monarch butterfly and we know that this initiative will have far-reaching positive effects for our community and our planet.