



100 YEARS GUNDERSON LIFE CELEBRATION CENTERS

The first 100 years and counting

Perhaps the secret to surviving for a century is having a different perspective. Gunderson Life Celebration Centers take a different approach to paying one's respects, and it remains dedicated to providing families with the memorable farewell their loved ones deserve.

HOW WAS THE COMPANY STARTED?

1922 was an interesting year. Warren G. Harding was president, but not for long. Amelia Earhart set the altitude record for women, and Elmer and Inez Gunderson founded their family business. Elmer and Inez had seven children — five girls and two boys — and when Elmer unexpectedly passed away at 46, Inez went to mortuary school and continued running the business. Pete Gunderson remembers his grandmother as a strong, proper woman. She wore high-necked blouses with a cameo pin at her throat. She always had a smile on her face and never had a hair out of place. Inez expertly filled her husband's shoes at a time when very few women owned businesses. Through her actions, she taught the next generation about compassion and caring for the community.

HOW HAS THE COMPANY EVOLVED SINCE ITS INCEPTION?

Bob Gunderson, Elmer and Inez's son, served in WWII. When he returned from overseas duty, he married his sweetheart, Shirley. They raised four children and ran their own funeral business in DeForest for seven years. Although Bob helped Inez, he did not officially join the family business until 1957. Bob's son Peter joined his father and grandmother in 1982. With Peter at the helm, the business expanded to locations in Oregon, Middleton, Cross Plains, Fitchburg, Stoughton, and Lodi. Now, Matt Gunderson serves as vice president, and they've added locations in Mount Horeb and Black Earth. This past year, Matt's cousin Skyler completed his training and joined the family business.

HOW HAS YOUR INDUSTRY CHANGED?

Other businesses have consolidated, but Pete Gunderson is committed to keeping the family-owned business just that. He never wants to see it sold to a big international conglomerate. "I love that decisions are made here in Madison with our friends and family and not outside our community where ownership has no personal stake," he says. His vision for the next 100 years is to continue to reinvent the concept of caregiving and to provide the same exceptional care that friends, family, and neighbors have experienced during the company's first 100 years.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS THE COMPANY HAD TO OVERCOME OVER THE YEARS?

This past year has presented a myriad of challenges. "This year taught us a lot about flexibility. Life celebrations needed to fit the needs and wishes of the family and also keep everyone safe," says Pete Gunderson. Each of the nine locations made changes this past year to ensure they met those needs. This is not the first pandemic Gunderson has navigated. The artificial pandemic of war, multiple influenza outbreaks, tuberculosis, and HIV all impacted the safety protocols adopted over the years. Some changes include the option to livestream services. This allows people from all over the world to participate who otherwise would be unable to attend for many reasons, not all of which are health related.

Traditions change and Pete and his son Matt are poised to change right along with them and provide the flexibility to celebrate a life well lived — however a family wishes to celebrate it.

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Gunderson Life Celebration Centers

From top: Founders Elmer and Inez Gunderson; Inez with her seven children; the second Gunderson building; on the wall from left to right Bob, Inez, and Elmer. Standing from left to right Skyler, Pete, and Matt.

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