

# THE COMMUNITY CIRCLE

By Ryan Helfenbein

On June 28, 2018, our Annapolis community was forever changed as a tragic event took place in our backyard. Five families lost a loved one, and so many others were impacted that day by these inexplicable shootings. Tragic events stop us in our tracks. They put us all in a “what if” mindset and leave us wanting to offer our help and support. However, affected families often want to be left in solitude, with just close family and friends to provide comfort. Undertakers witness this tug of war between who is considered “close” almost daily. The community circle surrounding families after a loss can be wide. This could be the barista in the local coffee shop who poured them their favorite cup of coffee each morning on their way to work, the clerk at the local grocery store with whom a joke was always shared, or even the local bartender who knew exactly what should go in their glass during happy hour. We see this with the local car mechanic, dry cleaner and so much more today. How do we respect the needs of the family and still acknowledge an extended need to grieve?

Those not directly affected, but who feel a sense of hurt, can contribute to informal memorials to show their caring and support. These are often located near the place of the tragedy, where cards, banners, balloons, flowers and other expressions of love can be placed. This allows individuals to share their words and remembrances with the community while respecting the family’s need for privacy. These items are often times collected and later provided to the individual families, offering an extension of support and love from individuals they may not have ever met in person.

Many community members find solace in attending a vigil, where candles are lit in remembrance of those who lost their lives. Often these events involve speakers and

religious leaders who give voice to the pain experienced, and provide comfort to those left behind. During these events we frequently find an opportunity for all to be involved through a biodegradable balloon release. This typically allows each person to share a message either verbally or on a small note card to be released into the air with a balloon. Fortunately through these events along with memorial runs, charitable donations, simple words of support through the use of social media, and many others, we are witnessing opportunities for community members to both receive and show their love and support.

Undertakers typically stand ready to lend a helping hand to communities in tragic situations. For example, shortly after 9-11 many funeral directors, including my business partner, stopped what they were doing, left their own families and gave several days and weeks of their time to assist with the needs of the grief-stricken. During the events following the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings in 2012 undertakers from all over the country provided grief dogs and memorial outreach to the community of young children who were left confused and lost by the events that took place. To bring this much closer to home, after the *Annapolis Gazette*

incident, three firms from Pennsylvania and an affiliate of the industry in Ohio contacted my funeral homes to see how they can be of help.

May the families affected by the tragic event on June 28 be forever in our prayers and those who feel a sense of hurt and grief also continue on their path to healing. Share your memories through public outreach and ultimately continue to remember the pleasant times had with the ones for whom we grieve. In one way or another, directly related or not, that tragedy had an effect on all of us. May we all continue to remain Annapolis-strong.

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## Bay Bytes

If you or your group is searching for volunteer opportunities with the U.S. government in any of the 50 states, log onto **Volunteer.gov** where you will be able to search by location, dates or interests and abilities. Agencies participating include the U.S. Forestry Service, NOAA, Fish and Wildlife Service and others primarily focused on outdoor work.

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