

## A Badge of Honor

It was an awesome display of togetherness. And people noticed. The occasion was the funeral for Virginia Louise Hawkins, 67, a resident of Old Fort, Tennessee, who died at Life Care Center of Cleveland on Saturday. Her daughter is Vicki Hood, a 21-year associate who had been the activities director of that facility and later its marketing director. Today, she is the marketing director for the Cumberland Region of Life Care.

The Remembrance of Life Service was held on Monday morning. The crowd began gathering early before the 11 a.m. start. As I got out of the car in the parking lot before entering the funeral home chapel, I glanced at the Whatever It Takes And Then Some pin on the lapel of my coat. It's a customer service program symbol, I thought, and maybe not appropriate for the occasion, so I slipped it off and stuck it in my pocket.

As Lola and I were seated, next to Forrest and Kathleen Preston just behind the pews reserved for the family, I noticed that people kept streaming in. Many of them, it was very obvious, were wearing that familiar red, white and blue pin. It became a vivid reminder that Vicki's professional family was there to support her. I took my pin out of my pocket and put it back on my lapel. Suddenly, it was like a badge of honor, a sort of family coat of arms – for Vicki, for her family and a tangible tribute to her mother, who had been served for years by a staff wearing that pin every day. It was, I felt, very appropriate that it be present on a day celebrating her homegoing to heaven.

When the service concluded, long lines of people wearing that very pin streamed down the aisle to Vicki's side. They hugged her, wept with her and comforted her.

On three different occasions, the owner of Jim Rush Funeral Homes commented to Forrest Preston that he had never seen such an outpouring of love and support as that given to Vicki and her family by those with whom she worked. He was incredibly impressed by the demonstration of compassion that he was witnessing.

Why is that important? In Life Care, Century Park and Life Care at Home, we are called to serve the residents entrusted to us. To accomplish that task in the most complete fashion, our professional service must be rendered with compassion.

But we cannot deliver the care they need and deserve if we who work together don't care about one another. It's the underlying principle that makes any team effective.

(more)

The associates of Life Care – from the corporate offices and the centers that Vicki visits and others – spoke loudly and clearly Monday about the mission that we take so seriously.

--Beecher Hunter