

A COVID-Era Celebration of Life

by Steve Walker

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has undoubtedly changed the funeral service business. Whether the changes will be permanent remains to be seen, but funeral directors know that those they serve have been affected in a way that makes the traditional process of visitation and funerals much more difficult.

One funeral service in Maryland created a special memorial just for friends and family members who were unable to properly say goodbye to their loved ones during the spring and early summer lockdown. **Highview Funeral & Cremation Services** in Fallston, northeast of Baltimore, held an outdoor event on October 17 to commemorate the lives of those who had passed during the March 1 through June 15 restrictions at burial events. During this time, only 10 funeral attendees per event were allowed in this part of the state, so quite often loved ones were buried with few or no friends present, and even without all their family members who wanted to attend.

“Many had passed away in nursing homes with no visitors for weeks, and some actually had no service at all,” says Lynda Staylor, director of Family Services for Highview. Lynda coordinated the event. “I just felt like we should do something to give the families closure. It’s really not fair to have to bury a loved one without everyone in attendance who wants to be there.”

Lynda wanted to create an event that attendees would cherish as a celebration of the lives of the people who had passed

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during the COVID -19 peak period; some of whom actually died from the coronavirus itself.

“Music is one of the most important aspects of a memorial service and I knew of an English boys’ choir called Libera, whose voices truly sound like those of angels,” Lynda adds. She had attended a Libera concert in Pittsburgh and felt the music was perfect for the memorial service. Highview created a slideshow of all the loved ones whose services had been restricted, and set it to the sounds of Libera’s angelic

voices (www.libera.org.uk). Lynda also arranged, through the group’s London management, for one of the young boys to introduce the slideshow via a special video message just for the event’s attendees. The slideshow ended with the video of Libera’s song, “Angel.” Libera’s Angel video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_j13d5eFgQk&vl=el.

“We set up a stage with a huge video screen and held the event outside, enforcing standard COVID-19 precautions,” says Lynda. “Now that restrictions have been relaxed, we were able to invite many of the family members who weren’t able to attend actual services.” Lynda had email addresses for the families and used an online e-vite service to get the word out about the ceremony.

Other components of the service involved a dove release and live musical performances, including a solo from a young woman who had lost her grandfather. There also were words delivered by a local councilman and a pastor.

“Response to the event has been tremendous,” says Linda. “We’ve received numerous positive comments, plus many cards and letters of thanks.” ❏

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