

Mourning the Dead in the Midst of COVID-19

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When a local World War II veteran was laid to rest in an Alton Cemetery last month, the family was told that military rites could not be performed because of Governor Pritzker's Executive Order (in response to COVID-19), which limits gatherings to no more than ten people.

Within the funeral industry, such stories have become de rigueur.

According to Craig A. Schaaf, co-owner of Elias, Kallal & Schaaf Funeral Homes and Crematory, families must now face even more unspeakably difficult decisions at a time when they're struggling to cope with the loss of their loved one.

"Families come in here, already stressed out and they have to decide which ten family members can be present at the visitation and funeral," said Schaaf. "How do you figure out whom to include? Whom to exclude? On top of burying their family member, they have this added burden."

Schaaf said that he's seen many tears shed over the angst of deciding which family members will be included or worse, excluded.

Some families have decided to delay funerals, in the hopes that, in time, funerals will again be permitted.

"A family asked us to keep their loved one here (at the funeral home), hoping that the order would be lifted soon," Schaaf said, adding that after two weeks, the family decided to go forward with the burial.

At Elias, Kallal & Schaaf, they've started offering "drive-by viewings." An oversized piece of Lexon was cut to fill the space normally occupied by two full-size front doors. When it's time for the viewing, the doors are fully opened, and the Lexon is inserted into the space normally occupied by the doors. The coffin is moved to the most-forward spot on the front foyer, where it can be seen by car-bound visitors, as they move through the funeral home's portico.

The family remains in the chapel or sometimes stands outside as the cars roll by. Schaaf said that he'd estimate that attendance at these drive-by viewings is about 10% of that seen during traditional visitations. At their Bethalto chapel, they had two drive-by viewings with 25 cars at the first, and about 15 at the second. In Godfrey, there were a dozen cars on a recent Saturday afternoon. The company also offers "live streaming" of services.

According to the governor's order, the "ten or less rule" applies to both visitations and burial at the cemetery.

Elias, Kalla & Schaaf Funeral Homes and Crematory has roots back to 1866, when it started doing business as Streeper Funeral Home at 2521 Edwards Street in Alton.

Company website: www.eliaskallalandschaaf.com