

CHICAGO TEAMSTERS JOINT COUNCIL 25



NEWS>>

CASKARS OFF AND ROLLING **Local 727 Steward Rizzo Turns Caskets Into Go-Karts**

Funeral director Mark Rizzo's outside-the-box idea came from looking inside a box that he's familiar with – a casket.

“I was trying to think what we could do for PR for the funeral home, and I thought, ‘What if we had mini caskets to ride in?’” said Rizzo, longtime Teamsters Local 727 steward and a 19-year employee of family-run Colonial Wojciechowski Funeral Home.

A couple months later, CasKars were born.

To create the custom-built casket go-karts, Rizzo teamed up with his brother-in-law, Dwight O'Brien. At first, the duo wasn't sure if the concept could work, but they decided to give it a shot. They took measurements, drew up a prototype and soon the CasKars were up and rolling.

O'Brien's garage serves as the manufacturing plant for the all-steel framed CasKars, which are capable of driving at least 25 mph and come complete with headlights, taillights and adjustable pedals. It takes Rizzo and O'Brien about four weeks to build a CasKar, working nights and weekends.

“We didn't cut corners,” said Rizzo, a Cicero native. “They're built to last.”

Hitting the Road

Rizzo and O'Brien formed C.R.O.W. Enterprise, Inc. – an acronym for Caskets Rolling On Wheels, and also a play on the black crow that frequently appears on tombstones – in 2008. They also trademarked the CasKar name.

Rizzo said CasKars are effective tools for promoting prom night safety or other “don't drink and drive” campaigns, as well as a way for funeral homes to advertise.

When Rizzo showed funeral director and former classmate Maureen Feeley-Balto a bright purple CasKar, she brought it home the same day.

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“It’s a hard business to be in, but we are people, too, and we want families to know there’s a lighter side to it, too,” said Feeley-Balto, a Local 727 member and the owner of Feeley-Balto Funeral Service. “It seems like there’s a lot of possibilities for things we can do with these.”

Feeley-Balto and Rizzo unveiled the CasKars to the public during Evergreen Park’s July 4 parade last summer, taking home the trophy for originality.

“When we entered them in the Evergreen Park parade, we didn’t know how people would receive these or how people would react, but we decided to take a chance,” Rizzo said. “The response was overwhelming. Every time we stopped, people would swarm around us and take photos and video.

“I derive so much joy from driving it and seeing people’s reactions.”

Feeley-Balto is going to drive her CasKar again in this year’s Evergreen Park parade on Friday, July 2.

Looking Ahead

Rizzo’s wife, Cathy, came up with the name CasKar because it sounded like NASCAR. Rizzo said he wants CasKar racing to become a reality. He envisions a dozen funeral homes with CasKars gathering for racing events once a month, with all of the proceeds going to the host funeral home’s charitable organization of choice.

“We’d gather, sell tickets and concessions and race the CasKars,” Rizzo said. “We’re trying to put the ‘fun’ back in ‘funeral’ in a light-hearted, charitable way.”

Most of all, Rizzo said, getting into the CasKar business has been an enjoyable ride.

“We’re not going to get rich on these, but that’s not our objective,” Rizzo said. “It’s a hobby and it’s unique and it’s fun.”