

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Encouraging Community Awareness

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Encouraging Community Awareness

by Ann Marie St. George

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and so begins not only the thoughts of the things we are grateful for but also a gentle reminder of those who we grieve for; the loved ones who are no longer here to help celebrate the upcoming holidays. Just because we are funeral directors does not mean that we are immune from feelings of loss, it only makes us better at what we do. Through personal experience and what we see day in and day out, we know better than anyone about the benefits of what we do. As a young funeral director I relished every moment when families appreciated what we did for them. Thirty years later I still have the letters I received from families who recognized what an important role funeral directors play in their lives. Those letters confirmed that I had picked my true life path. I am positive I was more grateful to these families than they were for what I had done.

As funeral directors we sometimes forget the importance of what we do. We focus on the industry in flux and we tend to lose sight of why we chose this profession in the first place. What comes naturally to us is compassion, empathy and understanding in caring for our families. It is these very attributes that we should use to help us to educate the public about the benefits of pre-arranging a funeral. The holiday season is the perfect time to begin this process by holding remembrance events for those who have lost loved ones. These events can also serve to explain the benefits of preneed especially when focused on the importance of relieving the burden on those left behind.

As families gather together over the holidays there is an opportunity to talk about one's wishes for final disposition. Society is becoming more open minded to these types of conversations. In speaking with my circle of family and friends there are many who have no idea about what their parents want when

it comes to their funerals. They do not know how to talk about it with their parents and their parents sense their children's discomfort. All it takes is a funeral director to bridge that gap. It is up to us to talk about the reality of death with humor, love, and professionalism. I have found that the people lucky enough to have parents who have completed the prearrangement process are more open and relaxed knowing the hard choices have been made. They are able to speak about their memorials with acceptance and often humor.

To help encourage these conversations we can offer community seminars on death and dying by bringing in local experts; Hospice counselors, instructors who teach death and dying in either the local high schools or colleges (maybe offer the reverse by proposing to come in and speak with their classes), clergy, florists, cemeterians, vault, casket and monument companies, even local service providers offering unique ways to scatter ones ashes (as long as it is legal). We can also bring in local restaurant owners that offer facilities for families to meet after the funeral. Basically, anyone that may be involved with a funeral can be useful. Think outside the box! Recently, a Mid-Atlantic grocery store, "Wegmans" (similar in size to Whole Foods, Ralphs, Piggly Wiggly, Albertsons, Publix, Kroger, etc.) spoke to our regional funeral directors association offering both floral arrangements and food trays for the families. This was a brilliant leap for the grocer as this store already provides so many offerings to the local community; why not one more. They have brought the term; "one stop shop" to another level. The presenters seemed excited about their new venture and were looking for the approval of the local funeral directors. These are the people that we should be working with; cutting edge thinkers. Even if you don't have a Wegmans in your community see what your local grocers offer, you may be pleasantly surprised. Many of these stores

have facilities to hold informative public seminars on all aspects of the death care industry including preneed.

Why not set up a schedule of events? Or a series of "classes" covering different aspects of our industry. If you are feeling really daring, hold an open forum meeting entitled: "Everything You Wanted to Ask Your Local Funeral Director but Were Afraid To." In order to avoid any awkwardness offer the people attending the option to write down questions on slips of paper. Another option is to ask anyone attending to send in their questions prior to the forum so you can review them and make sure you have the correct answers.

Hold the events once a month with a different topic offered on different nights of the week giving

everyone an opportunity to come. The guest speakers could be any of the people mentioned earlier. Thinking "Hot Topics", why not have a cremation night and bring in a cremation keepsake/jewelry vendor along with someone that offers a scattering by sea or over land service. Everyone involved can share the costs associated with these meetings and the facility may even cut you a deal if it is going to bring them business. Actually, I would be certain that you're only added cost would be if you wanted to supply beverages and snacks.

What an awesome opportunity to be known as the "Everything you wanted to know about Funerals" educator? Wouldn't it be fantastic to have the community think of us in a different way and give them another reason to be grateful for what we do? I am certain it would be good for business! **FBA**



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