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## Play Ball in Your Community

Just before opening day of the 2021 Major League Baseball season, I received a press release from the Philadelphia Phillies about a program the team launched to honor hometown heroes. The faces of 41 frontline heroes surrounded Citizens Bank Park, an honor that is usually reserved for the players. The Phillies reached out into their community for this program, and the frontline heroes were selected from nearly 500 nominations submitted in early February by fans, all of whom shared heartwarming and personal video testimonies of local essential workers who had stepped up to the plate to help the city and the community during the pandemic.

As an additional perk, the frontline heroes attended opening day with a guest, and two were selected to dance with the Phillie Phanatic during the fifth inning.

What a great way to usher in the new season, I thought, as I read the release. Reading a little farther down, I was thrilled to see a funeral director on the list – Jason Goldstein, manager of J.S. Goldstein Funeral Home and Monuments in Linwood, New Jersey.

In addition to Goldstein, the list included several physicians and nurses, a respiratory therapist, firefighters, police officers, the owner of a steak and hoagie joint (remember, this is Philadelphia), a school bus driver, a school principal, a railroad conductor, a warehouse associate, outreach workers, grocery store cashiers and more.

Funeral directors certainly went above and beyond the call during the pandemic, doing what they could to serve families within the necessitated limitations. It is certainly well deserved when funeral directors receive recognition for the work they do.

But why stop here? One thing often mentioned in this column is the need for community engagement by funeral directors. Every year, our consumer survey data suggest that funeral directors need to enhance their visibility in their communities.

Maybe funeral directors can pick up where the Phillies left off. Maybe they can pick up the ball and raise awareness in their communities of who their own local frontline heroes are. Instead of being the honoree, be the one who recognizes others.

Throughout the baseball season, these essential workers will also get the chance to tell their story in a “Frontline Hero” video series that will air during Phillies games and on the team’s YouTube channel. Imagine if similar videos could be placed on your funeral home’s community engagement web page or your YouTube or other social media platform. You could even take the program old-school, with articles planted in the local papers.

By spreading a very positive message, you can bolster your funeral home’s name and reputation and help your firm assume or reassert a community leadership role. Not to mention that by asking for stories about why someone might be deserving, you are getting to know the people in your community on a whole different level.

Many have risen above and beyond the call throughout the pandemic, and sharing these stories shines the spotlight on those on the front line.

Many sports franchises have taken on similar programs to recognize outstanding achievement in their areas. Perhaps your community is already doing something like this, but maybe not.

Helping to bring recognition to those deserving members of the community is not something that will easily be forgotten.