

John J. Jennings, FD  
1875 - 1948

Mary Jennings, FD  
1911 - 2006



Funeral and Cremation Services, Inc.  
Honoring *Life* with our *Community* for 115 Years

Christopher C. Calvey, FD, CFSP  
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### Essay and Supporting Documents

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Essay

## Mats for the Homeless

Homelessness is a devastating situation and on the rise throughout the county. Covid-19 has compounded this public crisis even more and officials say they are seeing spikes in homelessness from San Francisco to New York. In Lackawanna County the effect of this situation is witnessed daily with individuals and families living along the Lackawanna River. They camp there for shelter and for access to water under tents and other makeshift shelters or often without either. There is rarely bedding, and most are sleeping directly on the ground. Jennings-Calvey Funeral and Cremation Services collaborated with several community members to help the homeless.

Chris Calvey, Jr. believes it is important for community businesses to act as leaders in addressing social inequities. Through his work as President of the Rotary Club of the Abingtons he learned about a creative solution to address some of the challenges faced by the homeless. A group of women in the area found a way to aid the homeless and address environmental concerns. The women collect plastic grocery bags that would have otherwise been disposed of and wound up in a landfill or in the ocean, compromising our delicate eco-system. They then take these bags and fashion them in a way where they create spools of plastic yarn, or "plarn", which are crocheted into plastic mats for the homeless to lay on where they choose to make their home. Because the mats are made from this plastic material, they are resistant to the elements and would not become saturated with water should it rain. They work with local groups that they make the special mats to donate to the homeless through organizations like Keystone Mission in Scranton.

The idea started at Taylor Community Library two years ago and then expanded to the Abington Community Library, Covenant Presbyterian Church in Scranton, and more groups throughout Lackawanna County and beyond. Chris Jr. was inspired and touched by the innovation of this project and the dedication of the group to taking action to address a challenge the homeless face. He wanted to work with the group to help them expand this innovative project which gives the homeless the human dignity and to amplify their story to increase public awareness of homelessness in the area and encourage others to become involved. He works directly with the libraries and other local organizations to provide resources and assistance.

The stories he hears about the impact of this project are profound and deeply moving. The volunteers say they enjoy helping the environment by recycling plastic and lending a hand to the homeless by giving them something dry to sit or lay on. "I had the pleasure of dropping bags off at Keystone Rescue Mission, and a homeless gentleman was stopping there for services, and he saw me unloading the mats, and he saw me and said, 'Are those for the mission?' And I said 'yes,' and he said, 'Can I have one, please? They are super.' I could have cried," said Leah Ducato Rudolph of Abington Community Library's Caring Hands group.

Loretta Heffernan of Taylor Library notes, "I knew there were a lot of homeless veterans, and I'm retired military, so that's originally who my mats were going to, and I think it's just fantastic when it spreads, you know knowledge when it spreads."

"It's hard to even imagine carrying all your worldly possessions with you, but that's what they do and to have something like this that's lightweight but insulates them from the cold is a really great idea," said Marti Rotherforth of Clarks Summit. These volunteers say their work may be especially important now.

Families served by the funeral home are introduced to possibly participate in this very worthwhile project. It has been shared with us that this activity of sorting and cutting the bags and rolling into plarn has helped them feel good again and find there is a purpose after their loss.

This effort also addresses another important issue, which is near and dear to Chris Calvey Jr. as he is an avid scuba diver, which is reducing the number of plastic bags that travel from reaching landfills to oceans directly. There is a huge problem in our oceans, rivers, and other waterways with plastic making its way and polluting these already

compromised eco-systems. According to Sylvia Earle, and American Explorer, "Why is it that scuba divers and surfers are some of the strongest advocates of ocean conservation? Because they've spent time in and around the ocean, and they've personally seen the beauty, the fragility, and even the degradation of our planet's blue heart."

Plastic bag donations may be dropped off at several places that will collect them, including Covenant Presbyterian in Scranton. Jennings-Calvey Funeral Home provides a reusable tote bag in exchange for plastic bags dropped off at the funeral home.

"In this kind of environment that we're in, any sort of positive footprint that we can leave is a great thing," said Chris Calvey of Jennings Calvey Funeral and Cremation. To learn more, check out the Mat Makers of NEPA group on Facebook."<sup>1</sup>

## Local group making mats to help homeless and environment

An effort is underway in Lackawanna County to help the homeless and the environment, and volunteers are working hard to make it happen.



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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.wnep.com/article/news/local/lackawanna-county/local-group-making-mats-to-help-homeless-and-environment/523-591d3ca3-2296-4a9a-967d-cc3d312768cb?fbclid=IwAR3Di497K-0CiaWQKyAwwJ0zWjMzaat5Q\\_U72JV9dDWZ2iS66iGyPEM9tyw](https://www.wnep.com/article/news/local/lackawanna-county/local-group-making-mats-to-help-homeless-and-environment/523-591d3ca3-2296-4a9a-967d-cc3d312768cb?fbclid=IwAR3Di497K-0CiaWQKyAwwJ0zWjMzaat5Q_U72JV9dDWZ2iS66iGyPEM9tyw)