

FUNERALS: Families find ways to grieve without gathering

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They settled on a four-hour visitation and a family-only graveside time with less than 10 people. They can't pick a date for a memorial service at church until society is allowed to meet again in larger groups.

"It isn't what I wanted to do," Zacharias said. "I want closure. I don't want to come back to this a month from now or whenever, but I'd rather do that than nothing at all."

SOMETHING MISSING

The family of Dan Lilienthal, a Brook Park dairy farmer and Mora Public Schools bus driver who died March 31, settled for a small service. "So many family members and friends were not able to show their love and support at the funeral home," said Dan's wife, DeAnna Lilienthal. "We needed their love and support as much as we know they needed to say their final goodbyes ... You could definitely feel that something was missing and it was not just Danny."

Following the burial on April 4, the community surprised the family with a funeral procession unlike any other.

A line of over 100 vehicles, tractors and school buses drove north from Quamba Baptist Church on Rainbow Street, and processioned past the Lilienthal dairy farm where the family could wave from the porch.

Friends, family and neighbors made it their way of saying goodbye and supporting the Lilienthals.

Dan's step-daughter, Erica Vork, can hardly think about it without crying. "I know he was a great man and I know others thought the same, but once you see them all banding together to show

you as a group, as a unit, it is so unbelievably overwhelming to the heart. I couldn't breathe."

Dan's oldest daughter, Tara Lilienthal, said, "I was absolutely amazed to see the tribute of friends and family that came through the farm in his memory. It was absolutely beautiful and I will forever cherish and have this memory."

NEW METHODS FOR NEW TIMES

Jeff Lillemoen, funeral director at Carlson-Lillemoen Funeral Home in Cambridge, related how local funeral directors have had to suddenly be ready and able to make new and difficult accommodations.

The directors are finding that some of the pressure to keep groups small is simply alleviated by the pandemic itself.

"People are staying home, honestly," said Strike. "They know the situation is going on out there and are trying to be considerate of the family and to others. Some have mailed cards here in advance. Some have expressed their condolences by phone calls, letting the family know they're not going to come."

He said another funeral home he heard from was expecting 150 people at a recent funeral and 38 showed up - and 25 were family.

"People are concerned, scared," he said. "They want to be protected, and they also - out of respect for others - are cooperating (with restrictions) and it's working."

Both Strike and Carlson-Lillemoen are working on digital methods to bring visitation and funeral services to family and friends who are sheltering in place through live-streaming or video-recording services that can be

viewed later on their websites.

DISTANCING AND DISINFECTING NOT EASY

The funeral directors have found that even if they've been able to limit the number of people in a room to 10 or less, they can't enforce the 6-foot social distancing rule when so many people at visitations show their love and concern by hugging.

"I'm not a huggy, touchy-feely kind of person," Zacharias said, "but my wife just died. If somebody wanted to give me a hug, I wasn't going to deny that. I wasn't out there with my 6-foot pole saying, 'Here's my bubble.'"

He said he tried to read the body language of individuals and honor whatever they felt comfortable doing.

Even without being able to control the hugs, the funeral directors are taking many other precautions to stem the spread of coronavirus; including disinfecting doorknobs every half hour, having hand sanitizer at the guest registry, even regularly sanitizing the pens used there. Regular hand washing by staff is also practiced, as well as extra cleaning of public areas and behind-the-scenes spaces.

Keeping staff safe during the COVID-10 outbreak is also at the forefront for the directors.

"We, and most local funeral homes in communities our size, only have two or three funeral directors," Strike said. "If one of us tested positive from a gathering, we would have to self-quarantine - two weeks with nobody to help families."

Strike said he and his father, Hugo, who began the funeral home, don't attend visitations together to make certain one of them will always be healthy. Staff members space themselves out

and use personal protective equipment as they work.

"We have talked with other funeral directors about being able to help each other out if needed," Strike added.

POSTPONING UNTIL SOMEDAY


Even if a visitation and graveside service can be provided during the pandemic, the directors are finding that many families still want to hold a larger gathering at a later date once restrictions are dropped. The question has been - when will that be?

"You can't postpone people's grief indefinitely," Strike said. "Even if it's private for family, they need to have some resolve, some date, some plan. They can't just hang on that, 'Someday we'll do something.' That's not an option."

He said one family is keeping an urn with the ashes of a loved one at home until a gathering can be held at the funeral home in the future. A quick check of online obituaries shows many other families are holding out for the chance to hold a future service.

Both Strike and Lillemoen say they must wait for instructions from the Minnesota Department of Health to determine when gatherings can increase in size again. Those decisions are out of their hands, but they still must be ready to serve families stuck in COVID-19 limbo.

"I feel heartbroken for families because it's a big deal when somebody dies," Strike said, "and their needs need to be considered while also balancing the health and wellbeing of the community, the state and the country. I'm just confused and sad and frustrated and looking for the day when this is behind us."



Salute

TO VETERANS

Past & Present

Honoring Our Heros in Uniform

SHOW YOUR PRIDE
Send the ADVERTISER a photo of your veteran, past or present along with \$4 by May 4. Photos will be published in a full color special section May 17.

Please Include:

Veteran's Name *(please print)*

Rank *(please print)*

Branch of Military *(please print)*

CHECK ONE

<input type="checkbox"/> WWI	<input type="checkbox"/> KOREAN	<input type="checkbox"/> IRAQI FREEDOM
<input type="checkbox"/> WWII	<input type="checkbox"/> VIETNAM	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> GULF WAR	

Mail or Drop off form, photo and \$4 by MAY 4, 2020 to the Mora or Pine City office.

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OPEN LETTER TO MORA SCHOOL DISTRICT VOTERS

Dear voters and taxpayers,

The proposed May 12 election will be referendum No. 7. The "Coronavirus" has put everyone in a tailspin, with orders from the president and the MN governor to not congregate, but to self-quarantine, or "shelter in place." This affects all public meetings, the Kanabec County Courthouse, all Mora Schools, churches, and non-essential businesses as well as many primary elections across the nation.

Many people of science, including Dr. Fauci from the CDC, have been unclear when the nation may get back to a semblance of normality. Will it be in two weeks, two months, etc.? The way forward is not clear. It may be fall before the danger subsides.

So why is the Mora School Board still planning to conduct Referendum No. 7? What's your guess? Is it because school leaders see an opportunity to get the vote they want? Many seniors will not risk going to a crowded polling site, and many election judges may refuse to serve. Where will that get us? Included here is a letter to Governor Tim Walz, asking that the governor's office step in and cancel referendum No. 7. We need every citizen to write to Governor Walz requesting this referendum be canceled.

March 31, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz,

Independent School District 332 is determined to hold a school referendum in early May of this year, in spite of community demands that the election be postponed or canceled. Gatherings of citizens are not safe for 250 people, 50 people or 10 people, and by your order, citizens are required to "shelter in place."

The majority of Kanabec County voters consists of senior citizens (62%) who will likely boycott the referendum due to the danger of contracting the Coronavirus. Everyone will be at risk. A better plan is to postpone the referendum to coincide with the presidential election in November.

I recognize by your words announcing the "stay at home" order that you care about the people of Kanabec County, as well as all the people of Minnesota.

The intent of this letter is to solicit your support to intervene and suspend the referendum scheduled for May 12, 2020.

Sincerely, Concerned Mora Citizens
P.O. Box 94, Mora, MN