

# Castiglia is carrying on a family tradition

LAKESIDE • from B7

and the military.”

“He went way beyond what was expected, from arranging for us to be there when our son arrived at the airport to controlling the news media who had overwhelmed us with their aggressiveness,” Howick wrote.

Castiglia served as a liaison to the press, balancing the media’s interest in the story with the family’s wish for privacy. He arranged for a TV camera from one of the three local TV stations to act as a “pool camera” to provide a feed of the service for all of the stations, limiting the number of cameras inside the ceremony.

He was mindful of details like placing an American flag on the hearse and attaching magnetic plaques with the Army insignia to the vehicle. Throughout, he had to pay close attention to the military’s requirements for a service member’s funeral.

The IOGR says its service awards go to funeral homes that go “beyond what is typically expected.”

Families are surveyed about their experiences, and the most noteworthy comments appear in the group’s magazine, which is published six times a year.

The comments create a pool of nominees which the IOGR’s regional chairpeople then vote on.

“It really is all about the service, above and beyond,” said Janet Protzel, the IOGR’s director of communications.

Castiglia is carrying on a family tradition started by his late father, Anthony. His father opened the business in 1970 in an atypical way, using a portion of the \$25,000 he had won in a lottery game the previous year.

Castiglia began doing work around the funeral home as a teenager and went on to earn his funeral director’s license. He start-

ed running the business for his father in 1990, and became president four years later, after his father died.

Castiglia credits his father with showing openness to his ideas, however unconventional they might have seemed. Lakeside started showing tribute videos in 1989, when they were rare in funeral homes.

His funeral home has gained recognition for its “Release of the Doves,” which he started in 1996. Seven white rock doves are released at the end of the service, evoking the Christian symbolism of Jesus joining with his father in heaven through the Holy Spirit.

Castiglia had learned about dove releases used in weddings, and thought they would be an even more appropriate touch for funerals. In 2001, he arranged the release of 22 doves at the New York City funeral of singer and actress Aalyiah, the total number of birds matching her age.

Other ideas have also become mainstays of his business. Around Thanksgiving, he hosts a gathering primarily for people whom the funeral home has served in the past two years, but also open to the public. About 40 doves are released as part of the program, to celebrate the memory of deceased family members. In the summer, Lakeside holds a similar “release of the butterflies” ceremony.

Following a service, his funeral home also sends out a series of four booklets, spaced several months apart, to help families cope with their grief.

Lakeside has survived a transition that proves difficult for many family businesses: the handoff from one generation to the next.

“The hardest part for a founding generation is letting go,” said Gerry Murak of Murak & Associates, which provides consulting services for a number of family owned businesses.

Told about some of the changes Castiglia implemented, Murak said he was impressed with the approach Castiglia’s father took to those ideas. “He gave him the freedom to do new things,” Murak said.

Murak said the key for a family business to last through multiple generations is to hire the best available people, even if they aren’t family members. The family can still maintain control at the board level, he said.

Castiglia’s mother, Loretta, who works in the business, recalled what her husband once predicted about how Charles would run Lakeside.

“He said, ‘I did a lot, but wait until you see what Charles is going to do,’” she said.

Two of Castiglia’s three children help out around the business, and so do a niece and nephew of his.

Castiglia felt a mix of emotions when he learned he had won Golden Rule’s award.

“I feel like I made my father proud, because it has been a long struggle,” he said. Castiglia recalled that after his father died, the business twice was on the verge of bankruptcy, because people didn’t know him as well as they did his father.

“This is not just me,” he said. “This is me building his legacy.”

Castiglia was honored to be saluted by his peers. He also felt a sense of vindication that he was on the right path, since a lot of other funeral directors initially scoffed at some of his ideas, like releasing doves.

Castiglia said he is continuing to look at new things, including adding locations through acquisitions. But he said he wants to proceed carefully, to maintain the personal connection in his business, which handles about 120 funerals a year. And it is work that he loves.

“If there is such a thing as having a vocation,” he said, “I’m in the right one.”

e-mail: [mglgymn@buffnews.com](mailto:mglgymn@buffnews.com)