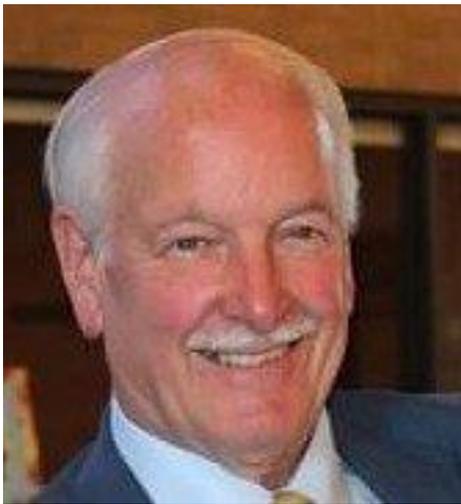


Broadview Heights Historical Business Spotlight – January 2017



In 2017 Broadview Heights will turn 90! To celebrate, we are honoring our oldest businesses every month in 2017. In December 2016 Broadview Heights Economic Development Director Kristina Sorensen spoke with Don Faulhaber of Faulhaber Funeral Home, to learn more about their business and its history in Broadview Heights.



Q: How did Faulhaber Funeral home get started?

A: We are a family business and opened in 1951. My Father (former Broadview Heights Mayor Don Faulhaber) worked part-time in high school at a funeral home, then served in World War II, and later worked as a steel worker in Cleveland. He injured his ankle and was having trouble walking on the steel beams. He thought about how he could use the G.I. Bill to become trained as an embalmer using his

experience at the funeral home, so he went to school, and became a licensed Funeral Director.

My Father needed a place for his business, and we came to be fixed at our current location (which is the original location) because our family had settled at this property long ago. My Grandmother's family had originally lived in a house on the property. Eventually my Grandmother moved out and my Father opened the business out of that home. Our family lived in the upstairs of the home and the business was run out of the first floor. As Faulhaber Funeral Home expanded, the business became wrapped around the home until it looks as it does today.

My family stayed in the business – my sister Judy became licensed in 1971. My daughter Robin received her license 25 years ago and my son Don received his license in 1994. We're now on the 3rd generation. We are still going strong and we are very proud of that.

Q: How many times have you expanded?

A: We expanded initially in 1961, and then again in the mid-1980s, until the property looks as it does today.

Q: So early on business was good?

Well, I think the first year we were open my Dad did six funerals. The population around here was 2,000 or less, so that was big for the area around here. Year after year we have continued to maintain or grow our business.

Over time, as new members enter the community they raise their families here, mature here and stay around. As we get to know them and build relationships, it's important to maintain those relationships. Those are our customers. We anticipate that as we provide a superior product and remain tied within the community, we will continue to grow our business along with a growing population.



Circa 1955

Q: Why have you chose to keep your business in Broadview Heights all of these years?

Our family is from Broadview Heights and we have become ingrained in the community. Our business is the type where you build relationships and keep at them. A family has a death once every 10 years. That means that every 10 years your relationships will be calling on you to serve them and it's important to be there for them.

Q: How would you describe Faulhaber Funeral Home's business style?

A: We are a traditional business and that grew out of how we started. People used to have funerals in their homes. After World War II, all the building of homes became smaller, like bungalows, and you couldn't get a casket in through the doors of the tiny houses. So my parents said, "Why don't you bring your family to our home?" So our home became a community funeral home. People would come in here after their family's death and they'd be in here all day. They'd come in and my mother would make them lunch, they stayed just like they would at their own home.

Q: Really?

A: Yes - we encouraged our customers to make themselves at home. Whatever they did at home is what we told them to do here; if they needed to stay at the house, we would let them, or if they were hungry we would make them food. We made our house their house; it's a host type of mentality. It's important to keep that tradition going. We have someone live in the building to keep it as a house. That's how it's been since we started. I live here now.



Its home and that's what we try to emphasize. It's a peaceful setting and we want to be here to comfort people, to help them through difficult times. We try to take the difficulty of a tragedy and get people back on the right track. We like to think our clients can lean on us, just like they can lean on their clergy.

Q: I never heard it explained that way but I think that's really nice.

A: Well that's what our business at Faulhaber's is done. Our business is an extension of our house and we have feelings for people. Most of our clients we know, but then there are those that we don't know. But I tell you what, by the time they are done with us I can guarantee that we know them and they know us!

