



Gent Funeral Home Adjusts to Times: Drive-Thru Funeral Visitations Become More of a Norm in COVID-19 Pandemic

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
May 5 2020 9:00 AM







ALTON - It is likely no one ever envisioned drive-thru funeral visitations and gatherings, but this is exactly what's happened at Gent Funeral Home in Alton because of COVID-19.

“People can drive under the carport when we have this type of visitation,” Ralph Bowles of Gent Funeral Home said. “People can hold signs to display. It may be a crazy idea, but with COVID-19, people who have done it and have loved it. Some have come through with signs and honking horns. Others have thrown bouquets of flowers and blown kisses. It is really touching. We have had four of these so far, including another one this past Saturday. We have had up to 100 cars come through for a drive-thru visitation. The people present are instructed to remain in their vehicles and are led by the staff.”

Bowles said individuals have been patient in the lines and his funeral home staff direct each person through the process outside.

A few have even come back through the drive-thru line an additional time because they felt they didn’t reach a certain family member or see what they wanted, Bowles said.

“We are adapting to the crazy times we are living in with COVID-19,” Bowles added. “This kind of visitation isn’t for everyone, though.”

Some are still doing the traditional visitation and funeral methods, but only 10 can be present under Gov. Pritzker's current executive order, which primarily includes immediate family. Some are waiting to have their funeral services at a later date with the COVID-19 pandemic still in full force.

Bowles is making sure the funeral home abides by all of Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s instructions.

“Even at the cemetery, we are only supposed to have 10 people present,” he said. “Funerals are always hard, but this adds to the stress of the situation.”

The funeral home director pointed out that unfortunately, people cannot visit COVID-19 victims in nursing homes and that often means people can’t say their goodbyes in person.

Gent Funeral Home in Alton is presently undergoing a major renovation and Bowles said the drive-thru visitations are helping Gent to accomplish big updates inside. He also said fewer people are visiting the funeral home, which helps during the busy remodeling of the facility.

Bowles said he looks forward to the day when things can go back to normal and added that he never remembers anything quite like the COVID-19 pandemic in his lifetime and career licensed in the funeral business for 32 years.





