

Russian Funeral Home Defends Hosting 'Party' for WWII Veterans

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A Russian funeral home that held a “party” for World War II veterans has justified its celebration as an attempt to protect the senior citizens from other undertakers who would charge them too much.

Some veterans in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg were appalled at invitations they received to a “tea party” at a local funeral home, named “Khel’p,” to mark the 70th anniversary of the victory over the Nazis. But “Khel’p” commercial director Dmitry Yadryshnikov said veterans deserved to know about his firm and its advantages over the multitudes of unscrupulous funeral agents in town who are eager to have veterans as their clients, REN TV reported Thursday.

“Our goal is to explain to people that if an agent appeared on your doorstep, from who knows where, and you had not summoned him, that means he has already bought information somewhere,” Yadryshnikov was quoted as saying.

The party's location and its organizers' identity apparently did not feature prominently on the invitations — which arrived with scores of festive cards in veterans' mailboxes ahead of Victory Day — and many became aware of the location only when a bus carrying them to the event arrived at a funeral home, local media in Yekaterinburg reported.

“Our 83-year-old grandma got invited to a festive tea party. She and other grandmas like her get invited to places all the time, lawmakers congratulate them, so this time they also got together with fellow retirees, headed, happily, somewhere to have fun,” a local woman, Valentina Borduk, was quoted as saying Wednesday by Yekaterinburg's E1.ru news portal. “And when they were taken to drink tea in a funeral home, they were simply shocked. Grandmother was very upset, she took it all very negatively.”

Some of the veterans continued on to the party anyway. Photographs carried by Yekaterinburg's online media showed elderly men and women sitting or standing against the backdrop of memorial wreaths, large crosses and other paraphernalia of the funeral home.

Others declined the invitations.

“Why should I go there? I don't need to go there,” said Yevgenia Vyatkina, decorated as a labor veteran for her work during World War II, REN TV reported. “Perhaps, maybe, I will live some more. It's too early for me to go there, to the funeral outfit. I said: I don't need any tea.”

The head of Yekaterinburg's association of people with disabilities, Alexei Kuzminov, who was identified by media reports as having been one of the gathering's organizers, said that veterans should have taken the setting more in stride, REN TV reported.

“We are all mortal,” Kuzminov was quoted as saying. “Today we are here, tomorrow we are gone. They got an opportunity to go and receive presents.”

But Yury Sudakov, the chairman of the veteran's union of the Sverdlovsk region, which includes Yekaterinburg, was quoted by the EANews portal as saying that he was “categorically against having veterans against the backdrop of mourning wreaths.”

The “tea party” came amid a number of complaints from veterans around the country about a lack of sensitivity from officials as the country prepares large-scale celebrations for its May 9 commemoration of the allied victory in World War II.

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