

Discuss death openly, funeral director says

BY SUK BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Funeral director Kevin McCabe believes death should be as openly discussed as any other family rite of passage.

A lecturer at Macomb Community College, McCabe has been a guest on the radio programs of Kevin Joyce, J.P. McCarthy, Denny McLain and Metrovision cable television.

"Death and grieving is a natural process," said McCabe, chief executive officer of McCabe Funeral Home, Inc., Farmington Hills. "What a sad person this must be if nobody sheds a tear."

Just as we expect children to come to terms with other family events, they need to be part of the grief process when a family member dies, he said. Children must look beyond themselves and know how badly their parents and friends would feel if anything happened to them. "Explaining death to children is what people need to know about," McCabe said.

But death and suicide are often considered touchy subjects.

McCabe would like to talk to Farmington students annually about suicide and death but says he's been denied. His talk would deal with grieving process, which is a similar process for the loss of a

beloved pet or family member, he said.

Judy White, Farmington Public Schools assistant superintendent, said the district chose to leave the death and dying discussion out of the curriculum because it's tied to family religious beliefs.

"We also believe it is the family's responsibility," White said, adding that individual needs, however, are handled by counselors.

Yet families often don't know how to explain death or how to have children participate in family sorrow. They delay talking about death or speak beyond a child's level of comprehension, McCabe said.

McCabe has already spoken at the district's Career Day, guest-lectured for a psychology course, and has been interviewed by a journalism class at North Farmington High School. The funeral home printed the Harrison High School's Students Against Driving Drunk contracts.

He's an advisor to a metropolitan-wide response team called Kids in Crisis, which goes into schools — at school administration's invitation — after a student has died.

Each age group has different ideas about death. In kindergarten for example, children want to know how to avoid "catching" death almost as if it were contagious. "Sixth

graders want to know what to say (to the survivor)," McCabe said. "Kids are so genuine. They ask, 'How can we help them (the survivor) out.' And I tell them, there's no quick fix."

Children should not be told that the deceased is sleeping, for example, because they will fear going to sleep, McCabe advises.

Even though government, school and religion say that life should be fair and equal, reality is more stark. "Death is very unfair," McCabe said. "That's not the way death works."

McCabe handles 300 funerals a year. "What I know, I have learned through watching people. I want to make people think. Fear comes from what we don't know."

McCabe frequently speaks to college sociology and psychology classes. "Did you know that in family and marriage classes, people don't die?" McCabe asked. They (class textbooks) deal with multiple marriages, step-parents and in-laws, but nobody dies. This highlights our problem. We deny death."

Survivors can't forget, but they can cope, McCabe said.

The Farmington Hills McCabe Funeral home opened in 1971 under the direction of Kevin's father, L. David McCabe. Kevin McCabe is a fourth generation funeral director



Kevin McCabe

— family business started in 1893 in Detroit on Cass at Grand River.

McCabe is a 1981 graduate of Wayne State University's School of Mortuary Science. The following year, he received his license to practice. Kevin McCabe is president of the Michigan Funeral Directors Association's District 6. The district represents 90 funeral homes in Oakland, Macomb and St. Clair Counties.

McCabe is a past president of the Kiwanis Club in Farmington Hills North and a member of the building and grounds committee of the Community Center Farmington/Farmington Hills. He also founded the St. Fabian Bereavement Group. He and his wife, Sandy, live in Farmington Hills.

Tie vote blocks incinerator plan

BY WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County's proposed trash incinerator was dealt another — but perhaps not fatal — blow Tuesday when a plan that would have revived the incinerator was blocked by a county commission committee.

Members of the commission's planning and building committee voted 5-5 on an agreement with New Jersey-based Ogden Martin Systems Inc. that would have kept incinerator plans alive.

"I'm delighted, but I don't think this is the end," said Rochester Hills Mayor Billie Island, an outspoken foe of the trash burning plant.

Committee members could reconsider at their next meeting, Tuesday, July 28.

Ogden Martin offered to build the incinerator, after the original contractor, Westinghouse Electric Corp., withdrew from the project earlier this year.

But Tuesday, commissioners deadlocked over sending Ogden Martin's plans to the full commis-

sion. The dispute involved project financing.

While the company pledged to obtain state permits and solicit approval from county communities, commissioners blanched at what they believed was a \$50,000 company fee.

"I just felt we'd spent enough time and money on this thing as it is," said Teresa Krause, D-Troy, one of five commissioners who voted against proceeding.

But committee chairman John Olsen, R-Huntington Woods, who supported the plan, said the vote was a misunderstanding.

"We'd already authorized the \$50,000 for state permits," he said. "I expect Ogden Martin will come back to us and straighten this all out."

Those voting against the plan included Krause, James Ferens, D-Pontiac; David Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills; Lilian Jaffe Oak, D-Southfield; Charles Palmer, R-Clawson.

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