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A Tribute to Our Veterans

Anderson Funeral Home
Alexandria, MN

We can all agree that COVID-19 made 2020, and the first half of 2021, extremely difficult and that it directly affected each and every one of us. Being in the funeral industry during the pandemic came with its own challenges. The staff of Anderson Funeral Home found that families not being able to properly honor the lives of their loved ones was heart wrenching and very unsatisfying. We believe honoring the life is truly the first step for beginning a healthy grief journey. This step also leads to proper support for the family. Because we were unable to serve our families, during the pandemic, in the way we desperately wanted to, the staff at Anderson Funeral Home felt compelled to bring our community together and make a difference.

After discussing ways to bring our community together, all our staff agreed on two things; we are passionate about caring for the families in our community and showing appreciation to those who serve in the armed services, past and present. Alexandria, MN recently built a beautiful and emotionally moving Veterans Memorial Park. As it was completed shortly before the pandemic, we had not been able to utilize this beautiful gift to our city. This led to an open dialogue among the funeral home staff and the local veteran groups. Our focus was to provide a meaningful service for the families who were not able to witness military honors for loved ones who had honorably served our country due to COVID-19 restrictions. We are truly grateful to all the men and women who have served and are currently serving our country. We know this sentiment is strong throughout our community and gave us good reason to invite our entire community to an event at the Veteran's Memorial Park which we named "A Tribute to Our Veterans".

Our staff worked hard to organize the event in a way that we hoped would truly move the community. We worked with the city officials and police to have the streets adjacent to the park closed for the event. Invitations went out through the veteran organizations, local radio, our local newspapers, and through community event display screens. The Navy was contacted to provide personnel for the event. Media personnel were contacted to be on hand for recording the service. The service would be recorded digitally using several cameras and drone

photography. Our plan was to live stream the event for those not able to attend. A large screen was planned to be set up in the park to provide a video and music presentation as part of the service. We asked the local Vietnam Veterans of America Post 235 Rifle Squad to perform a rifle salute and they were honored to assist in this event. A local pilot volunteered a "fly-over" of his P-51 Mustang plane to open the service. To make the tribute even more meaningful, we asked a family we recently served, and could not provide military honors for, if we could honor their brother and uncle. Joseph Hanson, a former Navy SEAL (Ret.), who was born and raised in Alexandria, would receive the honors due to him that evening. Others who we planned to ask to participate in the event were Angie Reichmann as a soloist and Pastor Mike Bartolomeo, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, to give the community a message of hope. Tom Anderson, an owner of Anderson Funeral Home who is a retired funeral director, also was asked to speak at this event.

This special event to honor and remember all veterans in Douglas County began with the aircraft fly-over and Tom Anderson giving the opening remarks. Tom is a lifelong member of the community and was able to tie in some fascinating history about many of our veterans. The family of Joseph Hanson was presented with an American Flag by two members of the United States Navy, Petty Officer 1st Class Brandon Ericson and Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Walz. Community member, Angie Riechmann sang the National Anthem and God Bless America, and Pastor Mike Bartolomeo from Church for the Harvest, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, provided a message and prayer. Steve Pederson played Taps and the Vietnam Veterans of America Post 235 Rifle Squad performed a rifle salute. We also put in great effort to make sure the event was live-streamed for those unable to attend in person.

The event was well promoted and over 300 people attended in person. Approximately 90 additional people attended via livestream. Media coverage inviting the community to this event and during the event included area newspapers, radio stations and mentions on a variety of social media. This community wide event is still spoken of months later.

This event gave members of our community an opportunity to show support to our veterans and men and women in our armed forces and a chance to visit the new Veterans Memorial Park in a unique way. It also gave the community an opportunity to experience the

powerful ceremony of a veteran receiving the burial honors, a moving ceremony for anyone who has never seen this before. We were also able to offer community members an organized event at a safe, large, outdoor venue when almost everything had been cancelled over the last year. Many people thanked us and asked if this was going to be an annual event.

“A Tribute to Our Veterans” gave our funeral home and staff the opportunity to make an impact and care for families we had served during COVID-19. Each one of us at Anderson Funeral Home deeply cares about our community and we felt truly honored to make an impact especially because we felt “our hands were tied” in the months prior.

We created a brief version of the event that can be viewed on our website, at the link below, or by searching “A Tribute to our veterans Anderson Funeral Home Alexandria MN” on youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUR6YM3BFxU>

Voice of Alexandria, our radio station, also created a recap video which can be viewed at the link below or by searching “A Tribute to Our Veterans Sept 23 2020” on youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R-w7MjZ65s>