

How to Locate a Bagpiper for a Memorial Service

By William W. Don Carlos

You have decided to include the Scottish pipes in your memorial plans, but how do you find a good piper? The skirl of the Highland bagpipes will etch an indelible memory. It can be difficult enough to find any piper, let alone a good one. You may remember the news of the airplane accident that took the life of golf pro Payne Stewart in October, 1999. Many still remember the nationally-televised coverage of the funeral, particularly the lone piper on the green, nestled in the foggy mist. Piping for funerals is a performance art form where the piper has one chance with no rehearsals to get it right. Most people are unfamiliar with this instrument; many cannot even name the title of a single bagpipe tune. In fact, most folks have never heard the pipes played live. What do you need to know to select a capable bagpiper and construct a unique music tribute in honor of your loved one's memory?

Just finding the piper may be the most difficult step. As a professional piper, I have a web page, advertise, and perform regularly in the community; yet, am often told that I was difficult to locate in the first-place. Searching online is an obvious place to begin. Entering the name of your community and the word *bagpipe* may generate a list of choices. If that does not work, then you might consider checking for evidence of a local pipe band organization in your community. If you live in Canada you can probably find a piper by inquiring at the local chapter of the Canadian Legion. In the United States, many police and fire departments have pipe bands. You can often locate a piper by checking at the local music shop or a large church. The local funeral home may have a trusted source. What you want to find is someone with lots of performance experience and a good reputation and ensure that they are known for quality, punctuality, and consistency. It is not enough to find a person who simply claims to be able to play the pipes.

A qualified piper is someone who can help guide you with such things as appropriate tune selection and how to stage the performance. He or she should have a large repertoire of musical selections and be able to learn new tunes quickly. They should be able to tell you on the spot if a particular tune can be played on the pipes or suggest

alternatives. It is common to locate a suitable piper with only days left until the event. When distracted by grief and the details of the planning process, obtaining an experienced piper is worth paying the higher fee. When planning a memorial service on short notice, consideration needs to be given to such factors as how the bagpipes enter and exit the venue, plus where the piper will stand to play. Pipes are effective when used to create a dramatic entrance, but others may wish to place the pipes outside or at a distance. Sometimes this means only being heard through an open door. You will quickly recognize whether or not you have found an experienced performer when consulting with them about such details. You should also arrange to pay the piper upon arrival. This enables you to focus on family and friends after the service. The setup can change completely when the day arrives. You need an experienced piper who is flexible, creative and dependable to create a perfect, lasting memory.