

Operation Restart: *Organizing Events during COVID*

—by Scott Wright

*Illuminated Sacred Heart Statue
taken during Angel Night*

The question
for organizing
events becomes,
“How are
we going to
do this?”

Countless articles have been written on the effects of COVID 19 on the cemetery industry. For the most part, our operations were running smoothly, and then, the largest public health crisis in a century occurred and disrupted everything. From operational procedures that had to be modified to families delaying burials, not to mention all the changes in daily life, the last year has posed some significant challenges.

Now, here at Calvary Cemetery in Dayton, OH, we are ready to welcome the public back to the cemetery for events and tours. Calvary prides itself on “Creating Community and Celebrating Lifetimes,” and one way in which we do this is through our public events and tours.

Although the majority of our events will host 30-50 people, our flagship event, “Angel Night,” attracts almost 2,000 people to the cemetery to tour our Victorian angel monuments. Prior to COVID, many of these events occurred without much struggle. Our vendors were lined up, volunteers were ready to assist, and all the PR seamlessly occurred. After almost two years of the public health crisis, we have encountered many challenges in restarting our events. Vendors closed due to lack of business, volunteers are hesitant to come into public due to virus fears, and many contacts at local media outlets have left the industry. The question for organizing events becomes, “How are we going to do this?”



*Angel Night main
event tent location.*



Knights of Columbus at the Memorial Day wreath ceremony

The first thing we need to realize is that our events have changed and will probably never “be the same way they were,” even if we follow our pre-COVID planning notes. I’ll never forget a drill sergeant on the first day of Air Force Officer Training School telling us, “Flexibility is the key to airpower.” As we prepare to restart events, this phrase could easily be adapted to the cemetery industry. When we find out that our preferred vendor closed due to staffing shortages, is another vendor in the region that can fulfill our request? When a church group states that their volunteers are hesitant to assist, is there another group? One such situation arose this past Memorial Day when we realized that it would not be possible to host our annual Memorial Day Mass due to the size of the crowd and local health restrictions. I reached out to the Knights of Columbus, and they arranged for a wreath ceremony in our soldier section. The Knights went so far as to write a script for the event, purchase new military branch flags, and provide about 20 Knights in support, all from a simple ask. The perceived setback of canceling the Memorial Mass turned out to be an avenue to expose a new group to the cemetery and a new event to the public.

Another item to consider is having a backup plan well in advance of our events. Although our “Angel Night” is a spectacular event, welcoming over 2,000 people each year to the cemetery, do we organize a backup plan if the public health regulations change in our region overnight? Does the traditional format necessarily have to remain the same? A simple formatting change may help us avoid outright canceling an event that we have worked so hard to organize. We are ready to implement one formatting change to Angel Night from an in-person event with wagon tours, crafts, and musical performances to a “Drive-Thru” type tour. The cemetery has been mapped, and vendors have been notified in advance. We live in a time where local governments could implement rules that would make it impossible to have 2,000 people gather together, often announcing safety measures just days before planned events. If a backup plan is devised months in advance, it will be much easier to implement at the last minute.



Tour of St. Kateri Preserve with the “socially distanced” crowd in attendance.

Finally, “taking a deep breath” when you encounter a setback will help you throughout the entire process. If the goal is to “Create Community and Celebrate Lifetimes” by hosting events during very trying times, we have to realize that setbacks will be the norm. If we can relax and not let minor inconveniences define the event, our events and cemeteries will once again shine for all the public to see.

If the goal is to
“Create Community and Celebrate Lifetimes”
 by hosting events during very trying times, we have to realize that setbacks will be the norm.



Good Shepherd
 Divine Mercy
 Venetian Glass
 Mosaics
 4' x 6'
 Resurrection
 Cemetery
 Wichita, KS





www.inspiredart.com (888) 442-9141 gianfranco@inspiredart.com