



LAZARUS MEMORIAL SERVICE

On Saturday, November 2, 2024 at 1:00 p.m. at the Beal Memorial Cemetery, over thirty-five clergy and members from various faith communities will gather to remember and say goodbye to the invisible members of our local community. The Lazarus Memorial Service is an ecumenical ceremony to bury individuals in our community who have died without means to provide for their own burial. The ceremony provides a dignified manner to memorialize the cremains of those who otherwise would not have funeral services. It is our community's outpouring of respect and community spirit to provide the unclaimed deceased a dignified resting place.

The ceremony has become a much-celebrated event within the faith community and in the life of our county as a dignified way to memorialize those we have lost, many of whom are senior citizens who have outlived their relatives as well as infants and children whose parents and families are without financial means. Some individuals are those members of our community who have become estranged from their families due to mental illness. This year we have 31 individuals from 29 to 88 years of age.

Florida Statute 497.005(43) requires that each of the 67 counties ensure the proper final disposition of indigent and unclaimed deceased persons in the respective counties. Each year, Okaloosa County receives an average of 30-40 individuals who die without family support or financial means to cover the cost of interment. Other counties have begun to follow Okaloosa's leadership and have their own ecumenical services. Okaloosa County was recognized by the Florida Association of Counties for Best Practices.

A little information regarding the origin of this service: Over the past 17 years, Okaloosa County has contracted with various private funeral homes to provide cremation services for these indigent and unclaimed persons. When I first became a commissioner I asked the question, "What happens to the individuals once cremated?" No one knew, and a quick search of local funeral homes, that had contracted with Okaloosa County over the years, yielded approximately 450 sets of cremains in storage at the various vendor funeral homes.

In 2016 Local pastors were invited to plan a service like no other to bury these forgotten individuals in a dignified but joyful ecumenical service. That same year a coordinated effort was developed to purchase seven burial plots at Beal Memorial Cemetery in the heart of Okaloosa County. The County initially agreed to pay \$7,530.00. Area churches took up a collection to defray the cost, which resulted in a contribution of \$5,000.00 to the cost of the plots. Further, the clergy were able to contribute \$1,481.00 to purchase and place two benches, one at either end of the burial plots.

The Okaloosa County Lazarus Memorial Service has become a cherished ceremony. The name is taken from the recorded words of Jesus about the poor man named Lazarus who went to Paradise after death, after struggling on earth (Luke 16:19-21). This ceremony has buried about 800 individuals.

Mr. Bass, Director, and the wonderful staff at Emerald Coast Funeral Home have graciously stepped up each year to host this formal ceremony to place each person to rest. Each set of cremains is held in a box bearing the individual's name. Prior to the ceremony, the boxes are placed inside green velvet bags for display. Those attending the outdoor ceremony can pay their final respects before the ceremony begins. A printed program is provided which includes the order of worship, music to be shared, and a list of the individuals to be interred. The service includes ringing the cemetery bells, offering prayers, reading scripture, singing hymns and music, a message of faith and hope, and the recitation of each person's name. The name and date of death of each interred individual is entered in *The Book of Remembrance*. This book is stored on site at Beal Cemetery for use by relatives and friends of the deceased.

Okaloosa County has found a compassionate and dignified way to bury these invisible members of our society. Area clergy from every denomination come together throughout the year to plan for an ecumenical service to provide a dignified burial in Beal Cemetery in Fort Walton Beach, FL. Many faith communities mark November 2 as All Souls Day. This day was chosen by the group as the Lazarus Memorial Burial date.

You are invited to attend this beautiful ceremony:

When: Saturday, November 2, 2024

Time: 1:00 PM

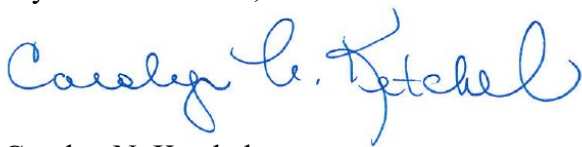
Place: Beal Cemetery, 316 Beal Pkwy NW, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

Bring: a lawn chair to sit (rain or shine)

I know it sounds odd, but you will leave the ceremony with a quiet feeling of having done something "right" that cannot be repaid in this world. Come and join us as we say goodbye to individuals who may have died alone but are remembered by our community. Trust me, you will be glad you made the time to say goodbye to those who have no one else to mourn for them.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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