Q: What's the one thing that your business is known for, over your competitors?

A: Good quality service at a reasonable price. There's not much else I can say. We deal with people who are in hardship and have problems - a lot more than I'd like to admit. But people just don't have it and can't do it. And we've been beat out a few times. That's ok, we are who we are and we will provide the best service for them.

Q: Tell me a little about your biggest achievement as a business owner and what it meant to your business.

A: I'd have to say the biggest accomplishment I've had is in how I've been able to help my customers. When someone dies of a tragedy, accident, whatever, family members want to see them and know that they are ok. To be able to take someone who has had a traumatic experience and be able to put them back together, and make them look right, and then be able to show them to their family members, and they can see them in one piece. It helps the family gain some closure to the situation, and I find that very rewarding. Over the years I've found that if people want a closed casket because they are scared to see their loved one, they might always wonder and have regrets. This way, if they can at least see them, they become peaceful at that time.

When a customer tells me that the work we have done for their loved one has helped them feel better and helped them through the grieving process, that is what makes my job rewarding.

Q: It sounds like the emotional closure and your ability to have a meaningful relationship with your customers is part of your business style and also part of what motivates you personally.

A: Yes. I learned this lesson early on, assisting a woman as a limo driver when I first started. All she wanted was a service where the casket was driven to the ceremony and dropped off, which is what we did for her. Afterwards she said to me, "Well I hope I did the right thing". And I knew right then that she didn't. I didn't make the arrangements or know the deceased. But I knew, that she didn't do the right thing because she probably wanted to follow the wishes of the person who died - which is the *wrong* thing to do. Funerals are for the living, not for the person who died. She didn't have a service or see the person. She needed that closure and she didn't get it. She's going to have trouble the rest of her life, because she didn't do it.



Circa 1986

In that situation I learned the importance of getting closure. If clients come in with a firm decision on what they want, I try to explain all options to a point for that reason. If clients don't want a service that is their choice but I always try to encourage them to go somewhere and get with family, friends, clergy, a bar – wherever- and get it out. You've got to get started on your grief. You've got to finish the chapter and then get started with a new one.

Q: What was your biggest risk you have ever taken as a business owner in the last 65 years?

A: Probably investing to build a new building and expand the business. People say funerals are expensive and yes, they are, but there aren't many Funeral Directors I know of who are exceedingly rich. Yes, we have a nice car and nice suits on, we are active in our communities and get out, etc., but, the biggest risk was when we tried to expand. We overextended a little bit. In the end, it all worked out.

Q: How did you learn necessary business skills?

A: I just picked it up as I went along. Had I been a better business person earlier I probably wouldn't have spent so much money trying to expand; I probably would have thought about it more before I made the decision to do it, due to the way our business works. Most Funeral Directors are not business people. They're here to help people out and perform a skill. Most family funeral homes you see are all going to be closed someday, because there is no one else to take it over, and there's too much money tied up in the building, and the business is changing.

Q: How is the business changing?

A: Well, people don't have a true visitation anymore. It might be a cremation. Most funerals are around \$7-8,000.00. Funerals that don't have visitations are around \$3-\$4,000.00. So, budgeting wise, we have to prepare because we are doing the same amount of work for less money. Folks in this generation are doing less true visitations nowadays. There's more work to do and more services to provide, to make up for not having a traditional funeral.

Q: What would you like to see for the future of Broadview Heights?

A: I'd like to see continued intelligent growth. I told a previous Mayor years ago, "You might be the Mayor of this town now but you're not going to be around forever. The people who live here are. So you've got to do them right and do what people expect." You've got to grow right, keep the streets good and keep trash picked up. People need to be able to get up and out of their house and go on about their way. I'm telling you, rubbish is a big thing!

Q: Was that your Dad (Mayor Faulhaber)'s motto?

A: Actually, the reason he became Mayor was that he believed there needed to be better services provided, specifically in regards to collecting the rubbish! A number of residents asked my Father to run for Mayor because the City was almost in default and could not pay for rubbish pick up, roads were not repaired, the City was down to one usable police car, etc. My Father assembled a

team of business people that had not run for political office and was successful in getting the City turned around.

Q: What do the next 25 years look like for Faulhaber Funeral Home?

We will always be here in the community, as part of the community and serving those in it. We are glad to be here for over 65 years

You can find Faulhaber Funeral Home at:

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